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THE DYNAMIC MANAGEMENT OF ATHLETES' ROLE EXPECTATIONS.

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ABSTRACT

The formulation and dissemination of athletes' role expectations are critical to the psychological structure within sport groups. However, the ways in which athletes come to understand their roles in a sport group is a dynamic process; beginning upon initial group entry and continuing to evolve throughout the competitive season. The purpose of the present chapter is to highlight the processes underlying the development and communication of role responsibilities, and to discuss key time frames that influence athletes' understanding of their role expectations. In the first section we discuss the sources of information athletes rely on to inform their understanding of their role responsibilities. Second, we draw attention to how the arrival of newcomers represents a planned, yet substantive shift in the types of roles athletes perceive to occupy. In doing so, we describe the ways in which sport teams socialize newcomers into their prevailing team culture, and the potential difficulties coaches may encounter during this process. Finally, we describe how coaches and athletes adapt and respond to unanticipated events that punctuate the equilibrium of the group (e.g., major injury). Recommendations for how coaches can address role-related obstacles that arise from these events are discussed.

Keywords: Coaching, Group Dynamics, Mentoring, Organizational Socialization.

INTRODUCTION

A Marcus Stroman slip-up during a bunt drill has significantly altered plans for the Toronto Blue Jays' starting pitching rotation. The right-hander suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in his left knee during pitchers'

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fielding practice at spring training Tuesday and likely will miss the entire 2015 season. So, the trickle-down effect of this news goes as follows: Daniel Norris's career as a full-time major league starter might be accelerated. Newcomer Marco Estrada may return to starting....Plans to turn Aaron Sanchez into a closer could be shelved. (Harrison, 2015, para. 1)

The beginning of a new competitive season brings with it promising expectations for individual as well as collective contributions and outcomes. In the case of the Toronto Blue Jays (Major League Baseball; see above quote), the anticipated pitching rotation for the 2015 season was significantly altered due to a rather unusual injury (for a pitcher), on a common play, to a young and strong athlete. While clearly devastating to Stroman as an individual, the effects of the injury immediately resonated throughout the organization. The open roster spot raised questions about the team's quality, fostered competition among teammates, and fundamentally changed the structure of a professional sport group. In essence, this situation, one that is common in sport, highlights the dynamic nature of both team structure and role expectations derived for athletes.

The structure of sport teams can be considered from both physical and psychological perspectives (Carron & Eys, 2012). The number of athletes required to fill a roster and the formal organizational subunits (e.g., offensive and defensive units in American football) provide clear examples of the physical structure. From a *psychological* perspective, the structure of a sport team forms as members have opportunities to interact with one another, develop expectations for their behavior, and ultimately allow for differentiation to occur. In other words, status differences emerge (e.g., leaders vs. followers), generalized expectations for all (or most) team members become entrenched (e.g., team norms for productivity and effort), and specific role expectations for athletes are communicated and adopted.

Of the three concepts identified in the previous paragraph (i.e., status, norms, and roles), the examination of role perceptions has yielded the most research within sport. The set of behavioral expectations for an individual, who holds a position within a particular context, represents the constitutive definition of a role (Biddle & Thomas, 1966; Katz & Kahn, 1978). A research focus has been placed on how athletes respond to perceived role expectations. For example, several studies provide support for the importance of communicating clear role expectations for athletes. Perceptions of role clarity are positively linked with athletes' intentions to return (Eys, Carron, Bray, & Beauchamp, 2005), satisfaction (Bray, Beauchamp, Eys, & Carron, 2005), and evaluations of coach competence (Bosselut, Heuzé, Eys, Fontayne, & Sarrazin, 2012), while negatively related to competitive state anxiety (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2003). Furthermore, researchers have communicated the importance of other role perceptions including role efficacy (i.e., athletes' beliefs about their abilities to execute role functions; Bray, Brawley, & Carron, 2002), satisfaction (Surya, Eys, & Benson, 2014), and acceptance (Benson, Eys, Surya, Dawson, & Schneider, 2013).

