Mentoring e coaching nello sport: Un approccio integrato per promuovere la coesione nei team sportivi

Mentoring and coaching in sports: An integrative approach for fostering sport team cohesion

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate mentoring and coaching, two recognized techniques in Human Resource Management (HRM) for the development process of individuals within the sport field. Adopting an integrative approach, where both techniques have been simultaneously considered, we argue that coaching thanks to mentoring can be more oriented and effective in fostering cohesion in sport teams achieving high levels of performance. This theoretical and explorative research is conducted through a deep review of the literature on the topic in the sport context in order to evidence how mentoring main functions can significantly support coaching in the direction of cohesion goal for sport teams. Thus, this paper aims to provide a broader investigation of mentoring within sport coaching trying to develop the existent literature on both phenomena in sports.

Questo lavoro si propone di investigare il mentoring e il coaching, due tecniche riconosciute nell'ambito della Gestione delle Risorse Umane (GRU) per il processo di sviluppo degli individui, all'interno del settore sportivo. Si adotta un lettura integrata, in cui entrambe le tecniche sono simultaneamente considerate, noi infatti sosteniamo che il coaching, grazie al mentoring, possa essere più orientato ed efficace nel creare coesione nei team sportivi permettendo di raggiungere elevati standard di prestazione. Questa ricerca di natura teorica ed esplorativa è stata condotta attraverso una approfondita review della letteratura sul tema nel contesto sportivo, al fine di evidenziare come le funzioni principali del mentoring siano in grado di supportare in modo significativo il coaching nella direzione di un obiettivo di maggiore coesione per i team sportivi. Questo lavoro si propone, quindi, di fornire una investigazione più ampia del mentoring nell'ambito dello sport coaching cercando di ampliare la letteratura esistente sui due fenomeni nello sport.

Keywords

Mentoring; Coaching; Cohesion; Integrative Approach; Sport Teams.
Mentoring; Coachng; Approccio Integrato; Squadre.

Introduction[1]

In the last decades, the sport field significantly and increasingly affects the economic and social areas, becoming a very important business and a much interesting research domain in different disciplines. The increasing attention paid by scholars to sport implies the development of several and specific research sub-fields, mainly the definition of managerial, medical, technical and innovative tools able to usually guarantee high levels of performance in any sport disciplines for athletes and sport organizations. In this direction, we observe a significant proliferation of contributions in the sport literature focused on mentoring and coaching, as innovative techniques for supporting mainly the guidance, training and learning process for athletes and any other individuals with different roles and functions in the sport system (technicians, referees, etc.).

On one side mentoring plays a relevant role in sports especially in the last years. Mentoring, as "a forum for personal learning" (Kram, 1996) represents a relationship between two individuals, a senior and more experienced person (mentor) and a junior and less experienced individual (protégé/mentee), where the former guides, advises, suggests the latter for his/her professional and personal development; "it's an exclusive dyadic relationship "person to person" between protégé and mentor (one-to-one)" (Kram, 1985; 1996). Mentoring relationships have been qualified as effective instruments for supporting the development of people in any organizational contexts especially in the sport field.

On the other side, coaching, whose origins are linked exclusively to sport context, has been conceived as "a process of guided improvement and development in a single sport at identifiable stages of athlete development" (ICCE, 2012: P. 10). Coaching is focused on skills and performance concerning specific tasks with constant emphasis on feedback to the learner and a short-term orientation (Megginson, Clutterbuck, 1995). Thus, coaching is primarily related to performance improvement within specific skills area, where the coach gives detailed rules and suggestions about the process to follow for the coachee/learner (Archer, 2010). In coaching relationship all the individuals' learning needs and goals related to work issues are specified in order to support the learner to achieve high level performance, with focus on deficits and possible problems and so to explore and propose several solutions and decide which one to implement and how, also thanks a strict and timely feedback (Leidl, 2009).

