



Philosophy of Sports: Analyzing Sports Effects for Leadership Excellence

Authors' contribution:

- A) conception and design of the study
- B) acquisition of data
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Purnima Lenka^{*A-D} , Ajit Kumar Behura^{CD} 

Indian Institute of Technology (ISM), Dhanbad, India

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***Correspondence:** Purnima Lenka, Humanities and Social Sciences Department, Indian Institute of Technology (ISM), Dhanbad, Pin-826004 India; E-mail: purnimalenka93@gmail.com

Abstract

Leadership effectiveness is one of the significant concerns in the business world. While attaining goals, leaders offer direction, encouragement, and inspiration. They aid in creating a vision and uniting people behind a common goal. The literature on leadership has shown that leaders are less effective, affecting organizations, the environment, and society. This ineffectiveness is believed to be due to their rigidity, arrogance, narcissism, and ill-being. The research on leadership has shown that, among other factors, stress is one of the leading causes of this inefficiency, affecting leaders' well-being, attitude, relationships, and organizational productivity. As a result, leaders have poor awareness of how their environment is evolving. For that reason, stress management and a leader's well-being (mental and physical fitness) become the primary concern for business organizations. Leaders are the frontrunner of organizations, leading organizational objectives such as profit maximization, continuous improvement, employee management, and stakeholder satisfaction. In order to manage the corporate goal and workplace stress, they must ensure their well-being (mental and physical fitness). This paper proposes sports to enhance leaders' well-being and team-building 'we' attitudes, which help leaders to improve the organizational productivity. This paper employs content analysis methodology to justify how sports enhance leadership effectiveness. The time has come to understand the philosophy of sports, which has several benefits that guide practitioners to maintain a balance in their professional and personal life. This paper highlights sport as a vehicle for social change and personal development in leadership effectiveness.

Keywords: Philosophy of sports, leadership development, team building, wellbeing

Introduction

Maintaining, sustaining, and leading organizations successfully is one of the challenges for contemporary leaders. The literature on leadership has shown that "*leaders at all levels of organizations are under ever-increasing pressure because of the competitiveness and complexity of the global economy*" (Roche et al., 2014, p. 467). For that reason, they go through stress that affects their well-being,

relationships, and effectiveness. Pressure at the workplace is standard for practitioners; it becomes a center of debate when it affects organizational productivity. Neglecting employee and leader stress at the workplace will cost organizations productivity, efficiency, medical costs, and compensation, among other things. They are the frontrunners of organizations, leading organizational objectives such as productivity, customer satisfaction, brand values, and employee satisfaction (Kanungo & Mendonca, 1996;

Razak & Muhamad, 2022). In order “to succeed in today’s world, organizations should invest in developing their leaders’ skills, capacities, and knowledge” (Naderi, 2019, p. viii) and make them able to manage workplace stress. As Sison and Fontrodona maintain, a good business organization is “one that is well-governed, and that makes its members good” (2013, p. 612). Several studies prove that well-being is one of the keys to organizational productivity (Grawitch et al., 2006; Van De Voorde et al., 2012; Malinen et al., 2019). To achieve this, organizations should adopt practices that prevent or minimize workplace stress, help employees and leaders to overcome it and enhancing their leadership effectiveness. Organizational productivity depends on leadership effectiveness. In order to be an effective leader in the twenty-first century, one must strike a strategic balance between short-term and long-term business goals. To enhance this balance accordingly, leaders must have five qualities: well-being, a team-building (‘we’) attitude, a decision-making capacity, a sustainable approach, and strategic development (see Figure 1) (Oyinlade, 2006; Amanchukwu et al., 2015; Shanafelt, & Noseworthy 2017). In order to enhance these aspects in business leaders, organizations started adopting strategies like training, coaching, and