Although the emphasis on the individual perceptions athletes hold of their role responsibilities is reflected in several attempts to summarize this past work (see Eys, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2006; Eys, Schinke, Surya, & Benson, 2014), recent research has explored the dynamic nature of the role development process. The purpose of the present chapter is to highlight specific processes underlying the development and communication of role responsibilities, and to discuss critical timeframes that influence athletes' role occupancies. The following sections highlight these areas of interest. First, the role episode

model (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964) will be highlighted as a framework for studying how coaches formally communicate role expectations to athletes, and will be further contrasted with informal role development. In the second section, a focus is placed on disruptions to the group's psychological structure. We first discuss the structural ramifications of integrating new team members at the beginning of the season. Specifically, recent research pertaining to organizational socialization tactics within sport is presented and practical recommendations are offered. Next, we highlight situations that ultimately challenge the on-going psychological structure (i.e., personnel changes over the course of a season). As the situation at the outset of this chapter illustrates, unanticipated events (e.g., injuries) can severely disrupt the trajectory of the team. Group development, as a result, does not progress in a linear fashion.

SOURCES OF ROLE EXPECTATIONS

As noted by Dierdorff, Rubin, and Bachrach (2012), "role expectations represent an individual's construal of what is actually necessary to successfully perform his/her [team] role" (p. 575). To this end, coaches are often the primary source of these role expectations and are responsible for ensuring athletes have a concrete understanding of their role as a team member (Benson, Surya, & Eys, 2014). However, role expectations can also arise in lieu of any formal prescription by the coach (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2011). As such, it is useful to differentiate between role expectations that are prescribed by an authority figure in the group (i.e., formal roles) and role expectations that arise incidentally out of repeated social interactions and/or self-imposed pressures (i.e., informal roles).

Formal Role Expectations

The role episode model illuminates how coaches formulate, communicate, and adjust role expectations for a particular athlete (Eys, Carron, Beauchamp, & Bray, 2005, adapted from Kahn et al., 1964). According to the role episode model, five key events underscore the generation and communication of role responsibilities, beginning with a coach determining what role he/she envisions for an athlete (Event 1). Once a coach has formulated these role expectations, he/she must ensure these expectations are directed toward the athlete (Event 2). Notably, an athlete should be provided with enough information to understand the scope of one's role responsibilities, the behaviors required to fulfill these responsibilities, how role performance will be evaluated, and the consequences of not fulfilling role expectations (Beauchamp, Bray, Eys, & Carron, 2002). Ideally, this information would be conveyed explicitly and reinforced by subsequent interactions, such as ensuring an athlete is provided with sufficient opportunities to fulfill a prescribed role (Mellalieu & Juniper, 2006). Once the appropriate cues are directed toward an athlete, he/she will then experience these expectations in the form of role pressures (Event 3). At this point, it is up to the athlete to appraise these role pressures and respond accordingly (Event 4). Finally, how an athlete responds to these role pressures creates a feedback loop, as role episodes are a cyclical process that are reciprocally influenced by an athlete's response (Event 5). Put simply, coaches may have to calibrate or readjust the role expectations they set for athletes over the course of a season. For example, successfully executing prescribed role functions may lead to role stability or, perhaps, an expanded role with greater responsibilities and opportunities to contribute in

competitive situations. In contrast, athletes who are unable to fulfill prescribed responsibilities may motivate coaches to reconsider roles within the team, resulting in lowered performance expectations and/or reduced competitive playing time.

