

LEADING A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS
Leadership skills in sport and work

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The objective of the thesis was to study whether the leadership skills effect group performance. After four years studying at Innovative Business Services, this thesis started with learning the leadership issues from working life The background as a skier gave interest to study leadership issues from the field of sport and these two were compared to find out whether there are similarities.

In the thesis, when concentrating on sport, it will cover only skiing. This because it might have been too wide an area to study and include also other sports. The view for looking at this dilemma is from the athlete's point of view. The reason for this is that they have not been able to get their voices heard and they truly have something to say. In addition to sport, the leadership skills needed in a working organization are also studied.

The total of three athletes, two women and one male athlete were interviewed in order to get the athletes' point of view for this matter. The reason for this was to research how they have experienced their coach's leadership skills and what in their opinion are the qualities that a good leader should have. When referring to the interviews, the athletes have been marked by number, one (1), two (2) and three (3) because the athletes did not want be recognised due to the small amount of people in the field of skiing.

Results indicate that having a good coach can improve your training and the same applies in working life. Athletes pointed out that a good coach listens but is an authority to his/her athletes. In working life giving feedback and motivating subordinates is the key to successful teamwork. All of these coaching skills were mentioned in both fields so it means that these two are actually similar and the same coaching skills are useful whether you lead athletes or employees.

.Key words: Leadership, leadership skills, coaching, team, group work

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Tämän opinnäytetyön tavoite oli selvittää vaikuttaako johtajan johtamistaidot ryhmän toimintaan. Teoria kerättiin opiskelemalla johtamiseen liittyvät asiat työelämän kannalta. Oma urheilutausta vaikutti tämän työn kuvaan, jonka johdosta opinnäytetyö ja johtamisen näkökulmat linkittyvät tässä työssä urheilujohtamiseen. Tavoitteen selvittämiseksi otin selvää, onko näissä toisissaan eriävissä maailmoissa jotain yhteistä ja päteekö samat johtamistyyli molemmissa yhteyksissä.

Tässä opinnäytetyössä urheilu on rajattu koskemaan hiihtoa. Tämä sen vuoksi, että työstä olisi voinut tulla liian laaja, jos mukaan olisi otettu myös muut urheilulajit. Opinnäytetyön näkökulma on urheilijan kannalta. Tämä siksi, että johtamiseen liittyvissä asioissa tuntuu, etteivät urheilijat ole saaneet ääntään kuulluksi, vaikka heillä voisi olla jotain sanottavaa. Urheilun lisäksi opinnäytetyöhön on opiskeltu työelämään liittyvää johtamista.

Opinnäytetyöhön on haastateltu kolmea eri urheilijaa, hiihtäjää, jotta saatiin urheilijan näkökulma johtamiseen. Syy tähän oli se, että urheilijat pystyivät kertomaan miten heidän valmentajat ovat onnistuneet valmentajina ja mitä luonteenpiirteitä hyvällä valmentajilla tulisi urheilijoiden mielestä olla. Tekstissä urheilijoihin viitattaessa heidät on merkitty; "Athlete 1, 2 ja 3".

Tulokset viittaavat siihen, että hyvällä valmentajalla on vaikutusta urheilijan tekemiseen harjoituksissa ja kilpailuissa ja tämä sama pätee myös työelämään. Urheilijat osoittivat, että hyvä valmentaja kuuntelee, mutta on samalla auktoriteetti urheilijoilleen. Työelämän puolella erittäin tärkeinä asioina pidettiin palautteen antamista ja motivointia. Kuitenkin kaikki edellä mainitut johtamistaidot olivat mainittuina sekä urheilun, että työelämän puolella, joka viittaa siihen, että nämä kaksi toisistaan eriävää maailmaa ovatkin lähempänä toisiaan kuin on ehkä ajateltu.

Avainsanat: johtaminen, johtamistaidot, valmennus, joukkue, ryhmätyöskentely

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1 INTRODUCTION

How do the leadership skills of a coach effect the athletes' performance? As a cross-country skier, I have noticed that not all the athletes are satisfied with the coach-athlete relationship. Coaches are good in the sports arena but they lack some essential leadership skills. I have noticed this from the conversations I have had with athletes from different levels. During the years I have been skiing, I have had many different coaches. For me it is clear that there are differences between coaches and how they treat their athletes. Some of the coaches carry out training so easy. They have created an atmosphere, which is encouraging and positive. On the other hand, if the atmosphere is negative or just not welcoming you do not want to go training at all. Leadership skills are needed also in working life. Almost all employees have a person supervising their work, like managers. Even though these two fields, sport and work have different backgrounds I have a strong feeling that they have lots in common and almost the same leadership skills are needed in both.