performance reviews (Ulrich & Smallwood, 2013). Unfortunately, nothing works effectively, and organizations and leaders should understand that these aspects cannot be achieved through such strategies. The time has come to realize that to achieve the elements mentioned above, leaders must be physically and mentally fit; well-being is the foundation for leadership effectiveness (see Figure 1). As mentioned in Figure 1, well-being is the foundation element and leads other features in achieving efficacy. This paper suggests sports to enhance these aspects and the well-being of leadership, as it is a vehicle for social change and personal development. Leaders can learn many things from sports by being team members, like creating plans and collaborating with teammates to ensure success. A leader who participates in sports is more equipped to inspire others, set practical goals, and find effective solutions to challenges in order to gain a competitive edge. Sports enhance leaders’ effectiveness, provide a road map, and inspire team members to achieve a common goal that is good for all. For several reasons, the time has come to understand and incorporate sports philosophy into daily life. Sport encourages physical and mental activities, helping leaders achieve mindfulness and resolving workplace stress.

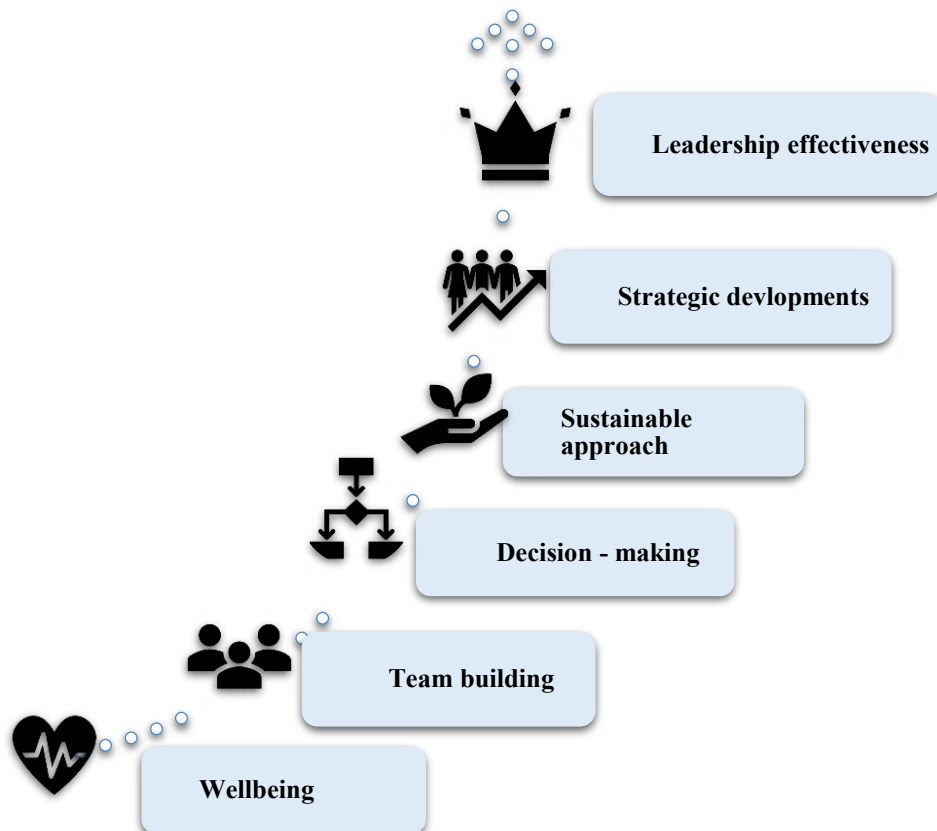


Figure 1. Five aspects of leadership excellence

Source: Own study.

Methods

A qualitative methodology based on content analysis of literature was used in this study to investigate features of sports practices for leadership well-being (physical and mental fitness). Content analysis is a research method used to analyze and interpret the content of various forms of communication, such as written texts, speeches, or media. It provides valuable insights into patterns, trends, and underlying meanings within the analyzed content, making it useful in social sciences, communication studies, and philosophical research. This study also shows the value of a 'we' attitude for team building to enhance leadership excellence and organizational productivity. However, the background of the study is created by looking through the secondary literature on sports and leadership effectiveness. It is grounded in secondary sources, such as articles, books, and other websites.

