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Towards the development of an online athlete leadership training program

The importance of leadership is recognized by Canadian sport-governing bodies such as U Sports who state that their vision is to “inspire Canada’s next generation of leaders through excellence in sport and academics (U Sports, 2013, p. 10). While we agree with these sport governing bodies, athletes (Gould & Voelker, 2010) and coaches (Gould et al., 2006) have identified lack of leadership skills as a frequently cited problem among athletes. Our proposed research aligns with Avolio et al.’s (2009) definition of leadership development, which is to enhance an individual’s knowledge, skills, ability, and motivation to enable them to exercise positive influence within the team environment. Viewing leadership through this lens suggests that to fully understand the interactive and social nature of the leadership process, two categories of leadership variables must be considered in leadership development programs: *leadership behaviours and leadership context* (Sosik & Jung, 2010). As for *leadership behaviours*, our research team has shown that athletes use a comprehensive range of leadership behaviours. However, the *leadership context* has been absent from athlete leadership development programs where the emphasis has been on developing the individual athlete. Furthermore, previous athlete leadership development programs have been face-to-face, which has limited the number of athletes it can reach. For instance, our research team has presented the findings from our face-to-face athlete leadership development program at the Sport Canada Research Initiative Conference (Loughead et al., 2018). The main recommendation from coaches, athletes, and administrators was to expand the access of our program to more student-athletes. The use of internet-based technologies is a solution to this lack of access. The objective of this project is (1) to determine which leadership context variables are impacted by leadership behaviours, and (2) to determine the elements that constitute an effective online leadership program for athletes.