1.2 Idea

In this thesis, the aim is to concentrate on cross-country skiing and study what kind of leadership skills are valuable in order to lead a group of individuals with success. When talking about sport and team sport particularly, team players share a common goal and they know that without the team they cannot achieve it. As in individual sport as skiing is, athletes have their own goals (if you do not count relays). These athletes try to reach their own goals and they are in fact training in groups. The Idea of this study came for me by monitoring things that were happening approximately a year ago. Dissatisfaction of athletes in the National B-team (now "The Challengers") was published also in TV. Athletes were unhappy with the situation in the team and according to athletes; their coach was not interested in his athletes. After talking with few of the athletes from the team

I realised that there truly might be a problem. In addition to sport, working environment offers interesting views in that phenomenon. In order to understand the similarities and differences it would be better to interview not only the athletes but also employees from a work organisation but in this case, it would have been too wide topic for my thesis. The study concentrates on leadership issues mainly from the subordinate's view in the interviews.

1.2 Research question

The research question is "Do the leadership skills effect group performance". The aim of this thesis is to find out what the qualities of a good leader are. Goal is to study the qualities that athletes find important and vital for a good leader. On the other hand, the aim is to find out whether there are similarities to working life. The perspective is from the athletes' and subordinate's point of view. Research was carried out with skiers because skiing is an individual sport. Therefore, one angle for the study is to find out if skiers who are individual athletes find group training useful.

1.3 Acquisition of material

Material for this study was collected by interviewing skiers. The amount of interviews was not limited beforehand and the aim was to interview as many as information was collected. Since author is also a cross-country skier, many skiers were familiar beforehand and the selection of athletes were simple. In order to have different backgrounds, information was collected from athletes from different levels of skiing. From different backgrounds, means that athletes have had different path and career development as skiers. They might have been in different groups and they have had different coaches. This was done to find out whether those who have been on higher level have had the same notifications

that lower level athletes have. Idea was to get athletes from both gender. As noticed beforehand, there are differences on how men and women see things. Athletes interviewed were almost the same age. This topic is sensitive so athletes are marked later athlete 1, 2 and 3. Questions asked has listed on the appendixes part after thesis. For this research, material comes from three different athletes plus my own thoughts. These three were chosen because of several reasons.

Some material for this research has come from personal experience. Experience has come from different coaches and group training in variety of groups. This is of course mainly one reason also for chosen this topic. Last year gave many thoughts for this topic and discussions with athletes that were familiar have rose awareness to the fact that there is a problem. Use of authors own experience when doing this research will be seen as a reflection in interviews with athletes. Leadership materials have collected from different books and internet sources.

2 LEADERSHIP AND COACHING

There are many ways of describing the word leadership. It can be the actual boss, who has a specific job, which involves leading people. Leadership can also mean a mind-set that some people have. Anyhow, when speaking of leadership there is always somehow people related to it. Leaders, dealing with leadership issues are individuals and it might be one reason why this topic is interesting to study. (Business dictionary) In general, leaders have ability to inspire and stimulate others to do their best. In addition, leadership in work organisation is ability to inspire confidence and support among the people who are working towards a specific goal. Yet it is important to realise the difference of management and leadership. Functions like planning, organising, directing and controlling are for managers. The division is that even though managers also lead they also have to organise, plan and control. There are studies that seem to prove that leadership matters in an organisation. In addition, there are also theories that focuses on the fact that leaders do not actually have much to do with the company's result. One of the theories point out that manager cannot predict whether some product will survive on the market or not. In addition, one theory provides the idea that factors outside the leader's control have bigger impact on business than leaders, good or bad have. (Dubrin, 2004, 2-3, 9-10) Many times people think that power equals good leader and leader uses that power to his/her subordinates. Truth is far from it and actually, those leaders who use that power with subordinates are the successful ones. (Canals, 2011, 44). Good leaders have charisma, which makes people trust and follow them. Charisma is a positive thing that leaders and people in general have. When people find leader to have characteristics like; visionary, that leader has more likely also charisma. Commitment to leaders are attributions of charisma and this is why it is so important leader to have. (Dubrin, 2004, 63-64).

