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## Female leadership in sports clubs

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**Abstract.** The objective of this study was to determine the type of leadership applied by the directors of amateur sports clubs. This quantitative, descriptive and cross-sectional study was carried out on a sample of 48 directors of sports clubs in total: 23 (47.91%) belonging to collective sports clubs and 25 (52.08%) to individual sports clubs. The study administered the MLQ-X5 Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (45 items). The answers are collected on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (never) to 4 (almost always). The results indicated that the directors opt for a transformational leadership style (3.24), preferably followed by the corrective leadership type (3.18) and almost the same level as the developer type (3.17). The study concluded that the collective sports directors opt for the style of transformational leadership by being proactive and promoting the achievement of extraordinary goals.

**Keywords.** equality; management; satisfaction; sport; women

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### 1. Theoretical foundation

Equality between men and women is established and recognized at the universal legal level by the United Nations Charter, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention regarding the elimination of any form of discrimination against women (Alfaro, 2012). Spain has a gender gap of 74.6%, ranking 29th overall in the European Union. The Gender Inequality Index is an indicator of inequality. It unveils the areas in which important normative intervention is needed and promoting proactive thinking and public policies with the aim of overcoming the systematic disadvantages that women experience (UNDP, 2018). Gender stereotypes continue and reinforce female and male professions (Arenas, Tabernero and Briones, 2011). Castells (1999) points out that a new society arises when a structural transformation can be observed in the production relations, in the power relations and in the experience relations. The masculinization of the masculine body and the feminization of the feminine body have led to a relationship of power and domination of the former over the latter, with masculinity occupying the central position between the sexes (Gao, 2015). Puleo (2005) points out the two theoretical approaches that point to the mechanisms of reproduction of the patriarchal system, coercion and consent. Sex is something biological, while gender is a broader conception, for Gálvez (2001) defines roles and values associated with each on the basis of historical and social elements. This concept is the one that sustains the stereotypes

and beliefs, culturally shared, that can limit leadership in women (Contreras, Pedraza and Mejías, 2012). The main driving force of the empowerment process must come from the discriminated collective, that is, the political direction of the model cannot come from an external agent (Castro, 2015). The situation of women in terms of decision making in sport is not very different from that of other sectors of society, although in the sports sector their representation is much lower than in the political or educational sector, being closer to the labor sector (Alfaro, 2010). The studies carried out on sports management positions mark and point out a series of barriers and limits to the promotion of women in decision-making positions (Soler, Moragas and Vilanova, 2018). Social stereotypes that classify women in a role that does not correspond to the characteristics of leadership that society considers, so these positions are usually reserved for men (Cuestas, 2014). There are endless barriers for women, which make it difficult for them to have access to a free labor market where they can and have access to managerial positions just like men, with the same opportunities within organizations (Ibáñez, 2017). The organizational context may be one of the factors that hinder women's access to management positions insofar as, in most cases, it still "favors" or "promotes" certain leadership styles (generally "masculine") (Charlo, and Torrado, 2012). Moragas and Puig (2013) establish three key factors to limit the situation of women in sports management i) personal, ii) close environment, iii) sport organization. The different areas of activity in which women predominate may vary by location, but many of them are shared (Alario, Pascual and Baraja, 2009). Historically, sport is a masculine space both in its practice and in its management. This is embedded in the organizational structure of sport, which hinders women's access to leadership positions, excluding them from decision-making bodies and therefore making them invisible (Alfaro, 2012). The sports practice rate among men and women who are aged between 25 and 34 is higher in men than in women (Martín, Moscoso, Martínez Del Castillo and Ferro, 2009).