Results

We used qualitative methodology based on narrative analysis to interpret sports for leadership to resolve workplace stress and enhance effectiveness. The detailed discussion depicts sports philosophy, focusing on physical and internal exercise, and broadly speaks about oriental discipline. Sport is a vehicle for personal development, which helps leaders to achieve physical and mental well-being. Sport is a method of self-discovery that combines physical activity, competence, commitment, and character. It helps to build resilience, boost emotional intelligence, improve creative capacity and thinking ability, and make practitioners focus. These qualities help leaders to build strong relationships with their followers and customers, while stress narrows one's perspective and diminishes one's relationship with others. Sports also help to gain psychological capital. Hence, practicing sports is essential for business leaders. It is a therapeutic practice – one might establish a mental state by focusing on the present moment while calmly noticing and accepting one's feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations. Additionally, it enhances concentration, self-confidence, and self-control, and guides practitioners to follow ethical ways when faced with challenging situations. In order to maintain workplace stress, leaders should behave like a sportsperson, which helps leaders to manage organizations effectively. Sports simultaneously improve the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual levels, which allows leaders to manage stress and, as a result, enhances their effectiveness. Its benefits cognition, attention to vigorous intensity, and stress reduction. In order to make leaders stress-free and effective, organizations should adopt sports in their curricula. Employee well-being is one of the keys

to organizational productivity. In the competitive world, a small but growing number business executives are moving towards these practices. The literature on leadership has shown that eminent business persons move towards different physical activities to enhance self-confidence and self-resilience, such as Dan Schulman (PayPal CEO) – Krav Maga, Adena Friedman (Nasdaq CEO) – Taekwondo, Elon Musk, and Fredrik Eklund among others. Fredrik Eklund, one of the famous figures in the U.S. business world, once said, "*He often performs a karate high-kick before he walks into the room. When asked why, he pointed out that it was a great way to release stress and mentally prepare himself for a big business meeting*" [2015]. The time has come to highlight the significance of physical activity, for business leaders to speak out about the benefits of physical activity, and to influence others to adopt it in their daily activities and organizational strategies. In order to manage workplace stress, business leaders should encourage physical activity among their employees by offering on-site gyms or fitness classes, providing standing desks, or facilitating walking meetings, since incorporating sports into daily life can offer many benefits to business leaders and employees, including improved physical health, reduced stress levels, increased social connections, and improved work performance, leading to improved organizational productivity.

Discussions

Leadership studies is a significant field in business research and much effort has been put into defining the nature and characteristics of leadership in the business world. Leaders are one of the significant pillars in business organizations; their activities justify whether organizations succeed or not. They are the frontrunners of organizations, leading organizational objectives and influencing employees to achieve common goals. Studies have shown that "*these men are charged with the responsibility of giving direction and the unity to the effort of any who participate in economic activity*" (Gordon, 1966, p. 3). For that, leadership effectiveness becomes the center of debate for practitioners, researchers, and activists. Accordingly, several scholars highlight this concern in their work (Barker, 2001; Antonakis et al., 2004; Trottier et al., 2008; Yammarino & Dansereau, 2008; Ahmad & Ibrahim, 2015; Guzmán et al., 2020), yet many of them have focused on empirical questions regarding the nature, style and characteristics of successful leaders. Several kinds of literature on leadership have shown successful leaders for successful business organizations (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). Accordingly, organizations started to adopt training workshops, guidelines, reviews, and so on, to enhance leadership effectiveness. Unfortunately,