Recent studies tend to investigate factors that can support sport teams performance also suggesting effective techniques to support them (Hoffmann, Loughead, 2016a; Fairhurst, Bloom, Harvey, 2016; McQuade, Davis, Nash, 2015), e.g. one relevant factor

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[1] Il manoscritto è il risultato di un lavoro congiunto dei due autori, anche se i paragrafi 1, 3 e 4 sono da attribuirsi interamente all'autore Luisa Varriale, il paragrafo 2 è da attribuirsi interamente all'autore Paola Briganti, mentre il paragrafo introduzione è da attribuirsi ad entrambi gli autori.

concerns sport team cohesion (Aoyagi, Cox, McGuire, 2008; Murray, 2006; Turman 2003; Carron, Bray, Eys, 2002; Gammage, Carron, Estabrooks, 2001; Spink, 1995).

In the literature on several organizational contexts the cohesion concept has been associated with better performance (Lurey, Raisinghani, 2001; Maznevski, Chudoba, 2000) and greater satisfaction (Chidambaram, 1996). We can observe an extensive amount of cohesion research in the sport field specifically in sport teams (Prapavessis, Carron, Spink, 1996; Brawley, Carron, Widmeyer, 1993). Indeed, some studies outline that sport teams with greater cohesion have better records than less cohesive sports teams (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, 2002). Also, in exercise groups thanks to major cohesion we record better adherence rates (Spink, Carron, 1992).

Cohesion is the process that involves the propensity for a sport team to form a bond to satisfy its performance goals and members' affective needs (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, 2002). In fact, the team cohesion involves social and task components: social cohesion is the degree to which members of a team like each other; task cohesion represents the degree to which each member of a team cooperates to achieve high performance goals. Cohesion construct is characterized by a dynamic, multidimensional, and affective nature, and depends on individual's attraction to the group and individual's perception of the group as an integrated whole (Carron, Widemeyer, Brawley, 1985). A meta-analytic study on the matter have showed that social cohesion related to sport team performance is positively stronger than task cohesion, confirming the believe reported by coaches that solidarity and unity linked to cohesion are significant predictors of good performance (Carron, Colman, Wheeler, 2002). Likewise, other studies evidence that the implementation of mentoring programs can be useful and effective in fostering relational development and aiding especially new members to feel connected to team members in any organizational contexts (Suchan, Hayzak, 2001).

The aim of this study is to analyze both techniques, mentoring and coaching in sport settings, in order to evidence their role in creating and developing cohesion in sport teams. Most research in the literature argue the relevant role of mentoring and coaching in the sport field, in supporting individuals in their personal and professional developmental process, and limited research focuses on their role in promoting major cohesion in the sport teams. Despite the proliferation of contributions in the literature on these topics, research exploring mentoring and coaching in sports, especially in terms of their link according to an integrative and complementary perspective, remains scarce leaving many unexplored areas such as the most effective mechanisms able to educate and support coaches (McQuade, Davis, Nash, 2015; Nash, McQuade, 2014).

This exploratory study aims to provide an integrative lecture of both techniques, mentoring and coaching in sports, focusing the attention on cohesion dimension, in order to evidence that, thanks to mentoring relationships, coaches can be more effective in their role and functions to promote and develop cohesion in any forms of expression of sport, that is football teams, soccer teams, athletics, and so forth. Thus, in this conceptual paper we try to evidence some relevant implications derived from mentoring applications in coaching educational in the perspective of cohesion in sport teams.

1. Mentoring in Sports

According to research, mentoring is one innovative and specific technique in the human resources management in any organizational settings, also in the sport field. Mentoring plays a key role among innovative learning and training techniques, in promoting the professional and psychological developmental process of individuals. Mentoring, also described as a learning and competence development goal-driven process (Godshalk, Sosik, 2003), represents a dyadic relationship between two individuals, one with maturity, experience and high skills and competence, the other one with less experience, maturity and poor skills and capacities, the former helps, supports, guides the latter in his/her personal and professional developmental process, giving the chance to know and enrich his/her skills, experience, competences, and so forth (Kram, 1983; 1985). Mentors provide two main functions: career development support and psychosocial roles. The career development support involves five sub-functions, that is coaching, sponsoring advancement, providing challenging assignments, protecting protégés from adverse forces, and foresting positive visibility (Ragins, Cotton, 1999; Noe, 1988; Kram, 1985). In addition, the psychosocial function includes personal support, friendship, acceptance, counselling, and role modeling (Allen, Poteet, Eby, Lentz, 2004; Ragins, Cotton, 1999; Noe, 1988; Kram, 1985, 1983). Kram's mentor role theory argues that career functions help protégé "to learn the ropes" and mentor can facilitate his/her advance within any organizational contexts. Overcoming the traditional vision of mentoring as "an exclusive dyadic relationship <person to person> between protégé and mentor (one-to-one)", some recent studies conceive mentoring as multiple developmental relationship phenomenon (Higgins, Kram, 2001), where a protégé can establish relationships with more than a mentor and vice versa (Kram, Hall, 1996; Higgins, 2000; Higgins, Kram, 2001; De Janasz, Sullivan, 2004).

