

Psychological characteristics of coaches of successful and less successful athletes in team and individual sports

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Personality traits, motivation, leadership styles, emotional and social competencies, and attitudes towards coaching were investigated in a sample of Slovene coaches. Four groups of coaches could be described by two discriminant dimensions. One was interpreted as *group leadership*, defined by democratic leadership, reports on problems related to coaching, more task than performance orientation, and reduced directivity. The second was interpreted as *permissiveness*, characterized by weak behaviour control, low achievement imperative and a lack of high aspirations, reduced domination, lower openness, poorer social skills and feed-back tendency. Successful athletes' coaches were focused on their trainees' emotions and needs, inclined to democratic leadership; they were dominant personalities ready to talk about the professional problems, unwilling to use social skills to command athletes. Less successful athletes' coaches were less focused on relationships, task oriented, didn't show a tendency to include anyone in decision-making, commanded their trainees often and communicated with them a lot, although the meaning and purpose of it was questionable. The coaches in team sports resembled each other regardless of the quality of their trainees. They differentiated from the individual sport coaches due to less expressed group leadership behaviour and lower permissiveness. Type of sport makes coaches more alike than the level of success.

Key words: coaches, athletes, psychological characteristics, discriminant analysis

The article is based on the common idea in sport psychology that the coach, besides his/her athletes, is the key figure in sports. Our goal was to test this idea in Slovene sport and examine the way Slovene coaches work with their athletes. Systematic study should result in scientific insight on the role and work of coaches in sport, and provide relevant information about importance of coaches in the development of sport.

Authors of numerous books single out a coach as a crucial person in athletes' sports career progression (Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Krevsel, 2001; Chelladurai, 1990; Martens, 1990; Gummerson, 1992; Sabock, 1985). Solomon (2001) found that the coach's estimate of athlete's self-confidence is the best predictor of athlete's performance in competitions. Dick (1997) defines coaching as "more an art than a science". The process of training consists of two components: the first, skill improvement, regards knowledge transfer, and

the second is the development of a relationship between the coach and athletes which influence athletes' development of the self-efficacy and can facilitate their psychological growth (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003). Self-efficacy depends primarily on how much we believe we have been successful in various activities within a particular field (Bandura, 1977). Poczwadowski, Barott and Henschen (2002) regard the coach-athlete relationship being responsible for the entire sports experience, quality of training, and competition performance.

Quality of coach-athlete relationship depends on the contribution of both sides. The relationship will be effective if both sides are satisfied. Research studies have demonstrated that, on the coach side, various dispositional and situational factors are important, as well as certain acquired skills. These factors are: coach's personality traits, emotional control, expertise/competency, innovativeness, communication skills, leadership style, motivational structure, gender and the like (Reimer & Toon, 2001, Serpa, 2001; Tušak & Tušak, 2001). On the athlete's side, there are also several interrelated factors that interactively influence coach-athlete relationship quality. Studies have already demonstrated that the most important factors for athletes are: their personality traits, chosen sporting discipline, age, gender, and competition quality level (Taylor & Wilson, 2005).

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Besides factors related to coach and athlete, environment in which they act have influence on their relationship as well. Also, coach-athlete relationship is a dynamic one – it changes through time and “grows” (Tušak & Tušak, 2001). Previous research investigated coach-athlete relationship from various aspects. Pozwardowski, Barott and Henschen (2002) on the sample of young gymnasts established positive correlation was found between the ability of the coaches to establish good relationships and the quality of their female trainees. The higher the quality of the female athletes was, the more able their coaches were to influence positively their relationship, and the influence on the development of the other person was stronger.

Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, and Peterson (1999) investigated the differences in coach-athlete relationships with regard to the sports achievements at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta. They established that the athletes from the teams which failed to accomplish the desired competition results felt the lack of quality communication with their coaches. The athletes were troubled with their coaches' lack of Olympic competition experience, and resented their inconsistency in mental training conduction, poor pressure tolerance and control, distraction proneness during matches, due to which their athletes did not believe them; athletes even suspected their trainers were not competent enough (Gould et al., 1999). The athletes who realized the expected results, or accomplished even more had unlimited confidence in their coaches. Coaches, in turn, radiated with enthusiasm, demonstrated high level of knowledge and proficiency, high adaptability to environmental circumstances and were constantly able to provide their athletes with favourable conditions for training and competition; the coaches were preparing clear and sensible plans for high performance and respected them, so their athletes believed in that plans with no restraints.