nothing works effectively; the time has come to understand that such strategies are ineffective in improving leadership effectiveness. Leadership is an ever-challenging position in the business world, where following any strategy is quite challenging for business leaders. In order to achieve excellence, leaders should maintain several qualities. Leadership effectiveness is multidimensional; *“Leaders must exhibit trust, vision, and communication skills and can handle pressure”* (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002, p.284). Additionally, they should develop relationships between employers and employees, since building relationships with subordinates is essential to leading successfully (Weinberg & McDermott, 2002). Literature in the field of leadership has shown that business leaders are currently more self-centric, which, due to extreme work pressure in a highly competitive market, affects relationships with their subordinates, team-building, and organizational productivity. Studies have shown that stress reduces the subordinate relationship (Creel, 2001; Schultchen et al., 2019), which affects personal and professional relationships and their effectiveness. As a result, they start to deteriorate, affecting the environment, organizational productivity, and society, in general. It is necessary to understand that to manage leaders effectively they must have well-being and a ‘we’ (team-building) attitude. ‘We’ attitude is one of the essential qualities for team-building; it enhances leaders’ positive attitude, communication, and employee collaboration and planning skills, which make leaders more effective. Leaders should understand that leadership is a two-way process of communication (Gardner, 2000; Allen & Carthy, 2017). They should engage, involve, and motivate employees to create a culture where the ‘we’ attitudes are enhanced. In order to achieve this, they must have mental and physical fitness. This paper suggests sports as a method for enhancing well-being and ‘we’ attitude among leaders, indirectly improving leadership effectiveness. Several studies in sports and business depict leaders’ significance in leading successfully (Jones, 2002; Kim et al., 2012; Di Simone & Zanardi, 2021). Both sports and business researchers highlight the significance of personal development; they are role models for their teams. Additionally, business leaders can learn a great deal from practicing sport. Sport is a vehicle that enhances team-building, decision-making capacity, relationships, and strategic development. Additionally, it improves mental and physical fitness, helping leaders to resolve workplace stress (Baker et al., 2003; Schulenkorf, 2012; Wisnu et al., 2022).

Sports have been a part of human civilization for thousands of years. Over centuries, sports have evolved and transformed, with new forms gaining and losing popularity. In the 21st century, sports have become a global phenomenon, with millions participating worldwide. Several studies have shown that sports are of increasing

interest in recent years for individual and public health (Smith et al., 2022; Taylor & Garratt, 2010; Moustakas et al., 2023). The twenty-first century has shifted sports toward a more data-driven approach. With the advent of advanced statistics and analytics, coaches and athletes can track and analyze performance metrics in real time, providing valuable insights that can inform practitioners about their training, strategies, and decision-making. Another trend in recent years is the increasing focus on athletes’ physical and mental health. Figure 2 depicts the comparison of four scales in student-athletes and non-athletes. In a survey conducted by Kenari (2014), four mental health scales were calculated separately. The findings confirmed that athletes have good mental health when compared to non-athletes (see Figure 2). Additionally, several kinds of literature (Downs & Jennifer, 2011; Malm et al., 2019; Baniyasi & Salehian, 2021) have proved that athletes and practitioners have good mental and physical health compared to others. As a result, the demand for sports has increased and, at the same time, the form and types have changed, according to the wishes of practitioners. Different sports are played worldwide, each with unique rules, equipment, and culture. The most popular sports include football (soccer), basketball, baseball, hockey, tennis, and golf. Other popular sports include cricket, rugby, volleyball, and swimming. In addition to traditional team and individual sports, many emerging forms of athletic competition have gained popularity recently, such as snowboarding, skateboarding, parkour, and e-sports, which involve competitive video gaming. As a result, researchers and practitioners move their focus to sports. Whilst sports are not a new area of research, several scholars (Laborde et al., 2016; Malm et al., 2019; Bilohur & Andriukaitiene, 2020) interpret sports in different fields. However, using sports for business leaders to manage workplace stress and leadership effectiveness is something new.