In the literature on mentoring formal or informal mentoring relationships have been distinguished depending on their formality and length of the relationship, and purpose of the relationship meant like specific goals (Kram, 1985; Zey, 1985; Ragins, 1989; Murray, 1991; Lankau, Scandura, 2002). Indeed, formal mentoring consists in programs created and implemented directly by the organization defining strict rules for the selection of mentors and protégés, the length of the relationships, the timing schedules and number of meetings, and so forth.

Research has evidenced several organizational application areas of mentoring, that is learning and training areas, socialization process, career advancement process, diversity management and work-life balance policies (Fagenson, 1989; Thomas, Kram, 1988; Noe, 1988; Burke, 1984; Kram, 1983; Hunt, Michael, 1983; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, McKee, 1978). Also, many studies evidence the beneficial outcomes of mentoring in several organizational settings, business, education, nursery, sport, such as higher levels of job satisfaction, career opportunities, commitment, and support, counselling, friendship in terms of psychological dimensions (Scandura, 1992; Fagenson, 1989; Fagenson, 1989; Noe, 1988; Thomas, Kram, 1988; Kram, 1985; Riley,

Wrench, 1985; Burke, 1984; Kram, 1983; Hunt, Michael, 1983; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, McKee, 1978).

In the recent years mentoring is significantly widespread in the sport field (Varriale, Tafuri, 2014) although we observe a dearth of research on the conceptualization and functions analysis of mentoring in sport (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998; Perna, Zaichikowsky, Bockneck, 1996) and sport management (Pastore, 2003; Weaver, Chelladurai, 1999) and also the existing contributions tend to mainly focus on coach to coach mentoring (Loughead, Munroe-Chandler, Hoffman, Duguay, 2014; Bloom, 2013).

As already outlined, coaching represents one of the sub-functions of the career development support provided by mentors. As a consequence, most studies in sport field have evidenced that coaching plays a very important role in the mentoring relationships within sport field, allowing to associate coaching to mentoring (Pastore, 2003; Weaver, Chelladurai, 1999; 2002; Wright, Smith, 2000; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998; Schweitzer, 1993); indeed, mentoring has been most investigated in the sport management, in order to provide some guidelines of good practice that could be applied to sports coaching (Jones, Harris, Miles, 2009). Some studies have investigated the application of formalized mentoring as a learning strategy for volunteer sports coaches or, more specifically, to support the black-female student-athletes (Carter, Hart, 2010; Lough, 2001; Depauw, Bonace, Karwas, 1991) and athletes administrators (Weaver, Chelladurai, 1999). Others tend to exam the role of mentoring in the sport management outlining its contribution in supporting the professional development process for the athletes in any sport disciplines, especially football, and all the individuals involved in this wide sector, such as referees or technicians, also focusing more on the spirit and nature of sport (Bloom, 2013; Pastore, 2003; Nash, 2003; Butki, Andersen, 1994; Hardy, 1994).

Furthermore, some scholars explore how formal and informal mentoring opportunities can help Paralympic coaches' in their learning and educational experiences (Fairhurst, Bloom, Harvey, 2016), or compare well-peer mentored and non-peer mentored athletes' outlining their different perceptions of satisfaction, higher for the former category (Hoffman, Loughead, 2016b).