2.1 Leadership in work organization

Boss-subordinate position is clearly visible in sport life but it is even more visible in work environment. Leaders have huge role on how their company survives in

in hectic business life and the leaders need to develop themselves constantly. Work of subordinates and company can improve when the leader is better than yesterday. (Sievinen, 2015). In the working environment, interaction is the key to a successful in an organization. Subordinates run many daily activities in an organization and they might have good ideas on how to develop their business. Instead of making leaders solve problems it would be a necessity to let and ask subordinates how they feel about this dilemma. Leaders might hear something they did not know of their company and on the other hand, in the future subordinates may have ready solution for these problems. The key is to listen to what the subordinate says. One possible solution that may drive organizations on to the next level is questioning some old solutions. Good leaders let their subordinate question some of the old solutions. Questioning something is not necessarily a bad thing and it might lead to do better performance next time. (Salin, 2015).

It is important to give feedback in order to have a successful organisation. Leaders should find time for feedback sessions with their subordinates because this is the only way of subordinates develop themselves. A big part of giving feedback is setting a right and reachable goals. After setting these goals subordinates know exactly what they need to achieve and they can set a specific timeline and goals halfway. After the deadline is reached, it would be a necessity to have a feedback session in which the boss and subordinates carefully go through whether the goals set were achieved or not and how the whole process went. When giving feedback it is necessary that the one giving the feedback gives it constructively. This is the key element if bosses want their subordinates to develop their performance in the future. Giving feedback can also boost subordinates' output. (Siipainen, 2014)

As in sport also in working life goal setting is one of the most motivational cause that boosts subordinates to do their best. Goal theory gives simple pattern on how to motivate your employees. Employees who are provided with demanding task will actually perform most likely better than those whose task is easier. Anyhow, it is still important that the employees that have harder goal are people who accept the goal and are willing to take feedback from their actions. One important

thing to remember in goal setting is that employees perform better if they have specified goals instead of general “do your best” type goals. After setting a goal, which is specified boss, should think that the goal is hard, yet reachable. When a goal is too hard it might turn employees good work motivation into frustration. (Dubrin, 2004, 296-297)

Communication between an employee-boss is one of the most important things to successful teamwork. In addition, non-verbal communication is almost more efficient than verbal. Therefore, in order to get message through to employee, manager must be synchronising the non-verbal and verbal communication. In order to get a company to success, there has to be open communication between boss and employees. Effective leaders listen to their employees and in addition to that actually use their employee’s suggestion. This way there will be open communication that will lead to trust in between boss and subordinates. (Dubrin, 2004, 362-363)

2.2 Leadership skills in sport

Coaches should have a holistic view, because they need to see the whole picture in order to know their athletes well. Holistic coaching means “consideration of whole person, including mental and social factors” (Oxford 1991:562) and in order to see coaching from a wider perspective it is good to take into consideration also emotional, political, spiritual and cultural factors. Therefore holistic coaching means taking into account all these factors. In addition to get the athlete to perform in the best possible way, coaches need to think not only of physical matters but also personal, emotional, cultural and social identity. This kind of coaching requires coaches to think more and be more intellectual than technical. (T. Cassidy, R. Jones, P. Potrac 2009, p. 11-12)

In some cases, coaches spend more time with young people or children than their own parents do. Because of this, there is huge impact on child’s future how the

coach treats them and what kind of rules and regulations they teach to their athletes. People, no matter the age, sense what the intentions of coach are and because of this, it is vital that coach is a caring, honest and open person. The coach has to create a good relationships with the athletes so that they start to really trust him. Coaching is a more positive atmosphere than a negative one and can lead to positive experiences in forming relationships. The first priority should be players, safety and wellbeing. No matter how hard the coach wants to win there should be clear “marching order”. Therefore, the coach can be a more effective educator than parents are and have responsibility for children’s growth. For example, how the coach communicates with athletes forms some kind of mind set also to the athletes themselves. They can be future leaders and at least they are community members even though they do not carry on as athletes or coaches. Coach’s behaviour in front of their athletes no matter the age effects on how athletes respect them. This way dealing with also bad situations well increases respect among athletes and their parents. Creating an atmosphere, which is trusting and positive; athletes will do their best in training. (<http://play-positive.libertymutual.com>)

2.3 Characteristics of a good coach

Good coach has qualities that athletes respect and many times coaches are the ones being judged, if the team or an athlete is not performing as well as they should. Here is a list of characteristics of a good coach from the athlete’s point of view.