As discussed in the section above, leadership is challenging, and stress and challenges are common factors. In order to stay fit and maintain well-being, leaders should adopt sports and incorporate them into their daily activities. This will indirectly help practitioners to manage the stress that enhances leaders’ personalities. Sports have both physical and mental benefits that aid individuals in developing their character. Unfortunately, many individuals misunderstand sports, thinking they are all about physical fitness and health. Fewer individuals are aware of the psychological aspects of sports. Regarding its impact on health, sport is a double-edged sword. Physical exercise is one of the primary concerns for more sports; sports have numerous side impacts, like psychological development and personal growth (Nowak, 2014; Fraser-Thomas & Strachan, 2015; Eime et al., 2023). Sport has been recognized as a vital aspect of leading a healthy lifestyle.

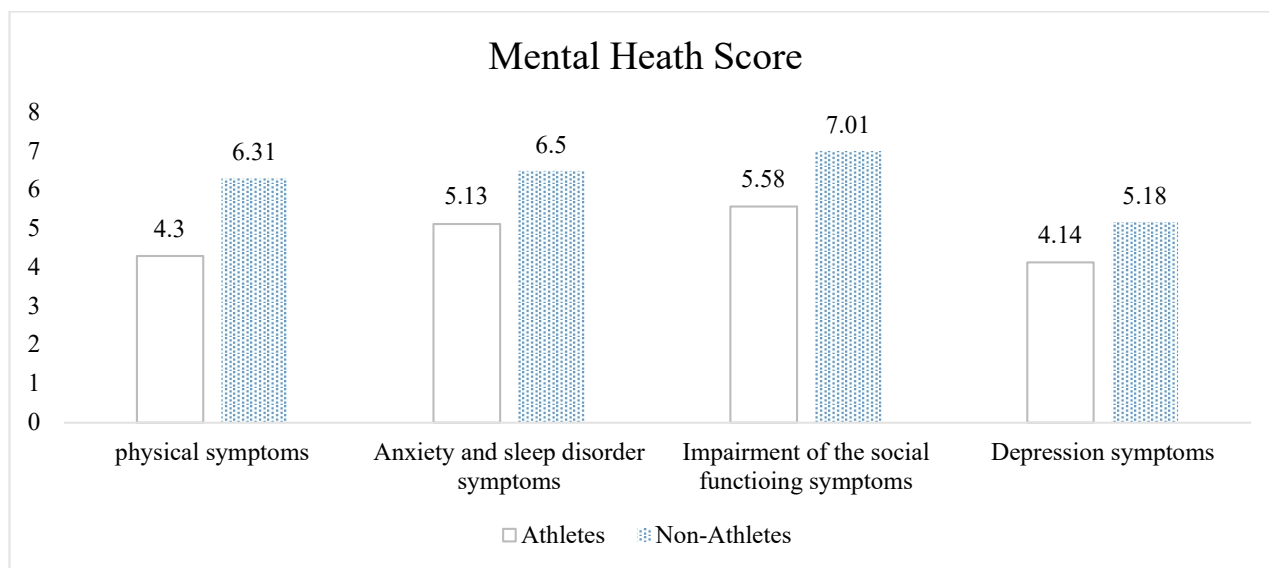


Figure 2. Comparison of four scales in student-athletes and non-athletes

Source: (Kenari & Morteza Alibakhshi, 2014)

Physical activity and exercise are essential for maintaining good health, and sports provide a structured and enjoyable way to achieve this. In addition to physical benefits, sports can positively affect mental health and well-being.