Another interesting topic investigated by scholars on mentoring in sports concerns the role of mentoring in developing sport teams cohesion, although the contributions are still scant. Some authors evidence, for instance, "how formal mentoring should be set up within a team or to refine the processes used to choose individuals for leadership positions" in order to promote the development of group cohesion (Lusher, Robins, Kremer, 2010: p. 220; White, Boorman, Breiger, 1976; Lorrain, White, 1971). Some authors explore the relevance of types of informal roles in team sport environments, outlining the crucial role played by mentoring in developing cohesion for sport teams (Cope, Eys, Beauchamp, Schinke, Bosselut, 2011). Jent and Niec (2009) in their study aimed at evaluating the effectiveness of a group mentoring program with the inclusion of components empirically supported mentoring and cognitive behavioral techniques for

children at a community mental health center, outline that the primary goal of the mentoring program was to foster the development of the rapport, group cohesion and behavior expectations, also with reference to sport groups.

In summary, mentoring research in sports still is poor in investigating if and how a mentor can support sport team to be empowered, evidencing that the success of sport team can also be partly attributed to the way in which mentoring relationships support them in their performance and style communicating. In this direction, most research emphasize the role and function of coaching in fostering sport team cohesion (Ramzaninezhad, Keshtan, 2009; Payne, Reynolds, Brown, Fleming, 2003; Turman, 2003; Chelladurai, Riemer, 1998).

2. Coaching in Sports

In the last decades, coaching has been defined moving away from the traditional perspective focused on skills and performance to the emphasis on self-empowerment (Rolfe, 2013). In general, coaching consists into a complex technique able to understand the complexities and experiences faced daily by any individuals, such as coaches, athletes, parents, workers, health care operators and so forth (Bush, Silk, 2010). Coaching can be conceived as the process in which individuals, mostly sport athletes, are supported for their improvement and development in order to achieve high levels of performance (ICCE, 2012).

Sport coaching's primary function is to manage sporting performance. Sport development in terms of sporting capital generated by high performance sport and international success attract athletes, public and financial resources in a social and institutional context that generates secondary implications for the coach's role and responsibilities in terms of efficacy and efficiency criteria (Lyle, 2013a) e (Lyle, 2013b) (Adams, 2011). This secondary and significant coaching role is due to the phenomenon that successful athletes represent role models for young people and they act as a catalyst for increasing sports participation; indeed, coaching practices will impact on the athlete's behavior and the potential for sporting success (Lyle, 2013b).

In particular, from a macro social and institutional perspective, according to Payne's model (Payne, Reynolds, Brown, Fleming, 2003), the following criteria guide to the dynamical aspects of coaches' impact on social cohesion processes:

- Attentional Processes, intended as the extent to which the role model characteristics are attractive, the compatibility between learner and model, and the quality/stimulation of the presentation or event;
- Retention Processes, indeed, the level of stimulation, creation of key images or messages;
- Reproduction Processes, the degree to which opportunity for reinforcement is available, availability and quality of feedback to the learner;

- Motivational Processes, such as rewarding behavior, incentives and perception of value added.

According to an internal organizational behavioral perspective, coaches practices affect cohesion in the small groups within sport settings, through specific techniques and strategies to promote cohesion among players: effective coaches tend to avoid inequity, embarrassment, ridicule scenarios, detached and isolated behaviors, and to promote humor, sarcasm and motivational interpersonal interactions and speeches, direct attention and dedication to athletes, always underlining the respect and the quality of opponents (Turman, 2003).

Chelladurai and Riemer (1998) demonstrated that coach effective leadership, the behavioral interactional processes between coach and his/her athletes, that influences team members toward performance accomplishments, is positively related to athletes' sense of belongingness to the team, hence, to team cohesion.

In particular, a comparison of coaches' leadership styles demonstrates that football coaches, exhibiting higher levels of training and instruction, social support, positive feedback, democratic behavior and lower levels of autocratic behaviors, increase athletes' perceptions of team cohesion: successful football teams tend to be more cohesive when their coaches exhibit higher levels of democratic and social support behavior. The interdependence in team sports, managed through effective coach leadership behavior, supports the significant need for team cohesion that contributes to team success (Ramzaninezhad, Keshtan, 2009).