Potential issues during role episodes. An important point to emphasize is that the disruption of any phase within the role transmission process creates a potential for misunderstanding and/or conflict surrounding which role an athlete should fulfill, or how to go about doing so. For example, if a coach is unsure of what role an athlete should fulfill (Event 1), then it is unreasonable to expect an athlete to understand which role behaviors are desirable, permissible, or inappropriate. Similarly, if a coach is able to formulate a clear vision of a specific role for an athlete, but fails to communicate those expectations (Event 2), then once again problems are likely to arise. In contrast, athletes may simply fail to detect or assimilate role-related information provided by the coach (Event 3) or refuse their assigned role (Event 4). Perhaps most relevant to the current chapter, group processes can be hampered if coaches are unable to successfully renegotiate role expectations when circumstances dictate that adjustments must be made (Event 5).

Informal Role Expectations

Although coaches are ideally situated to outline athletes' role expectations for an upcoming season and adjust these expectations when necessary, role pressures inevitably develop through more informal avenues. As initially described by Mabry and Barnes (1980), the tacit development of expectations that arise as a result of repeated interpersonal interactions is an often overlooked, but critical aspect of the role-making process. Expanding upon this initial theorizing, Benson et al. (2014) suggested that self-imposed role pressures can arise in addition to expectancies that are created and reinforced by interactions with group members over time.

Personal role-crafting. As most coaches will intuitively recognize, some athletes take it upon themselves to expand or redefine their role. We refer to this personal role-taking endeavour as role-crafting, which is akin to the concept of job-crafting (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). Essentially, people are naturally inclined to carve out their own niche within group settings. Van Maanen and Schein (1979) suggested that self-imposed role revision processes takes on two distinct forms. First, *role content innovation* refers to the attempts by individuals to seek out additional information or devise an alternative strategy for fulfilling their role-related responsibilities. This could also include an athlete's desire to expand his/her role-set within the group by taking on additional responsibilities. Second, *role mission innovation* refers to the attempts by individuals who do not accept the basic premise of their responsibilities to actively redefine what their basic role functions entail. On the positive side, actively redefining aspects of a role may reinvigorate athletes' willingness to fulfill role-related duties while providing a sense of fulfillment and personal control; all of which can have positive psychological benefits (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). On the negative side, athletes who redefine their role may not always do so in a way that complements existing team dynamics, as personal interests do not always match up with collective goals (Jones & Wallace, 2004). Consider a veteran athlete who has no formal leadership role within the group, but decides to take it upon herself to mentor a newcomer. In one scenario, a coach might benefit from this impromptu mentorship, especially if the veteran is a competent

mentor and genuinely has the newcomer's best interests in mind (Hoffman & Loughead, 2015). In another scenario, if the mentorship is misguided and hinders a newcomer's integration into the group, this personal role-taking has now created conflict with the existing leadership structure.

Role expectations that arise out of interpersonal interactions. A second way informal role expectations develop is through repeated interactions that occur among team members. It is well known within the broader domain of psychology that people's expectancies influence other individuals' actual behaviors (Rosenthal & Rubin, 1978). Though preconceived expectancies can exert an immediate influence on others' actions, expectancies also develop over time. As teammates spend time with one another they inevitably develop a deeper understanding of one another's personalities and behaviors. Through this iterative process people come to expect certain behaviors over time, which can lead to new role-related behaviors. For example, an athlete who is gregarious and extremely well-organized might eventually fall into the role of the social coordinator, as teammates begin to turn toward that athlete with increasing frequency about where the next social event will take place. Although some roles that develop out of group-member interactions might be wholly social in nature, similar examples can also be found in relation to task-related roles, such as the aggressive ice hockey player whose behavior among teammates eventually leads him to become the team's enforcer.

Implications of informal role emergence. Informal roles can *reinforce* or *resist* the existing formal structure in the group, either of which can be functional or dysfunctional depending on the effectiveness of the structure that is already in place (Hare, 1994). Table 1 depicts hypothetical examples of when informal roles can hinder versus facilitate team functioning. In cases where a team is functioning cooperatively and efficiently as a unit, the emergence of informal roles that reinforce a team's existing psychological structure would be advantageous. In contrast, roles that deviate from the structure that is in place can be a nuisance to the team or lead to the development of isolating and destructive designations such as the bad apple/team cancer (Cope, Eys, Schinke, & Bosselut, 2010).