This section will explore how sport enhances both physical and psychological well-being. Sport offers a range of physical benefits, including improved cardiovascular health, enhanced strength and endurance, weight management, and reduced risk of chronic disease (Durstine et al., 2000; Haskell et al., 2007; Durstine, 2013). Participating in sports can also improve bone health and reduce the risk of osteoporosis (Andreoli et al., 2001; Nichols et al., 2007). Sport also helps to improve body composition, as it can help to build muscle mass and reduce body fat. Regular exercise can also help to manage weight and maintain a healthy body mass index (BMI). Additionally, sports can help to increase stamina and endurance, making it easier to perform daily activities. As well as the physical benefits, sports can positively impact mental health and well-being. Physical health and mental fitness are interrelated, and one affects the other, “*if the mind is relaxed, the muscles in the body will also be relaxed*” (Prashad, 2004, p. 191). Similarly, if the body is relaxed, the mind will be relaxed. It is necessary to understand that “*physical activity and exercise have significant positive effects in preventing or alleviating mental illness, including depressive symptoms and anxiety- or stress-related disease*” (Malm et al., 2019, p. 1). Studies have shown that practicing sport reduces stress and mental illness. Sports offer an opportunity to engage in social interaction, which can improve mood and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Playing sports also provides a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem,

which can help combat depression and anxiety. Studies have shown that, exercise release endorphins, the body’s natural feel-good chemicals, which can help improve mood, reduce stress and anxiety, and promote well-being (Mathew & Paulose, 2011; Chow et al., 2012; Samełko et al., 2023). A survey conducted by Malm et al. depicts “*sport’s physiological and psychosocial health benefits, stemming both from physical activity and sports participation per se*” (2019, p. 1). Moreover, playing sports can improve cognitive function, including memory, attention, and decision-making. Regular physical activity has been shown to improve brain function, including increasing blood flow to the brain and promoting the growth of new brain cells. This can help to improve mental clarity and focus, making it easier to manage daily tasks and improve overall cognitive performance. The above discussion shows that sports have several benefits that boost overall health, including physical and mental fitness, which indirectly helps individuals to reduce stress (Wankel & Bonnie, 1990). In order to manage workplace stress, leaders should focus on physical and mental health. For that, leaders should incorporate sports into their regular activities. Along with physical and psychological well-being, sports also build resilience, develop teamwork skills, and enhance personality, self-awareness, self-confidence, and concentration; they also help practitioners focus, enhancing self-improvement and self-discovery that directs leaders towards effectiveness. According to a survey by Malm et al. (2019), robust scientific evidence establishes a strong connection between engaging in physical exercise or training and experiencing positive physical and mental health outcomes.