García (2011) defines leadership as the ability to influence others, but it is possible to identify large differences in the way leadership is exercised. Pautt (2011) talks about the transdisciplinarity of the concept to express that the study of leadership is carried out from different scientific disciplines with their own perspective, such as Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, etc. For Avolio (2007), leadership is a process of influence, which needs to analyze at least three elements that are essential for this process of influence to occur. i) the role of leader. Very often, this individual is able to transmit a vision to his followers about a desired future state. In order for this leader to achieve this vision, he needs to reformulate it into a communicable mission based on concrete actions; ii) the followers of a leader, who will apply (or not) a certain level of effort to achieve that mission; iii) the context and the means by which leaders and followers establish links and relations of social exchange (Avolio, Walumbwa and Weber, 2009; Yammarino, Dione, Schriesheim and Dansereau, 2008). The Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) studies how leadership styles help transform organizations and the human capital that forms them. Bass and Avolio (1997) differentiate four elements or dimensions that respond to transformational leadership (behavior, attribution, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation, two dimensions that make up transactional leadership

(individual consideration and contingent reward) and a last element that makes up *laissez-faire*. Transactional leadership is identified by the exchange between the leader and the members of his or her group who recognize him or her as leader and accept his or her authority. However, the leader, in return, must provide incentives to the group. Perilla and Gómez (2017) determine that transformational leadership can especially affect the emotional well-being of employees and the prevention of physical disorders associated with health. The transformational style manages to change attitudes of the followers, infusing the importance and value of the results of the task, as well as the idea of a team obtaining a higher performance than expected and an increase in the satisfaction levels (Aguilar-Luzón, Calvo-Salguero and García-Hita, 2007). According to Druskat (1994), the type of traditional organization is not decisive when studying the role of gender in leadership. Cuadrado, Navas and Molero (2004) determine that in general, the "masculine" and "feminine" organizations are not directed using typical masculine and feminine leadership styles.

Although women at any level of management can "perceive" the glass ceiling, this metaphor is often used to explain the barriers they experience in high-level positions. (Charlo, and Torrado, 2012). The organizational context may be one of the factors that hinder women's access to management positions Cuadrado, Navas, and Molero (2004). The glass cliff determines that women access managerial positions, largely when there are in a crisis situation (Ryan, Hersby and Bongiorno, 2011). The transformational leadership style "is most desirable in periods characterized by fear, confusion and uncertainty" (Monfort, 2015). The characteristics of authentic leadership are closer to the traits that are generally associated with women (Ibáñez, 2017). It is necessary to know if one of the possible causes of the under-representation of women in leadership positions is the leadership style they adopt (Cuadrado, Molero and Navas, 2003).

Growing global competition, the emergence of new markets and rapid technological development have led to the need to generate quick and accurate responses to ensure the survival of Blanch, Gil, Antino, and Rodríguez-Muñoz organizations (2016). Companies need workers, especially in managerial positions, with empathy, understanding, who can communicate and provide help (Gartzia, 2011), behaviours inherent to women. Women who are competent in their work are often disapproved personally and socially (Monzani, Hernandez, Dick and Peiró, 2015). In the current process of change, traditional models of work organization are outdated and not very profitable (Gómez and Sánchez, 2009). Gender and leadership continue to be of great interest, especially given the low representation of women in leadership positions (Kapasi, Sang, and Sitko, 2016). Montes and Roca (2016) suggest that women are effective, creative, transformational and democratic leaders, characteristics that define the ideal leader of the 21st century. When women have to play the role of leader, they present certain characteristics that make them more appropriate leaders for contemporary organizations (Eagly and Karau, 2002). The challenge for modern organizations, and for women within them, is to recognize and empower difference as a source of wealth (Contreras, Pedraza and Mejías, 2012). Precisely, it is necessary to broaden and continue with the studies from the feminist

perspective in this field, as well as to revise the current sports legislation (Leruite, Martos and Zabala, 2015). Therefore, the objective of this study is to determine the type of leadership applied by the directors of amateur sports clubs in both collective and individual teams.