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

However, as the far right column of Table 1 depicts, there are times when the group is already marred by dysfunction. In such cases, roles that reinforce the existing group structure may further exacerbate issues that are already plaguing the group (e.g., hazing). For instance, given that veterans are a key conduit for passing down knowledge about how things ought to be done within the group, negative role-related behaviors can be easily transferred from veterans to newcomers. In contrast, there are times when informal roles arise in a way that resists the existing group structure. Indeed, if an elected team leader is ineffective because of their laissez-faire (i.e., hands off) approach to leadership, another veteran might take it upon himself to fill this void and step into a role of leadership. In this sense, informal roles that resist the existing structure within the group may serve a beneficial function.

Practical Recommendations Related to the Transmission of Role Expectations

As described in the foregoing sections, there are a number of ways that informal roles can hinder a team's functioning, which is why the early identification of informal roles is critical. However, given the breadth of issues coaches must oversee and manage throughout a given season (Santos, Jones, & Mesquita, 2013) it may be difficult for them to discern these informal role behaviors. To this end, sub-leadership groups and assistant coaches who are attuned to the pulse of the team dynamics can be especially valuable resources for identifying the emergence of informal roles within the team. Whereas informal roles that positively contribute to existing team dynamics can be nurtured and, in some cases, encouraged (e.g., formalized), problematic informal roles should be thwarted in their early stages, before those behaviors become habitual and engrained in a group's psychological structure.

From a practical perspective, it warrants emphasizing that sport team dynamics are jointly influenced by the role expectations formally established by authority figures within the group, and the role expectations that naturally emerge over the course of group membership. In addition, athletes who do not feel they have a well-outlined and meaningful role within the team may resort to finding their own ways to contribute within the team (Benson et al., 2014). In other words, athletes who are not provided with clear role boundaries may redefine their role in a way that creates friction with the team's existing structure. As such, proactively establishing and setting role expectations on a team-wide basis helps to avoid confusion within the group related to who should be doing what, while also deterring the emergence of negative informal roles.

DISRUPTIONS TO THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF SPORT TEAMS

Drawing upon the punctuated equilibrium model of group development (Gersick, 1991), there are certain timeframes when the psychological structure of the group undergoes noticeable change or is challenged. Every year, sport teams undergo anticipated, yet potentially dramatic changes as the combination of departing veterans and new group members alters the personnel available to fulfill the various task- and social-oriented roles within the team. In addition, over the course of a season a team will undoubtedly incur structural and psychological changes. These changes are often initiated by unexpected absences to team members due to injuries, trades, externally mandated absences (e.g., league suspension), and internally mandated absences (e.g., violation of a team policy). In the following sections, we discuss how newcomer integration processes and personnel changes throughout a given season can serve to disrupt the psychological structure of sport teams.

Integrating Newcomers at the Onset of a Season

The onset of a new season—a timeframe characterized by significant turnover as the exodus of veteran team members is offset by an influx of newcomers—is also an ideal time for re-establishing team directives and clarifying role boundaries. Given that newcomers are unaccustomed to the generalized expectations and norms adhered to by existing group members, the acquisition of new information lies at the core of successful newcomer integration. Another issue in highly competitive sport teams is that teammates are often in direction competition with one another for playing time and opportunities to contribute in

competitive situations. As such, coaches have the difficult job of ensuring group members are able to reconcile their individual aspirations with the collective needs of the group. Put simply, the ways in which the group is managed during the timeframe of newcomer integration is a key component to ensuring a sound psychological structure.