Patient	Flexible
Experienced	Organized
A good communicator	Not just a dictator
Knowledgeable about skills	Open-minded
Motivator	Has the ability to teach
Has a sense of humour	Punctual
A people manager	Has a loud voice

Adventurous	Uses time wisely
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(T. Cassidy, R. Jones, P. Potrac, 2009, p. 47)

These characteristics point out that holistic coaching is here to stay. Athletes want their coaches to take them as individuals rather than some machine doing as they say. This leads to the fact that athletes will value and respect coach and their performance in training will be more effective. Athletes want to feel that they are respected as individual. In addition, to get the best out of athletes they need to have total well-being and a sense of confidence. (T. Cassidy, R. Jones, P. Potrac, 2009, p. 47-48)

One of the qualities the athletes above listed was “punctual”. Even though coaches need to build, a relationship with their athletes there still has to be clear coach in training. Coach is the one who makes the rules and the rules has to obey by both of them. Athletes listed also “has a loud voice”, which clarify that athletes want their coach to be some kind of authority to them. Rules are essential especially when training in a group of people. When rules the are folowed by athletes and coach the respect is shared. This research shows distinctly that athletes want their coaches to be authority to them and they need someone to give them clear and fair rules. (T. Cassidy, R. Jones, P. Potrac, 2009, p. 47-48)

It is necessity that coaches do not think they have it all under control. Athlete needs to be heard and this is even more crucial when athlete is an adult. They usually know how their body works and what kind of training is suitable for them. At least coaches should ask their athletes how they feel today and this way show respect to them. Especially when training with team coach cannot know everyone’s feelings at that specific day. In these cases, coach’s responsibility is to ask athlete of their feelings. (Wayne Smith, in Kidman 2001:43) (T. Cassidy, R. Jones, P. Potrac, 2009, p. 49)

2.4 Leadership – coaching

Aim was to find out how does the leadership skills effect on subordinates performance. Many leaders actually see themselves as coaches more than boss of a company, and an effective leader is a good coach. “CEO Bill Ford (of Ford Motor Company) says, “I see myself as a coach, and my job is to set the direction of the company, to make sure we have the right players and eliminate the politicking””. (Dubrin, 2004, 304) This shows that sport and working life are not that far away from each other. After studying facts from the both areas coaching and leadership, I realised that there are many similarities these two. One of the biggest concerns in both areas are interaction. Like mentioned before subordinates need feedback and bosses need carefully listen. This applies also in sport. In trainings athletes notices when coach is not present. Athletes may say something but coaches do not really listen about it. This may lead to shattered atmosphere inside the group. When the athletes feel that there is mutual respect between athletes and coaches there are possibility to have better trainings also. Coach who listens their athlete’s problems can hear important things that are affecting on athletes performance. Effective leaders have a sense of humour, which was mentioned also on sport side. They are also warmth, trustworthiness and they have high tolerance for frustration (Dubrin, 2004, 33). These things can found from coaching side also with different words. Words that connect on those are, people manager, a good communicator, not a dictator and has ability to teach. This shows clearly that same leadership skills are important in sport and in working life.

As in working organization, in sport giving feedback has a huge role if you think of keeping athletes hungry for more. Athletes come to trainings in order to develop themselves and learn new things. Coach who is constantly focusing on what their athletes are doing and gives feedback for them is doing a huge favour for the future of that athlete. When athlete hears some parts she/he needs to develop, he/she has something to pay attention. On the other hand, if athlete

does not get any feedback he might accidentally revert and forget that there is always something to develop. Giving feedback and goal setting plays a huge role also in working life. As an athlete, we need to set a specific, reachable goal for the future and this is something employees must also do in organisation. Goal can be set either by the boss or employee but the main concern has to be that when the goal is hard enough it pushes the employee to work little bit harder than he/she would for easier goal. Giving feedback and goal setting go hand in hand in organisations. People who are willing to reach their goals are usually ones who also listen feedback carefully. This applies also in sport and skiing. Those who listen feedback carefully know that with this information, I can become even better and in this way, develop myself.

If we go through some of the words that athletes have mentioned as a good qualities of coach we find same words, which are important also in working environment. For example patience and motivator. In both areas, these adjectives are important because they are used to describe people with whom it is easy to collaborate with. The leader who is a motivator can push subordinates to reach company's goals and athlete to finish first in an important competition. The role of motivation cannot be underestimated. People, whether it is in sport or work, who is motivated can achieve goals easier than people without motivation. Motivation starts from your inner mind but it is vital that your managers create an atmosphere where subordinate can create his/hers creativeness and skills. (Toikka, 2012). Patient leader on the other hand does not push too hard. They let their subordinates grow and figure out the solutions by themselves. In this way, next time they have a problem subordinates may have courage to solve the problems by themselves.