Miller, Salmela and Kerr (2002) see coach-athlete relationship being like mentorship and describe it as a close, but not familiar/parental or romantic, union of a mature person and young, still developing, maturing persons. The mentor is acting primarily as a role model and the purpose of the relationship is development of numerous skills in the trainees. The coach acts as the mentor due to his/her expertise and experience, and his/her goal is to transfer them to his/her protégé.

Coach-athlete relationship has been researched in the Slovenian population, too. Velepec and Doupona Topič (2004) found out on the sample of 26 top-level biathlon athletes that coach-athlete relationship was hardly ever problematic, which confirmed the opinion that their good, constructive relations facilitated high sports achievements. One finding was especially interesting – the athletes estimated their attitude towards the coach as more crucial element of the relationship than vice versa. The similar was found in the study by Marinko (2003) on the sample of elite Slovenian dancers who were mostly satisfied with the treatment of their coaches.

A part of previous research dealt with the issue of athletes' perception of their coaches. The comparison of athletes' evaluation of their coaches and their own self-evaluation showed certain discrepancy (Barić, 2002; Brumen, 2006; Chelladurai & Carron, 1983, Salminen & Liukonen, 1996; Serpa, Pataco & Santos, 1991, Percival, 1971, Tušak & Tušak, 2001). The general athletes' perception of their coaches was more negative than positive, although the athletes from team sports perceived their coaches more positive than their colleagues from individual sports. Percival (1971) concluded that 80% of sportspersons in individual sports perceived negatively their coaches. Laughlin and Laughlin (1994) also compared athletes' and coaches' perception of coaches' behaviour. The results demonstrated that the athletes, whose estimations of their coaches' leadership style were comparable to their coaches' self-estimations, gave higher scores on coaching effectiveness scale, whereas the opposite was valid for the athletes whose estimations were different from the coaches' self-estimations. The line of agreement is obvious in all the mentioned studies: the coaches are inclined to give socially more acceptable answers and to present themselves as more instructive, democratic, and supportive in comparison to their athletes' impressions. Beside this, Jaki (1993) reports that coaches overestimate their coaching abilities.

Psychological profile of a successful coach

A question frequently appearing in sports practice is: who is a successful coach, which psychological traits do determine him/her? Popper and Lipshitz (1992) state that successful coaches can be described as follows: committed to work, not afraid to show that they like their coaching profession, express high achievement and excellence aspirations, they are able to transfer their opinions and ideas in a simple way, and inclined to give feedback. Tušak and Tušak (2001) indicate that characteristics describing the successful coach are very similar to the group of characteristics describing the good educator (achievement aspirations, self-cognition, social skills, teaching skills, permanency of social connections, well developed teaching techniques, analytical abilities, observation ability, responsibility, behavioural consistency, ability to create positive atmosphere, self-control) besides several additional psychological skills like: high working motivation, flexibility, creativity, organizational skills, trustworthiness, social skills, sound reasoning, and self-confidence.

Perez Ramirez (2002) conducted a qualitative study of the characteristics of successful coaches. She determined the *psychological profile of high-quality coaches* on the sample of 11 coaches from three sports (football, tennis, and athletics). The successful coaches are competent persons with the developed ability to direct their behaviour to personal and professional success; they were all top-level athletes; they have high achievement motivation, transparent leadership

style, and developed social skills; they favour feedback giving, care about safety of athletes. The background of their actions is the principle of athletes' optimal achievements and satisfaction. Successful coaches are altruistic, empathic, guided by clear goals in their work. In conflicts they know how to control themselves and seldom manifest aggressive behaviour, more often they act as peace-makers; they consider themselves as good listeners and athletes' problems do interested them. Their feeling of personal responsibility is well developed, self-discipline and self-demand are high. Further, they are well organized, and they direct their behaviour as well as behaviour of their athletes to sports accomplishments. These findings correspond in general with the findings of the research performed by Ogilvie and Tutko (1981), Sternberg and Ruzgis (1994) and Tušak and Tušak (2001). Coaches and athletes are emotionally involved in their sports, manifested particularly in conflict situations and during competitions. Several research studies have demonstrated that coaches' heart rate values during competitions are similar to those of their athletes; in other words, coaches are deeply involved in all events, but they must be able to control their emotions (e. g. Tušak & Tušak, 2001). Coaches who lose their nerves running along the court or field side lines, shout and criticize their athletes, who shout and swear at referees and everybody else are not popular or liked. From available literature we can see that successful coaches are cognizant of their own coaching role and direct responsibility of their trainees' physical, technical, tactical, and psychological preparation. They are generally open to the changes in training programmes, and usually they employ individual approach to each of their athletes, being fully aware of the important task to create and do everything to maintain positive motivational climate. On the sample of Slovene coaches Hvalec (2005) found no differences in personality traits between successful and less successful ones. The only finding was that the successful coaches, compared to the less successful ones, expressed various forms of behaviour more intensely (instruction, leadership, organization), and although they were performance and goal achievement oriented, they paid considerable amount of attention to the relationship with their trainees establishing, who they respect as persons.