## **2. Method**

### **2.1. Sample**

The reason for being included in the investigation was to be an active part of the management team of a sports club at the time of the study. The final sample consisted of 48 directors of sports clubs, 23 of them (47.91%) belonging to collective sports clubs and 25 (52.08%) to individual sports clubs. Of those, 19 (39.58%) have studies of BUP/Baccalaureate/Higher Degree Cycles, 3 (6.25%) are Graduates in Physical Education, one (2.08%) has primary studies, 25 (52.08%) have university studies, 9 (18.75%) are in Physical Education and 16 (33.53%) in other degrees. They play the role of president 11 (22.9%), vice president 4 (8.3%), secretary 10 (20.8%), treasurer 8 (16.7%), member 9 (18.8%) and perform other functions 6 (12.5%). The participants were accidentally selected Kerlinger, (2001), being a non-probabilistic sample (Hernández, Fernández and Baptista, 2000).

- **Instrument**

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X, Bass and Avolio, 1995) was administered in the factorial version and in Spanish by Molero, Recio and Cuadrado (2010). MLQ-5X (short form) consists of 45 items, 36 items that respond to the different types of leadership: transformational leadership -behavior, attribution, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation-; developmental leadership -individual consideration, contingent reward-; corrective leadership -active exception-; passive leadership -passive exception and laissez-faire-. The remaining nine items evaluate organizational outcome variables 4 items on the leader's effectiveness, 2 on the subject's satisfaction with his/her own methods and work, 3 on the extra effort that influences his/her employees. The answers are collected on a Likert scale with a range from 0 (never) to 4 (almost always), which indicates that the higher the scores are, the more they are in line with the type of leadership measured.

- **Procedure**

After contacting the different sports clubs their participation in the investigation was accepted. They were given an informed consent that specified the objectives of the study, as well as the voluntary, confidential and anonymous nature of their participation. An action protocol was developed to ensure that data collection was similar for all research participants. The questionnaire was self-administered, with an interviewer being present in case the participant wanted to ask any questions that appeared during the process of the questionnaire.

### 3. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptions of the type of leadership based on the classification of the sport whether it is collective or individual. The types of leadership that directors determine to apply to a greater extent globally are respectively transformational (3.24), corrective (3.18) and developer (3.17). The passive leadership (1.05) is the one that has obtained the lowest score, being the style that is applied on fewer occasions. As for the type of sport, there are no significant differences as to whether it is collective or individual. The highest average scores, differentiating by type of sport, are reached by the developer (3.27) and corrective (3.26) leadership in individual sports and the transformational (3.24) collective leadership. As for the behaviors that make up each leadership type, both collective (3.37) and individual (3.39) sports behaviors reach the highest values. The Passive Exception (1.07) in collective sports and the *Laissez Faire* (1.00) in individual sports are those that have obtained the lowest scores; therefore, the directors determine that they are the ones that are applied the least. The results also show that they encourage effort, efficiency and satisfaction.

**Table 1.** Description of the type of leadership depending on the type of sport: collective-individual.

	Total	Type of Sport		p-value
		Collective	Individual	
<b>TRANSFORMATIONAL_Leadership</b>	3.24 (0.4)	3.24 (0.44)	3.24 (0.37)	0.98
Behavior	3.38 (0.54)	3.37 (0.52)	3.39 (0.56)	0.948
Attribution	3.24 (0.5)	3.22 (0.55)	3.26 (0.47)	0.773
Inspirational_Motivation	3.28 (0.5)	3.35 (0.48)	3.21 (0.53)	0.337
Intellectual_stimulation	3.08 (0.53)	3 (0.57)	3.16 (0.48)	0.315
<b>DEVELOPER_Leadership</b>	3.17 (0.44)	3.07 (0.46)	3.27 (0.39)	0.134
Individual_Consideration	3.04 (0.63)	2.91 (0.69)	3.18 (0.55)	0.156
Contingent_reward	3.28 (0.39)	3.23 (0.37)	3.32 (0.42)	0.417
<b>CORRECTIVE_Leadership</b>	3.18 (0.6)	3.1 (0.68)	3.26 (0.51)	0.37
Active_exception	3.18 (0.6)	3.1 (0.68)	3.26 (0.51)	0.37
<b>PASSIVE_Leadership</b>	1.05 (0.8)	1.08 (0.89)	1.02 (0.73)	0.799
Passive_exception	1.05 (0.9)	1.07 (1.07)	1.04 (0.72)	0.929
Laissez_Faire	1.05 (0.84)	1.1 (0.88)	1.00 (0.82)	0.695
<b>Effort</b>	3.23 (0.6)	3.19 (0.52)	3.26 (0.68)	0.672
<b>Efficacy</b>	3.12 (0.58)	3.07 (0.51)	3.18 (0.65)	0.516
<b>Satisfaction</b>	3.18 (0.56)	3.07 (0.63)	3.29 (0.46)	0.165