Organizational scholars have long-studied the process of how newcomers adapt and become accustomed to the values, norms, and responsibilities expected of them as a new group member, a process referred to as *organizational socialization* (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Generally speaking, successful socialization processes reduce ambiguity and uncertainty for the newcomers upon entry. An institutionalized approach to socialization is based on this premise, which entails the following tactics: (a) structuring and delivering learning opportunities in a formal manner on a group-wide basis while minimizing performance repercussions during newcomers' initial learning curve (i.e., collective and formal tactics); (b) delineating what group members must accomplish (and when) to procure additional responsibilities or status in the group's hierarchy (i.e., sequential and fixed tactics); and finally, (c) having veterans who are willing to share their knowledge with newcomers and act as a source of social support (i.e., serial and investiture tactics; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). A meta-analysis of 70 studies—specific to the workplace—that examined the strategies employed by organizations during the initial stages of newcomer integration found that institutionalized tactics confer a number of benefits for both the group and the individual (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo & Tucker, 2007). Summarizing these benefits, Bauer et al. (2007) found that the use of institutionalized tactics was positively linked to self-efficacy, role clarity, job satisfaction, intentions to remain, and feelings of social acceptance in newcomers.

Although organizational socialization theory was initially developed for workplace contexts, recent work has drawn attention to its applicability as a framework for gaining insight into how athletes can be integrated into sport teams in a way that accelerates the acquisition of knowledge related to team expectations, norms, and individual role understanding, while minimizing disruption to the existing psychological structure within the group (Benson, Evans, & Eys, 2015). Based on the insights garnered from coaches and athletes of Canadian Interuniversity Sport programs, the newcomer integration practices prevalent in sport teams appear to be conceptually similar to the aforementioned socialization tactics identified in organizational contexts. However, sport team socialization processes also present several distinct challenges, each of which has implications for managing athletes' role expectations. In the following section we highlight these challenges and offer recommendations.

Practical challenges related to newcomer integration strategies in sport. Given that people have a tendency to inflate their expectations in anticipation of a new endeavor (Louis, 1980), the onset of a new season is likely characterized by athletes who have overly optimistic expectations regarding what their role will entail. Indeed, discrepancies between athletes' initial expectations for a particular role and their actual experiences can be a source of tension within the group (Benson et al., 2015). A related challenge is that an athlete's role within the group is often contingent upon how well he/she is performing relative to others in the group, which means both newcomers and veterans are subject to a degree of role uncertainty. As such, outlining clear timelines related to an athlete's role progression might be problematic, as there are too many variables that can alter this progression over the course

of a season (e.g., skill development, unforeseen events, and teammate performance). Nonetheless, this does not preclude coaches from proactively addressing unrealistic expectations for an upcoming season through explicit communication, rather than reacting to complaints as they arise over the course of the season. Alternatively, a more indirect approach would be to provide athletes with opportunities to get realistic feedback on how they are performing. For example, a coach might intentionally pair an athlete with a more skilled teammate in a one-on-one drill to help an athlete realize how his skill-set compares to others. As it specifically pertains to newcomers, it would be advantageous to focus on lowering these unrealistic expectations that potential recruits might formulate prior to group entry experiences.

Another practical issue that requires concerted effort in sport teams is managing the development of social relations between existing group members. In the previously referred to qualitative study (Benson et al., 2015), athletes consistently identified that gaining the acceptance and approval of veteran team members was a primary concern prior to entering the group. Considering that hazing rituals are an unfortunate example of how far athletes are willing to go to gain entry into a team's inner social circles (Balish, Eys, & Schulte-Hostedde, 2013), formally structuring team wide social activities provides a degree of control and oversight over initial group-member interactions. Beyond initial team-building activities, the development of protégé-mentor relationships between newcomers and competent senior group members has been one of the most potent predictors of newcomer adjustment in studies of the workplace (see Chao, 2007, for a review), and more recently has shown promise in fostering beneficial outcomes for athletes (Hoffman & Loughead, 2015). A clear challenge for coaches is creating (or finding) opportunities to leverage the positive influence of exemplar team members.