Over the past two decades the research conducted in the area of coaching effectiveness has been primarily focused on identifying the most effective coaching characteristics, leadership styles, and behavioral interpersonal patterns and dynamics: "effective coach" has been defined as a dynamical process who elicits either successful performance outcomes and positive psychological responses on the part of his/her athletes (Horn, 2002). In fact, as coaches affect not only their athletes' physical performance but also their psychosocial well-being, it is important for an effective coach to pay attention and take care to the many personal and individual needs of their athletes.

Effective coaches must be aware that they can make a difference in the team performance by improving their own coaching skills, primarily observing themselves and understanding the effect that their behavior can have on their athletes (Anshel, 2003).

Horn's working model (2002) was inspired by the two most validated models of leadership effectiveness in sport, the Multidimensional Model of Leadership (Chelladurai, 1990) and the Meditational Model of Leadership (Smoll, Smith, 1989): elements of both models have been combined to form a new framework of an innovative working model of coaching effectiveness (Horn, 2002). Horn's (2002) working model is founded on three assumptions. First, socio-cultural context, organizational climate, and personal characteristics of the coach, and athletes' personal characteristics (age, gender, etc.) represent antecedent factors which affect coaches' behaviors indirectly through coaches' expectancies, beliefs, and goals. Second, coaches'

behaviors influence athletes' appraisal of their coaches' behaviors, and team performance. Third, the effectiveness of various coaching interventions is influenced by situational factors and individual differences.

Applying this model of coaching effectiveness, it's reasonable to conclude that cohesion has a significant effect on the team success, according to many studies which highlight the connection between these two constructs by utilizing a variety of sport disciplines, including golf, rugby, lacrosse, baseball, basketball and football (Ramzaninezhad, Keshtan, 2009). However, despite this large amount of research, one question that has gone relativity unanswered if cohesion impacts success and performance, or success affects cohesion. It may be reasonable to assume that as a team has more success, the high level of performance is what causes the athletes to perceive higher level of cohesion. Success has the potential of allowing strong interpersonal relationships and positive group morale to develop. The operational definition of team sport cohesion by Carron and colleagues (1985) describes the multidimensional entity and the circular influence of these variables, underlining through the Group Environment Questionnaire (GEQ) both task and social properties which involve both individual and group aspects, to quantify group cohesion as a multidimensional and dynamical property.

Brawley (1990) identified antecedents and consequences of group cohesion. The antecedents of group cohesion were classified into four categories: leadership, situational, personal, and team factors. The consequences were identified in two classes: individual and group outcomes.

Thus, in addition to the technical skills of their sport, effective coaches may be required to occupy many roles in the lives of their athletes, which may include being a leader, follower, teacher, role model, limit setter, psychologist/counselor and/or mentor (Anshel, 2003).

3. Mentoring in coaching for team sport cohesion

Researchers observe the presence of similarities and differences between mentoring and coaching, more similarities than differences (Gray, 2013). This recent perspective has been shown since the creation of the Global Coaching and Mentoring Alliance, established by merging of several organizations, that is the European Mentoring and Coaching Council, the International Coach Federation, and the Association of Coaching (Gray, 2013). Despite the similar functions between mentoring and coaching due to the involvement of a teaching and learning component, some differences between a mentor and a coach can be outlined (Clutterbuck, 2004; Ragins, Kram, 2007). Coaching focuses on skill development and improved performance, but at the same it pays attention to maintain a great deal of control over the direction of the relationship (Clutterbuck, 2004). Mentoring emphasizes on the potential and capacity of the learner, with a longer-term relationship by changing goals and expectations constantly in the developmental process (Clutterbuck, 2004). Otherwise, coaching is recognized as sub-

function of mentoring, for protecting the protégé and assigning challenging assignments (Kram, 1996; 1985).