The goal of the present study was to determine which psychological characteristics of Slovene coaches are most strongly related to performance and sports achievements. Therefore, we investigated characteristics of successful and less successful coaches as well as the differences between the coaches in team and individual sports. Based on previous investigations we presumed that certain characteristics of effective leadership style related to the coach's level of emotional intelligence, communication skills, personality traits, attitudes and motivational profile, which are desirable for sport coaching. The decision upon which characteristics should be investigated was made upon studying the exist-

ing research reports and articles on the profile of successful coaches. The selected characteristics almost always appear in these studies and we decided on choosing them in order to have a comparative body of research.

In addition, we aimed to examine whether distinct psychological profiles of successful and less successful coaches, can be found in team and individual sports. The amount of differences between team and individual sports and different demands these sports put on coaches leads us to expect differences in psychological characteristics of these coaches.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 275 Slovene coaches, 237 of the sample were male and 37 female, with one coach with no the answer about gender. Their average age was 38.87 years ($SD = 10.01$). The number of coaches by the type of the sport is presented in Table 1.

Out of the sample, 60% of them coach only one category of athletes (cadets and younger age categories were regarded as one category), whereas 40% of them train athletes of different categories.

The coaches who trained successful athletes were 41.43 years old on average ($SD = 9.66$), whereas the coaches of less successful athletes were 35.03 years on average ($SD = 9.32$). The age difference between these coaches is significant ($F = 29.29$; $p < .001$). The coaches of successful athletes had significantly longer training experience ($F = 16.50$; $p < .001$), that is, 19.48 years of experience on average ($SD = 10.25$) compared to 14.33 years on average ($SD = 3.18$) applied to coaches of less successful athletes. There was no difference in the level of coaches' education between these groups ($F = 0.23$; $p < .63$).

Success was defined by the criterion: experience in working with top-level athletes. So, the coaches of successful athletes were those who had been working with athletes – members of national selections or teams, either in team or individual sports, whereas the coaches of less successful athletes were all the rest.

Table 1

Number of the investigated coaches in team and individual sports		
	Sport	No. of coaches (fr. %)
Category	Individual sport	206 (74.9%)
	Team sport	67 (24.4%)
	Not defined	2 (0.7%)

Instruments and variables

Based on results of previously quoted studies which investigated psychological profiles and established certain psychological characteristics of successful coaches regard their personality leadership and communication style, motivation structure and attitudes toward coaching we decided to analyze the sample of Slovene coaches in a similar manner. For this purpose 8 Slovene versions of the listed questionnaires were used to measure 40 variables. They showed acceptable psychometric characteristics in previous applications on various Slovene samples, except for the Attitude inventory, which was designed specifically for this research.

Big Five Questionnaire (BFQ), Caprara, Barbaranelli, Borgogni, Bucik and Boben (1997) (fundamental dimensions and subscales: Energy – Dynamics and Domination, Agreeability - Cooperativeness/Empathy and Amiability/Friendship, Conscientiousness – Profoundness and Commitment, Emotional stability – Emotional control and Impulse control, Mental openness – Openness to culture and Openness to experience -15 variables).

Social skills inventory (SSI) – the original version by Riggio and Trockmorton from 1986 was translated and published in Lamovec (1994) – contains personal competencies (dimensions: emotional expression, emotional sensibility, emotional control, social expression, social sensibility, social control, and social manipulation - 7 variables).

Achievement motivation questionnaire - the original version by Costello from 1967 was translated and published in Lamovec (1994); (dimensions: the need for achieving success, based on own work and effort invested, and the need for achieving success regardless of our effort invested - 2 variables).