A final issue is recognizing that newcomers entering a team sport environment are in the process of developing a new identity as a group member. On the one hand, enforcing rules, policies, and codes of conduct is paramount to ensuring newcomers understand which expectations they must adhere to as a group member. This may involve disconfirming athletes' previously held beliefs about what team membership entails, especially if they are entering a higher level a competition where team policies and rules are markedly different. On the other hand, this should be balanced with events that foster perceptions of social inclusivity, as affirming a newcomer's personal identity in more social domains can elicit greater commitment to the group (Allen & Shanock, 2013). In sum, strictness surrounding accountability to team rules and policies does not have to come at the expense of an inclusive social environment.

Influence of Key Personnel Losses on the Group Environment

In addition to the changes anticipated from one season to the next, sport teams often experience multiple disruptions to the group's psychological structure over the course of a season. Understanding the group and individual responses to these changes may aid coaches in optimizing the modifications that are likely to occur during these times of instability. A qualitative study by Surya, Benson, Balish, and Eys (2015) illustrated that sport teams undergo several changes following injuries to contributing athletes. However, many of the themes highlighted in this work are applicable to any unexpected absences that are likely to occur throughout the course of a competitive season. As such, in drawing upon the themes put forth by Surya et al. (2015), we discuss the challenges coaches encounter during times of

instability in the group.

Group and individual task adjustments to changes in structure. The most proximal adjustment involves changes to the on-field strategies employed by a team. Given the nature of highly interdependent teams, an absence to a key team member may force a coach to re-evaluate the efficacy of a previously employed strategy given the available personnel. For example, an injury to the leading scorer on a basketball team may cause the team to become more defensive in response to this unexpected absence. An important individual consequence that stems from these shifts in team strategy, however, may involve modifications to the individual role responsibilities that team members perceive to hold within the team.

Sport teams—including those traditionally classified as individual sports (e.g., track and field)— can share collective goals, resources, and/or must work together to achieve an objective (Evans, Eys, & Bruner, 2012). However, the high degree of task interdependence in team sport environments means that a single team member's absence is likely to have far reaching effects within the group. For example a shift in team strategies that evolves in response to an unexpected team member absence is often accommodated by subsequent modifications to other team members' role responsibilities. Given the various consequences linked to how athletes view their role (Eys et al., 2014), coaches should be acutely aware of the cognitive and affective consequences that athletes may experience following a change to their role-set. For example, a basketball player who is thrust into the starting line-up in response to a suspension of a fellow teammate will recognize that her responsibilities have been modified, however, she may not fully understand the scope of these new expectations. Coaches may benefit from clearly communicating how their expectations have changed in response to the collective shifts in team strategy, particularly for those players who are expected to directly account for the unexpected team member's absence.

Modified expectations perceived as an opportunity or threat. A number of cognitive processes accompany the sudden absence of a team member. Anecdotally, athletes often discuss enthusiasm regarding increased opportunities to contribute, which are often tied to higher status within a group's social hierarchy. For example, Vancouver Canucks [National Hockey League] defenseman Adam Clendening noted that with top defenseman Alex Edler out due to a shoulder injury, he was provided, "A great opportunity. It is something I take pride in, my ability offensively and to quarterback the power play. To get that opportunity, especially with the (Sedin) twins and Burr (Alex Burrows) and Verbie (Radim Vrbata), is a big responsibility" (Ziemer, 2015, para. 4). In line with these anecdotal experiences, Surya et al. (2015) found that several athletes responded favorably to their increased responsibility accompanying a teammate absence. However, a sub-set of athletes also intimated instances where negative feelings accompanied these newly formed responsibilities. Drawing upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of stress and coping is useful in understanding why some athletes experience negative affect, rather than excitement. The first stage of the theory involves a primary appraisal whereby an individual interprets the motivational relevance of the situation. Once an event is appraised to be of importance, a secondary appraisal process occurs whereby the potential stressor is evaluated in reference to the available resources. From an intrapersonal perspective, athletes may be appraising the stressor (i.e., the newly formed responsibilities) as exceeding their current available resources (i.e., their current ability). As a result of this secondary appraisal, athletes may feel ill-equipped to successfully