Despite an increasing interest paid by scholars to mentoring, the empirical research on mentoring in sport is still sparse and predominantly focused on coach mentoring (Hoffmann, Loughead, 2016a) e (Hoffmann, Loughead, 2016b), (Loughead, Munroe-Chandler, Hoffmann, Duguay, 2014; Bloom, 2013; Jenkins, 2013; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998). Nevertheless, scholars identified many positive outcomes from mentoring (Bloom, 2013; Bertz, Purdy, 2011; Jones, Harris, Miles, 2009; Cushion, Jones, 2006; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998), such as helping their protégés to improve their identity, competence, confidence, and increasing their exposure and visibility thanks to a broad network. Moreover, mentoring was recognized as the most important career development factor by some expert coaches, although unfortunately, no structured path for finding a mentor coach could be identified (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998).

Another interesting recent study has been conducted by Hoffmann and Loughead (2016b) concerning the investigation of peer-to-peer mentoring between athletes on sport teams. Otherwise, only few psychology researchers (Miller, Salmela, Kerr, 2002; Perna, Zaichkowsky, Bocknek, 1996) have argued that mentoring can be also implemented in sport field. To date, as already evidenced, mentoring studies in sport are mostly focused on developing coaches (Jones, Armour, Potrac, 2003; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998; Gould, Giannini, Krane, Hodge, 1990). For instance, one study conducted by Bloom and colleagues (1998), analyzed the role of mentoring in developing Canadian Olympic and university team sport coaches, through 21 semi-structured interviews. The results of the study showed that mentors significantly affected their coaches, receiving beyond the tactical and technical skills, also mentors' philosophies and beliefs about coaching (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998). Another study investigated the vocational and psychosocial mentoring functions with intercollegiate athletes in coach mentoring (Perna, Zaichkowsky, Bocknek, 1996). According to the existing literature on the topic, coach mentoring can be either formal or informal as method for learning and developing individuals involved (Koh, Bloom, Fairnhurst, Paiement, Kee, 2014; Bloom, 2013; Cassidy, Jones, Potrac, 2008).

Among the numerous studies on coaching aimed to explore the formal or informal learning, which traditionally characterize coach education (Nash, Sproule, 2011; Mallet, 2010; Jones, 2006; Werthner, Trudel, 2006; Marsick, Volpe, 1999; Lave, Wenger, 1991), mentoring "could be considered as an effective and accessible method of supporting practice in the field" (McQuade, Davis, Nash 2015: p. 319). Indeed, most researchers currently advocate that mentoring represents a development tool for connecting theory and practice in coach education (McQuade, Davis, Nash 2015; Koh, Bloom, Fairnhurst, 2014; Bloom, 2013), even though the most effective mechanisms for educating and supporting coaches are still contested (Nash, McQuade, 2014).

"Mentoring can act as the bridge between theoretical learning drawn from the formal education environment and the practical application of that learning in the field.

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Recognizing that, many coach-mentoring programs have been put in place by organizations to support coaches in the field, such as NGBs, and by lead agencies, such as UK Sport and the Coaching Association of Canada" (McQuade, Davis, Nash, 2015: p. 318).

Mentoring in sports coaching can be provided both informally through interactions (observation and conversation) in the practical coaching context (Jones, Harris, Miles, 2009; Gilbert, Trudel, 2004) and through structured programs (McQuade, Davis, Nash, 2015).

Mentoring occurs constantly in the practical coaching environment within several relationships, like coach–mentor, coach–athlete, and coach–coach (Joo, Sushko, McLean, 2012).

"In the context of sports coaching, a more experienced coach acting as a mentor inevitably has an evolved network to which the mentee coach could be introduced. This could be significant in terms of signposting to new contacts, new opportunities, and, critically, new learning" (Kram, 1988: p. 614). Comparing mentoring and coaching, thus, "the key psychosocial or support roles that complement coach learning could be identified as relationship building, confidence building, cheerleading, empowering, championing, and being a critical friend" (McQuade, Davis, Nash, 2015: p. 321).

In this direction, considering mentoring as an effective development tool in coaching learning, we argue that coaches can be more oriented to sport team cohesion, coaches will be more effective and proactive in supporting and guiding athletes/coaches if they also act as mentors and are mentored. Coaches as mentors will be more completed and able to psychologically and sociologically support the sport teams in fostering high cohesion and so achieving high performance.