Self-motivation Inventory (SMI) - the original version by Dishman, Ickes and Morgan from 1980, was translated and published in Tušak (1997) – (it measures internal motivation, self-assessment of work and achievements, and significance of success – 3 variables).

Leadership scale for sports (LSS) – the original version by Chelladurai and Saleh from 1980 was translated and published in Kajtna (2006); (dimensions: training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, democratic behaviour, and autocratic behaviour – 5 variables).

Emotional competence questionnaire (VEK 45) - the original version by Takšič 1998 was translated and published in Kajtna (2006); (dimensions: ability to recognize and understand emotions, ability to express and name emotions and ability to manage emotions – 3 variables).

Leader Effectiveness and Adaptability Description (LEAD) self-assessment – Hersey and Blanchard, (1988, translated and published in Jakše, Kajtna & Tušak, 2006); (dimensions: telling/directiveness, selling/persuasion, participating, delegating, adaptability of leadership – 5 variables).

Attitude inventory for coaches (*Vprašalnik stališč za trenerje*) – Kajtna and Hvalec (2006, cited in Kajtna & Tušak, 2007); attitudes towards education/breeding of the young, self-improvement significance, fair-play respect, satisfaction with own social position and others, all grouped in three dimensions: education, excellence, problems – 3 variables.

Procedure

The data were collected as a part of the research project “Leadership styles of Slovenian coaches”, in the period October 2004 – September 2005. The measurement of a paper-pencil type was mainly individual. It lasted 70 minutes on average and a psychologist conducted it.

RESULTS

The differences between four groups of coaches (the coaches of successful and less successful athletes from team and individual sports) were examined by use of canonical discriminant analysis. After obtaining inadequate values of tolerance coefficients for 6 variables (all five personality dimensions and delegating – the leadership dimension) those were excluded from further analyses.

Discriminant analysis resulted in two statistically significant discriminant functions (Wilks' $\Lambda_1=.47$, $\chi^2=178.74$, $p<.001$; $\Lambda_2=.65$, $\chi^2=101.7$, $p<.001$), out of which the first one explained 43.9%, and the second 42.4% of variance of the differences between four groups of coaches. The obtained eigenvalues and canonical correlation coefficients ($\lambda_1=.38$, $r=.53$; $\lambda_2=.37$, $r=.52$) indicate that the derived discriminant functions only moderately differentiate among the groups of coaches, but it is obvious that both functions are equally important. To understand the meaning of the differences among the groups, the obtained discriminant function coefficients should be explained, as shown in Table 2.

In Table 2, the standardized coefficients of the discriminant functions and of the correlation coefficients of the variables with the discriminant functions are shown. The first discriminant function is defined with a couple variables: democratic leadership style (Democratic Behaviour), expressing problems related to coaching profession (Problems) on the positive pole of the function, and with Telling/Directiveness and Participating, which denote management focused on the relationships and not on the tasks, on the negative pole. So, the structure of the first discriminant function is related with the leadership dimensions which represent possibilities for athletes to participate in decision-making process in general and in specific situations. It is in accordance with the expressed inclination of these coaches to talk about problems of coaching profession because the inclusion of athletes in very demanding sports training management process is a relief to the coach to a certain extent.

Table 2

Standardized coefficients of discriminant functions (d_F), structure of significant discriminant functions (r) and centroids of the groups