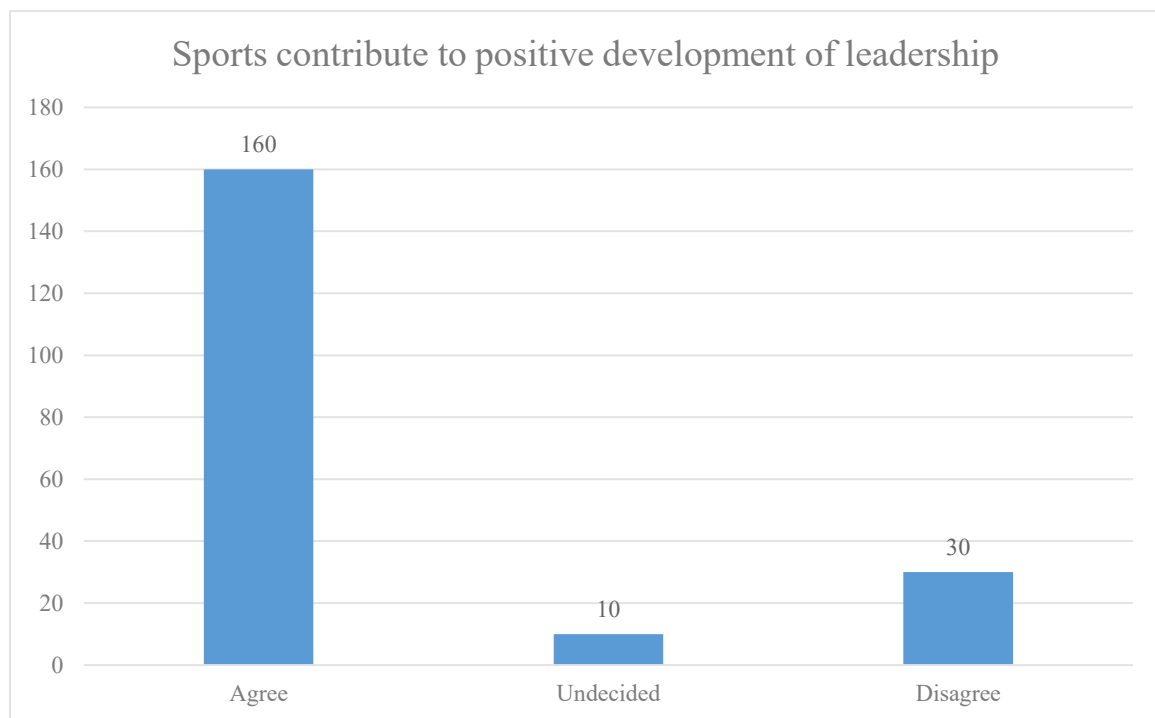


Figure 3. Sports Effect on Leadership Development

Source: (Kim Dong Hak, 2022)

In order to enhance leadership effectiveness, business leaders should train as systematically as athletes (Loehr & Schwartz, 2001). Business leaders and sports athletes have similar journeys of discovery (Orlick, 2015). Of course, sport is not a business, but there are some interesting similarities that business executives should learn from sports (Laurent & Bradney, 2007). The literature on sports has shown that sports provide a more comprehensive approach to leadership development than most management and leadership development programs (Frawley, 2018). Leaders learn about building resilience from sports; sports require dedication, perseverance, and the ability to handle setbacks. Business leaders who participate in sports can develop these qualities, which can help them overcome challenges in the workplace. Sports depict the strength of the team to achieve a common goal. Business leaders who participate in sports can develop their ability to work collaboratively with others, which is essential for success in many business settings. It simultaneously enhances leaders' 'we' attitude and helps them to build a solid team to achieve the common good. In order to maintain these 'we' attitudes, leaders should depict competence, commitment, and character to their followers. These are the factors that build a strong relationship between leaders and followers. Teamwork and team-building are fundamental qualities that sports teach participants. Teamwork is one of the basic skills for

sports; it inspires members to contribute their fair share, enabling the group to accomplish its primary objective. In order to set an example for their followers and to be productive, leaders need to have aptitudes that help them in building teams. However, a person can acquire the positive leadership traits and conduct required to succeed in a dynamic, challenging workplace by participating in sports. As discussed in the section above, sports promote health and wellness. Business leaders prioritizing their physical health through sports can improve their overall well-being and potentially reduce the risk of burnout. Additionally, it offers opportunities for individuals to develop their leadership skills by taking on roles such as team captain or coach. Business leaders who participate in sports can develop their leadership abilities, which can translate into effective leadership in the workplace. These qualities enhance a leader's decision-making capacity, which is one of the significant aspects in sports that direct participants to tackle challenging situations (Sağın et al., 2022). It also enhances resilience, self-control, and self-confidence, which enable leaders to make decisions during difficult situations. For that, leaders should adopt some practical knowledge for overall enhancement and finally apply it in the field example in decision-making, for example. Effective decision-making requires a multidimensional effort, a strong team, communication, and a self-disciplined attitude. All three dimensions depend

on each other for effective performance. Teams work effectively when leaders can influence their teammates. In order to achieve this, leaders must have communication skills. Such skills are a significant aspect of how leaders inspire, acknowledge, and appreciate the work of their teammates. Along with communication skills, leaders should be self-disciplined, and their activity should be a model for their associates to follow. Sport is a perfect way to achieve this self-discipline. It helps individuals to develop self-control and comprehension on an individual level. Sports provide each participant with different challenges, which means each individual faces a unique set of problems in sports; it helps the practitioners to understand how they fit into the team and how they can each progress individually. The same thing applies to business leaders. These are the qualities that direct them to take a sustainable approach. A sporting attitude helps leaders to realize that business cannot function without the environment and society. In order to sustain themselves in a highly competitive world, business leaders should direct their concern toward the environment and society in which they work. These qualities are enhanced through sports and move leaders towards strategic development