Indeed, Nash (2003), in her education setting study on mentoring supporting undergraduate sport coaching students, outlined that the highest-qualities possessed by mentors were considered relevant by coaching students, that is knowledgeable elements such as knowledge of sport, experience, organization, and leadership matched with effective communication skills, approachability, and enthusiasm.

Otherwise, some studies have already outlined that many aspiring coaches seek guidance from mentor in their career (Jones, Armour, Potrac, 2003; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998). Mentoring aims to develop a learning environment where a coach mentor can oversee the developmental progression of protégés by helping individuals in recognizing career potential, developing skills, and working towards professional goals (Bloom, 2013). However, in sport setting, mentoring has been conceived as one highly effective tool to allow coaches acquiring relevant information, learning roles and responsibilities, and improving individual coaching styles and behaviors (Bloom, 2013; Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, Salmela, 1998).

In summary, according to the prevalent literature on the topic still scarce and considering the scenario briefly described, coaches play an invaluable role in developing sport teams but, becoming or supported by mentors, they can be more effective especially in fostering the required high team cohesion. Hence, coaches can be

more effective in fostering sport team cohesion thanks to the moderator role of mentoring. As shown in figure 1, mentoring can positively moderate the relationship between coaching and sport team cohesion, and finally team performance/success through the psychosocial function.

Figure 1: Mentoring in Coaching in fostering sport team cohesion.
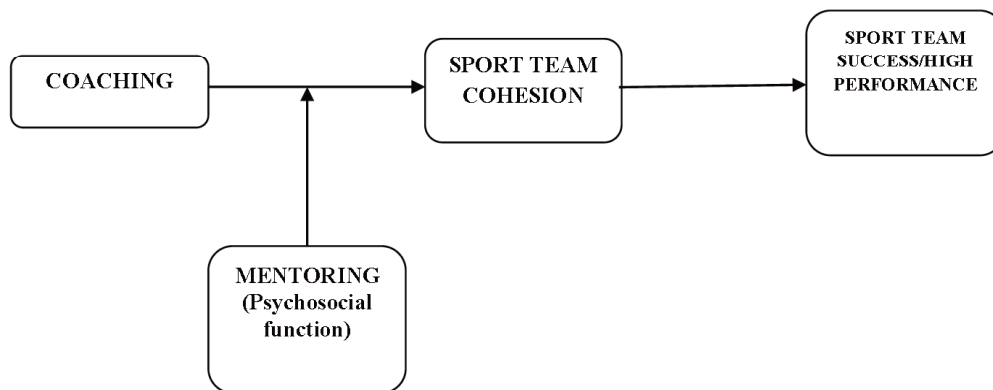
Source: Our processing.

4. Final remarks

This paper draws on mentoring and coaching literature still limited within sports, especially sport coach development research. Both techniques, mentoring and coaching, have been investigated together adopting an integrative approach for evidencing how mentoring applied in coaching education can support to foster sport team cohesion.

Thanks to our explorative study we argue that mentoring, formally or informally, can really play a key role as an effective tool in sport coaching development, especially with focus on its effect, combined to the same coaching, on sport team cohesion.

In this theoretical study we try to aim a twofold goal. First, this theoretical research aims to contributing to the existing literature on mentoring in sports, trying to extend the still limited research areas giving also a different point of view with focus on sport team cohesion and how this factor can be affected indirectly by mentoring. Second, we suggest to consider simultaneously mentoring and coaching in sports overcoming the limitations of the previous studies on the topic. Thanks to our integrative approach, we recognize the need for coaches to be more effective in fostering sport team cohesion and, for this reason, coaches have to provide also psychological and sociological functions by acting also as mentors. Indeed, mentoring as moderator plays a relevant role in coaching development with concern the psychological area.

In the future, adopting our integrative approach we aim to develop a research design in which we want to identify and measure the main variables, related to the psychological

and sociological arena, that can explain the relationship between mentoring and coaching in developing sport team cohesion, more specifically how mentoring positively moderates the relationship between sport coaching and sport team cohesion.

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