Category	Dimension	F1		F2	
		d_F	r_F	d_F	r_F
Subscale of personality traits	Dinamysm	.07	-.05	-.21	-.18
	Domination	.41	-.20	-.16	-.28
	Cooperativeness	.00	-.08	.24	.07
	Cordiality	-.03	.14	-.41	-.08
	Profoundness	.19	-.05	.05	-.12
	Commitment	.02	.06	.20	-.13
	Emotion control	.21	.06	-.14	-.12
	Impulse control	-.04	.08	.05	-.04
	Openness to culture	-.18	-.12	.06	-.14
	Openness to experience	-.19	-.08	-.17	-.22
Leadership/management-motivational approach	Training and instructions	.18	.12	-.07	-.11
	Democratic behaviour	.65	.47	.13	.23
	Autocratic behaviour	.20	.07	-.17	-.14
	Social support	-.15	.07	.33	.12
	Positive feedback	-.10	.04	.37	.22
Leadership/management-situational approach	Directiveness	-.28	-.29	.25	-.17
	Persuasion	-.14	.05	.40	.14
	Participation	.18	-.26	.19	-.07
	Flexible leadership style (adaptability)	-.19	.07	.05	.11
Achievement motivation	Self-motivation	.14	.06	-.03	-.21
	Achievement based on effort	-.35	-.12	.02	-.14
	Achievement regardless of effort	-.20	-.06	-.29	-.14
Social skills	Emotional expressiveness	-.06	-.08	.22	-.02
	Emotional sensibility	-.05	-.05	.06	-.19
	Emotional control	-.29	-.10	.37	-.02
	Social expressiveness	-.32	-.16	.36	-.11
	Social sensibility	-.09	-.20	-.09	.08
	Social control	.00	-.01	-.55	-.31
	Social manipulation	-.18	-.05	-.22	-.20
Emotional intelligence	Emotion recognition	.38	.14	-.73	-.38
	Emotion expression	-.13	.04	.32	-.11
	Emotion management	-.11	.03	-.04	-.16
Attitudes	Nurture (development)	-.12	-.07	-.09	-.13
	Achievement	-.01	.07	-.45	-.50
	Difficulties	.44	.45	.10	-.05
Centroids of the groups	Coaches of successful individual sports athletes (N=116)	.67		-.02	
	Coaches of less successful individual sports athletes (N=78)	-.50		.75	
	Coaches of successful team sports athletes (N=42)	-.46		-.97	
	Coaches of less successful team sports athletes (N=23)	-.85		-.66	

Therefore, this canonical discriminant function was named “*group leadership*”.

The second discriminant function is defined by a small number of variables with relatively small projections. These are: Excellence, Ability to recognize emotions, social con-

trol, Domination, Openness to Experience, and Self-motivation, on the negative pole, whereas Positive Feedback is on the positive pole. Correlations of other variables with the second functions are far lower; therefore we defined it as “*permissiveness*”. Practically, it denotes the leadership not

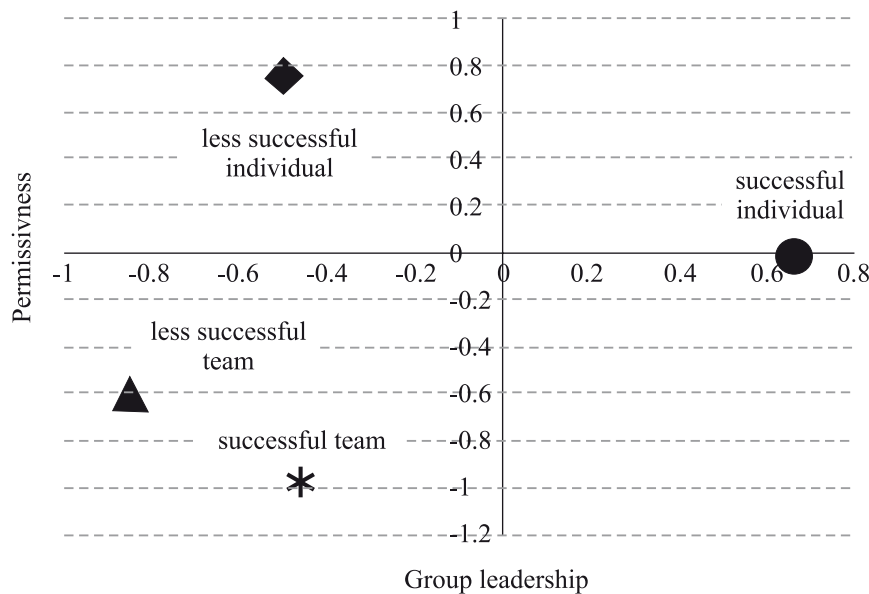


Figure 1. A display of centroids of the groups in the space of discriminant functions

characterized by the achievement imperative; the coach is not a predominant person, neither one who explores how to achieve sports results in new ways; he/she is not skilled in receiving and interpreting emotional messages of his/her athletes neither is he/she skillful in situation or people management aimed at goal attainment, whereas their working motivation needs outer impetus. Additionally, a lot of positive feedback is presented to the athletes, presumably serving as the means of control over the situation in which an “everything-is-well” impression is intended to be created, although it might not be true. This leadership style is not characterized with striving for excellence; social control is low and athletes’ emotions are hardly recognized; the coach’ dominance and responsiveness is reduced, although approval is constantly present.