that indirectly resolves workplace stress and improves leadership effectiveness. Sports have a significant impact on leadership development. A survey conducted by Kim Dong Hak (2022) has found that a significant majority of 160 out of 200 participants agreed that sports play a crucial role in developing leadership skills (see Figure 3).

Leaders should incorporate sports into their daily life; it enhances their well-being and improves physical and mental fitness, indirectly guiding leaders in team-building and decision-making (see Figure 4). Well-being and decision-making capacity enhance a sustainable approach that leads leaders toward development (Caddick & Brett, 2014). Through Figure 4, this paper argues that incorporating sports into the lives of leaders has a positive impact on their effectiveness. This model depicts, sports in leadership have a two-way effect: on the one side enhancing well-being through physical and mental fitness and on the other side promoting strategic development through a collective mind-set, effective decision-making, and sustainability. Ultimately, these factors contribute to leaders becoming more effective in their roles as a consequence they are able to manage their organisations in a better way lead towards development.

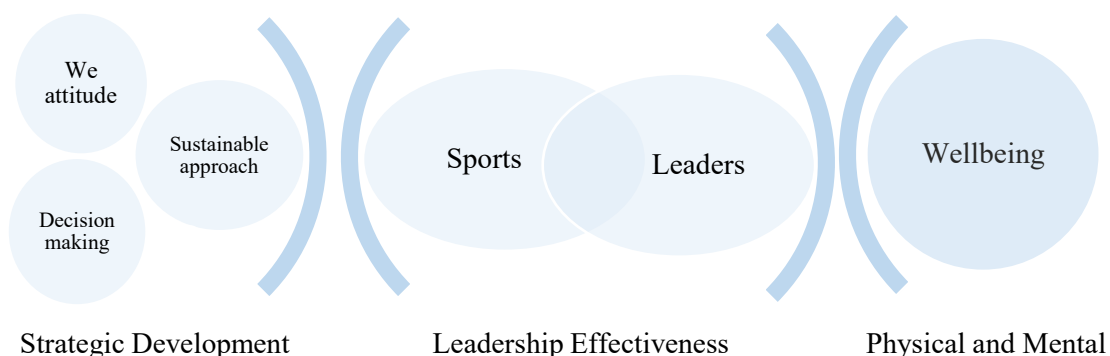


Figure 4. Sports effective for leadership effectiveness

Source: own study

Conclusion

In conclusion, sports offer a valuable lens for analyzing the effects of teamwork and collaboration on leadership, as a shared sense of purpose, open communication, and mutual support among team members often characterize successful teams. Sports also demonstrate the importance of leadership in setting a positive example and motivating others to achieve their goals. Influential leaders in sports and other settings demonstrate a commitment to excellence, a willingness to take risks, and a focus on continuous improvement. In order to achieve that, leaders must have

physical and mental fitness. Well-being is the foundation of other aspects (Figure 1) that lead towards team-building, decision-making, a sustainable approach, and in the end, towards strategic development. Ultimately, there is a positive answer to whether 'we' matter for leadership excellence. In order to enhance this 'we' attitude, leaders should incorporate sports activities into their personal and professional strategies and influence their employees to adopt sports. However, we do not proclaim that this strategy applies to everyone; instead, we merely show a potential new method. In this case, the fundamental presumption is that leaders will enjoy learning lessons from sports

for themselves and enlist the help of sports instructors to convey studies more effectively. Of course, additional research and surveys are required to confirm our findings.

Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests or financial interests.

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