navigate their new responsibilities and as a result negative feelings may arise. It may be useful for coaches to verbally encourage and acknowledge the suitability of an athlete's skill for his/her newly formed responsibilities, as verbal persuasion is an effective method for increasing self-efficacy, especially when it comes from respected others (Feltz, Short, & Sullivan, 2009).

Interpersonal responses to changes in structure. Coaches would also be well served to understand the interpersonal changes that occur as a result of the cascade of role responsibilities experienced by team members. For example, Surya et al. (2015) noted the potential development of tensions among group members, as athletes described instances whereby team members were fiercely competing for higher status positions following the absence of a high status team member. In line with work by Bendersky and Hays (2012) regarding intra-group conflict, status conflicts may arise when there are disagreements regarding relative positions in a group's social hierarchy. Given the relative uncertainty that may accompany a cascade in role adjustments across the group, posturing for higher status roles in response to a team member absence is likely, and these status conflicts can potentially undermine effective group functioning.

In addition to status conflicts that arise, coaches need to consider strategies regarding the absentee team member's *reintegration* into the group. As an example, Donta Montiejunas is a second year player for the Houston Rockets [National Basketball Association]. The rockets best player, Dwight Howard had been out for an extended period of time with an injury, and "Motiejunas has made the most out of his newfound opportunity by displaying his agility and soft touch on the low block…When Howard returns to the starting lineup, it's on Kevin McHale to find ways to better incorporate Motiejunas in the offense" (Rafferty, 2015, para. 7-8.). In line with the recommendations made throughout the chapter, explicit communication regarding the responsibilities of both the returning team member as well as the other group members likely to be affected by the return may aid in the reintegration process.

From a practical perspective, coaches may benefit from preparing for future team member absences by inducing situational instances where absences to key team members are simulated. One proactive strategy would involve dedicating portions of practice with various personnel to ensure that athletes will have a degree of preparedness if called upon to fulfill a higher status role. A second strategy would be verbally communicating various changes in structure that are likely to occur when different team members incur unexpected absences. If athletes are able to understand their own personal role modifications as well as their teammates' role modifications during times of instability, then coaches may be well suited to optimally respond to the inevitable within season disruptions that occur over the course of a season. In a sense, these strategies are both pre-emptive measures to promote a greater degree of role flexibility among team members, which may lead to a more resilient team dynamic.

SUMMARY

The psychological structure of sport teams provides continuity and order in what would otherwise be a chaotic environment. As the foregoing sections detailed, the role responsibilities athletes perceive to occupy are a major component of this psychological structure, and coaches are well-positioned to actively shape and manage how athletes view

their role as a group member. How coaches communicate and manage their athletes' role expectations over the course of a season, and from one season to the next, are likely key ingredients for achieving and sustaining team success (Carron & Eys, 2012).

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Athletes derive a sense of value within the group from a variety of roles, which vary in how they develop (i.e., formal vs. informal) and the function they serve (i.e., task vs. social).
- Athletes should receive role-related information in a proactive—rather than reactive—manner, through explicit communication, and on a team-wide basis.
- Role expectations should be monitored and re-evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure role adjustments are communicated when needed.
- Modification to one athlete's role-set often elicits a cascade of changes related to group dynamics.
- The influence of peer leaders on teammates should be leveraged to manage athletes' role expectations on a day-to-day basis.

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Table 1

The potential implications of informal role emergence as a function of the existing

group structure

	Well-functioning group structure	Dysfunctional group structure
Role that supports existing group structure	Positive influence	Negative influence
Role that resists existing group structure	Negative influence	Positive influence