Figure 1 displays positions of the groups’ centroids in the space of the discriminant variables.

When we look at the placement of group centroids in the space of the two discriminant functions, we can see that successful coaches in individual sports are distinct in group leadership and the centroid of that group is placed on the right side of the figure, whilst all other centroids are positioned on the left side of the figure. Coaches in team sport seem to be less different from each other according to how successful they are – the centroids for successful and less successful coaches in the figure are close to each other, indicating their similarity upon investigated variables.

DISCUSSION

In this study we tried to determine psychological profile of successful and less successful coaches in team and

individual sports. For this purpose canonical discriminant analysis was performed. The results revealed two statistically significant discriminant functions by which these four groups of coaches could be differentiated.

The first discriminant function is defined by democratic leadership style and reporting on troubles related to coaching profession, on the positive pole, and by directiveness and participating, the dimensions of situational management, characterized by the coach’s focus on social interactions and less on task, on the negative pole. These are mostly leadership dimensions, characterized by the cooperation with athletes and their inclusion in decisions making about techniques, tactics, style of play, and training session performance. The background of all these is high orientation to relationship development with athletes and associates. Reports on troubles of coaching professions are sensibly included in this function. Namely, the inclusion of the athletes in decision-making presents the means by which the coach receives feedback about himself/herself and his/her work; s/he also receives the information from the assistants and his/her duty is to co-ordinate and harmonize information, work and relationships. It requires additional engagement, so coaches perceive themselves as overburden with work and regard coaching profession as a very stressful job because it crossover to their private lives, whilst financial reimbursement for it is hardly sufficient. The first canonical function is named “group leadership”.

The second discriminant function is determined by the striving for excellence, the ability to recognize emotions and to control others; self-initiative, and openness to anything new from the field of sports training on the negative pole,

whereas the tendency to give positive feedback is placed on the positive pole of the function. High scores on this function denote lack of ambition for high standards, low assertiveness, and tendency to set unchallenging goals; the opposition to new experiences and new ways of doing things; insufficient social skills, low dominance, difficulties with other persons' emotions, needs recognition and understanding, as well as with responding to them. High scores are also linked to low intrinsic motivation and rigidness when new things are regarded, meaning reduced effort investment in coaching, insufficient self-motivation ability, and the need for extrinsic incentives. Low aspiration for high sport achievements followed by enhanced inclination to positive feedback giving is also typical. Insufficient aspiration for achievements enhances probability of failure, so extrinsic positive encouragements are also probably lacking. The function is named »permissiveness«. Due to its prominent characteristics typical for 'laissez-faire' leadership style it seems that the coach is just a leader by name who works off her/his job more formally than actively and creatively. In doing that s/he often uses public encouragement, appraisal, but it reveals her/his low quality standards than actual excellence.

The positions of group centroids in the space of so described discriminant functions allow the investigated groups of coaches to be described differently. The coaches of successful individual sports athletes are positioned on the positive pole of the function *group leadership*. That means that, compared to all other groups, they tend to include their trainees into the decision-making process. Simultaneously, they are oriented towards relationship and cooperation development with athletes and others, primarily experts from various fields who can help them in coaching with information. Successfulness of coaches working with athletes in individual sport has been investigated by Fry, Kerr and Lee (1995, cited in Yukl, 2002). More successful were those coaches who managed to solve conflicts at the group level and who respected relationships and group cohesion maintenance, which is congruent with previously explained results of this study. Results showed also that these coaches spoke frequently about difficulties related to the profession of coaching, viewing it as stressful, impossible to separate it from their private lives, and underpaid. The last statement is in fact true when their salaries are compared to the salaries of coaches in team sports. There was no published information about salaries of the Slovene coaches, but Jošt, Dolenc, Pustovrh, Leskošek and Vest (2001), in a study of attitudes of Slovene coaches, found out that most of them thought salaries were too small in comparison to complexity of the profession of coaching. Successful coaches in individual sports lean on their associates to a certain extent, which brings a kind of relief to them and much easier facing with the sources of professional pressure. Since directiveness is not one of their characteristics, they are probably less assertive and inclined to dictate the conditions under which they are prepared to work. This group of coaches is positioned on

the second discriminant function right in the middle; behaviours and characteristics determining the dimension "permissiveness" are expressed ordinary, i.e. they are neither passive nor strict. Their tendency to excellence is moderate; they can recognize athletes' emotions to a certain degree and they utilize certain mechanisms of social control. Also, they are relatively open to experience and moderately dominant, being contained in giving positive feedback. The positions of the group centroids make it obvious that the coaches of successful athletes of individual sports differ from all other coaches, especially from the coaches of less successful athletes of team sports, due to the value of the centroid of the latter on the first function.