### 4. Discussion

The present investigation has consisted of analyzing, in a sample of 48 directors of amateur sports clubs, the leadership styles that they apply to their subordinates.

In relation to the style of collective sports directives, we agree with Martínez-Moreno, Morales, and Angosto, (2018), where cruise crew members presented a higher level of transformational leadership, also with Pacsi, Estrada, Pérez, and Cruz (2014) who consider transformational leadership to be the most appropriate; with Ruiz (2016) where transformational

leadership was predominant in their study. As with Roza and Abaunza (2010), although the sample was of nurses, they exercise transformational leadership in a stronger way. With González, Gómez, and Figueroa (2019) where they obtained an acceptable and significant correlation between transformational leadership in relation to trust with the leader, and psychological well-being at work. With Martínez, Rodríguez, Navea, and Rojas (2016) where the leader perceives himself mostly Transformational, in his research on the leadership style in a Brazilian cosmetics company. With Martínez (2014) in the direction of an educational center, also with Eagly, Johannessen-Schmidt and Van Engen (2003), which indicate that women show a more transformational style, with Charlo, and Torrado (2012) there is an evolution towards flexible and participative innovative management styles, which incorporate the qualities associated with transformational leadership, as well as with part of the sample from the study of Cuadrado, Molero, and Navas (2003). Corroborate our data DeGroot, Kiker, and Cross (2000), as well as Judge and Piccolo (2004), who, in their meta-analysis, find positive correlations of transformational leadership with leader effectiveness, execution and subordinate effort, as well as Dum Dum, Lowe and Avolio (2002) with effective leadership in relation to transformational leadership, also Cáceres, Trujillo, Hinojo, Aznar, and García (2012) when talking about a possible female leadership style, with multiple elements of transformational leadership, also Cuadrado, and Molero (2002), where women tend to score higher on all transformational leadership factors. We also agree with Saravia (2014) that the intellectual stimulation dimension, both globally (3.08). As in team sports (3) and in individual sports (3.16), it represents the lowest degree among those that make up the transformational leadership style. Regarding the style of the individual sports directors, we agree with the study of Ruíz (2016) where the style that achieves the highest score is the developer (2.87) although that is far from those (3.27) that have an average in our study.

Our results are in line with Pedraja-Rejas, Rodríguez-Ponce, Delgado-Almonte, and Rodríguez-Ponce (2006), who find that transactional leadership was predominant in their research on small businesses. We also obtain similar scores to the study of Turrado (2016) in terms of efficacy (3.12) satisfaction (3.18) and effort (3.23). We also agreed with Cuadrado, Molero, and Navas (2003) in their study, with the women in their sample.

## **5. Conclusions**

The objective of this study has been to determine the type of leadership applied by the directors of amateur sports clubs in both collective and individual teams.

The empirical evidence allows us to conclude that the directors of individual sports clubs in the sample, who constitute the subject of study, encourage exchanges to strengthen their work through rewards. The directors of collective sports, included in the sample, opt for the style of transformational leadership. So, they are proactive, making collective interests prevail, and promoting the achievement of extraordinary goals.

Finally, some biases such as the innate social desirability of self-evaluation can weaken the



results. It is necessary to carry out this type of research, all the more so when the glass ceiling, although very slowly, is disappearing in the field of sport and more specifically in sports management. This allows us to determine and know better the leadership styles that apply the directives. However, analysing the subordinates would provide clues to the issue at hand.

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