As seen from the position on the first discriminant function, the coaches of less successful individual sports athletes rarely include athletes or other experts in their work and they hardly ever speak about professional difficulties. They are more commanding in their work with athletes paying more attention to tasks and goals than to relationships. On the other hand, they sometimes do prefer relationships over tasks and goals. Such instability of the criterion for the priority determination contributes to their lower coaching successfulness or to such an image of theirs in the public. At the level of the second function the coaches of less successful individual sports athletes differ from other groups of coaches by being most permissive. They set easy achievable and unchallenging goals both to themselves and their trainees; their social skills are not highly developed, and they are less open to new approaches to and new methods of work. Further, they are not dominant neither inclined to the democratic leadership style, meaning active participation of athletes in the decision-making process and coach's interest in their opinions and attitudes. Paradoxically, positive feedback can often be heard from them probably because they want to create an impression that they have control over things. However, the truth is probably that process is progressing by itself, with no true strategy and clear goal. Therefore, athletes and associates can get an impression that there is an abundance of two-way communication, but the communication might be insincere and abstract, which is neither supportive nor productive for the relationships establishing. Consequently, their trainees have less trust in such coaches. Namely, coaches of this kind neither do recognize nor react to emotions of others particularly well (Taylor & Wilson, 2005); they are not convincing in their role; their appearance is not of the self-assured persons, and they are not good enough in managing other people in actual situations. Therefore their inclination to give positive feedback may be understood also as a sort of defensive behaviour mechanism. The description of characteristics and working style of this group of coaches is in accordance with the findings of Burbach (2004) who found the relation between reduced emotional intelligence and tendency to *laissez-faire* leadership style, which corresponds with the description of the permissive coach.

The coaches of successful athletes in team sports are not inclined to behaviours typical for group leadership style, as described at the level of the first discriminant function. Also, they are least permissive in comparison to the coaches pertaining to all the other groups. That means they are directive when working with their teams, strive obviously for excellence, recognize well the needs of their trainees and only occasionally include them in decision-making process.

They have good control, are dominant and open to new possibilities, collaborators, technologies and similar new experiences, i.e. to anything that can help them in the realization of their high standards. They do not give positive feedback too often, probably restricting themselves only to the situations in which the athletes really have deserved to get one. Those coaches seem to work diligently, do not complain, and lead their teams with firm hand, employing clear strategy, towards high goals. Such an approach is sensible for coaching teams. Research studies have demonstrated so far that such an approach is more desirable when working with younger age athletes, but also with top-quality or elite athletes (Chelladurai & Carron, 1983).

The coaches of less successful team sports athletes are least inclined to group leadership style and behaviours. Generally, they are not permissive, but firmer in managing training process and their team; they rely primarily on their own strengths and capacities, including neither athletes nor associates in the coaching job. That is probably the main reason for their smaller efficiency.

Results of the discriminant analysis show that the coaches in individual sports could be differentiated among themselves with regard to successfulness more than the coaches in team sports. In other words, the team sports coaches are more similar among themselves than the individual sports coaches (Figure 1). Less expressed group leadership style and low permissiveness are typical for all the team sports coaches, with one slight difference – the coaches of successful team sports athletes are slightly more inclined to group leadership and less permissive than their less successful colleagues. The coaches of successful team sports sometimes include their athletes in decision-making, more often than their colleagues who work with less successful teams, but on much fewer occasions than do the coaches of successful individual sports athletes. They are not permissive; on the contrary – they have good social skills, invest in themselves, they are eager to know what is new in their sphere of interest. They are dominant, they know how to play social roles and they understand athletes' emotions; they are intrinsically motivated, they have control over events, but they are not very eager to give positive feedback; neither to encourage their trainees often. These results are consistent with the results obtained by Fry, Kerr and Lee (1995, cited in Yukl, 2002) who state that team sports coaches are successful when they can coordinate group well, fulfil their leadership role and emphasize team success, whereas, on the other hand, they do not demonstrate too much under-

standing for freedom and comfort of their trainees. Such a leadership style is important for team's discipline which influences efficiency and performance. Also, Perez Ramirez (2000) emphasizes the developed achievement motivation, care for the athletes and good communication skills as quality of successful coaches. Obviously, less democratic and more dominant and directive style of managing athletes is more advisable in team sports. Successful coaches in team sports have in general good reimbursements. Therefore, fewer reports were registered on the difficulties related to their jobs, which has a positive influence on work motivation. On the other hand, good behaviour control is their characteristic, probably due to a considerable attention of media and general public paid to team sports. Public reputation is very important in elite sport and good self-control helps them in achieving and keeping the desired public image. Additionally, Gillman (2000) indicated higher extraversion in the successful than in the less successful basketball coaches; consistent to the mentioned, in our study the Slovenian coaches have well developed social skills, which is typical for extraverts.

The coaches of individual sports athletes are more permissive and inclined to group leadership style than their colleagues in team sports. It seems that high expression of permissive leadership style is counterproductive to success in individual sports coaching profession, whereas the inclination to group leadership style, with moderate participation of certain permissive and some strict features of management, is what makes successful individual sports coach.

Undoubtedly, other characteristics besides coaches' personality traits, selected to be investigated in this study, also contribute to their efficiency as trainers. Certain part of the obtained differences can be attributed to the characteristics of the very sports and to the environmental-situational factors of success in sports.

The obtained results have two applicable outcomes for sports practice. On the one hand, they address the relationship coach-athlete, and on the other hand, sports goals. Good quality relationships between the coach and his/her athletes influence positively the entire sports development (Taylor & Wilson, 2005). Coaches who respect their athletes, are interested to know their opinions, and are focused on the recognition and satisfying their needs, have greater chances to develop good relationship with them, which positively influences athletes' motivation, communication with the coach and others, and eventually the realization of common goals, i.e. good sports achievement (Barić, 2007). It applies particularly for individual sports since they offer more opportunities to establish and maintain quality relationships. Based on the results of this study we can say that if we wish to have coaches who are high achievers, we should promote, besides indispensable expertise, certain aspects of democratic leadership style, form positive attitudes towards excellence and high achievements, based primarily on the work and effort, not only on talent, and emphasize

the need for self-evaluation and for working on oneself, particularly in the area of communication skills. It is also important, especially in team sports, to foster dominant, strict and engaged leadership with clear goals and high standards of quality. There is no universal recipe for this. Every coach should take into account the developmental characteristics of age groups he/she is working with, and must be aware of a great portion of his/her individual responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study results we attempted to describe psychological characteristics of the coaches of successful and less successful athletes in team and individual sports. The coaches could be differentiated by two dimensions. The first is named "group leadership" due to its correlations with democratic leadership style, reporting on difficulties related to the profession of coaching, orientation more to relationships than to tasks, and low directiveness. The second discriminant function is named "permissiveness" and is characterized by poor control, low pressure induced by the imperative of sport achievement, as well as the absence of striving for high goals, domination and innovation in training methods. This dimension is, further, defined by poorly developed social skills, much feed-back and higher orientation to tasks than to relationships. Coaches of successful athletes are more focused on their feelings and needs and inclined to include others into the process of management; they are also the dominant figures who speak about the difficulties related to their coaching job. Coaches of less successful athletes are less focused on relationships and are reluctant to include others into decision-making; they are focused on the task rather than relationships, and, although they often praise athletes and communicate with them, the purpose and meaning of such a communication are somewhat questionable. Differences between coaches of successful and unsuccessful individual sport athletes are larger than the differences among team sports coaches. Successful team sports coaches often involve their athletes in the decision-making, although less than individual sports coaches; they are more open for novelties, have good social skills, but rarely use them to praise their trainees. In general, the coaches of less successful athletes express less characteristics of group leadership, whereas the expression of the characteristics of permissiveness depends on the type of sport.

The coaches in team sports are more similar among themselves, regardless of the quality range of their athletes, whereas the most distinctive difference from the individual sports coaches is their lower expression of group leadership and permissiveness. The type of sport, not the level of success makes coaches similar to each other, i.e., the coaches of team sports athletes and individual sports athletes are on average more similar to each other by their psychological features than the coaches of successful and less successful athletes. The findings should be verified on new samples.

It would also be interesting to examine the obtained differences with regard to the gender of both the coaches and their athletes.

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