3 FINNISH SPORT AND SKIING

Overall Finns are sport people. They follow sport and especially athletes that are successful. There has always been discussion of are we really sport nation or do we just enjoy success. One of the biggest problems in Finnish sport is that it is fragmentary. There is no cooperation between sports and even inside a specific sport cooperation it might be challenging. Improving this situation Ministry of Education and Culture set up working committee and the mission was to estimate the development issues for Finnish sport. (J.Kokkonen, 2013). According to suggestion of this working committee, The Finnish Olympic Committee and The Finnish Paralympic Committee established "Huippu-Urheilun muutostyöryhmän" (Working committee for top-Level sport). The mission was to renovate the whole sport life in Finland. One of the high-flying missions was that Finland would be the best Scandinavian country in sport, measured by medals and with the most effective top-level sport regime. This mission has been criticised because of the fact that it concentrates only in top-level sport and forgets youngsters and children. (J.Kokkonen, 2013)

Somehow, trust between athletes, coaches and union leaders fragmented at the times of Lahti 2001. Some estimated that there has been lack of contacts between administration and athletes. This could have been lead to the fact that athletes have not realised how harmful the use of doping is not only for athletes but also for the sport community. Researchers realised that there should have been more contacting from the management side to athletes. Athletes should also notice that people in sport field are interested in what they do, even if it is dealing with doping. Linked to this matter is also division of responsibility in sport management. When the division is little bit confusing it can lead to situation where no one actually takes responsibility. If the management and coaches diverge from each other, it will lead to the lack of general view in coaching. Losing the general view can lead to favouritism and conflicts between personal coaches and team coaches. In addition the team spirit will be fragment. (Dopingselvitysryhmän raportti, 2001).

We have always had good skiers but now we are lacking super stars in that area. One can notice the effect of Lahti in fan culture. People are interested in skiing and skiers, but when they do not ski that well, fans reject them. In addition, it is more difficult to get sponsors. Otherwise, from athlete's point of view skiing in Finland seems to lack openness. It feels as if we do not share the information as other nations do and we do not celebrate success of others as other nations. Somehow, there is the feeling that there is a better atmosphere in other teams than in team Finland. It is hard to say what the main reason behind this is. There are few possible reasons but with these are not facts. Author has made these assumptions by herself. It would be great to see if this phenomenon is happening also in other sports than just in skiing but if so, is it characteristic of Finnish people? Are Finns jealous to one another? Author is sure that the reason why skiing is lacking openness is because people want to succeed themselves and do not want to share their information. This is because you have to fight also financially against your teammates. Competition of sponsorships is so hard and the Finnish ski association cannot help athletes financially. This has been fact for years and lack of money can drive you in a position where you have to fight against your teammates in order to get what you need. The lack of sponsorships happened after Lahti 2001. Even though Finnish Ski Association got new sponsors after losing all them, division of money transferred to team sports more than individual sports. This trend has strengthened during past years. (J.Kokkonen).

3.1 Group training in cross-country skiing

Because skiing is typically, describe as individual sport it is good to go through what kind of training squads there are for skiers. Surprisingly it is common to have some kind of group through your complete skiing career. As a youth, it is easier to find training squad to train with but when athlete reach adulthood, training squads are harder to find. This might be one reason why the amount of hobbyists decrease dramatically after junior years. As children, we have many different groups where we can belong to, in sport, kindergarten, school, neighbours and friends. When a person reaches teenage our friends comes even bigger influence for us. It is normal continuum, that, we also want to have people around us as

adults. Friends can be part of your hobby for a long time and they became your second family who somehow has control on your decision-making. (Dolan, 2012). It all starts with skiers own club and skiing school. Skiing club will be part of every skier's career through the whole career. It depends on the club what kind of activities they arrange to young skiers and how they involve themselves in skiers' career. There might be variety of training groups for children, youths and adults depending on the investments of each club. To clarify this here is an example of training groups at Ounasvaara's skiing club:

Kids under 8	Skiing school	1-2 times a week
Ages 8-12	"Kymppiryhmä"	Two times a week
Ages 12-15	"Hopeasomparyhmä"	Two times a week
Over 15 girls	"Kultasompa/ women"	Individually / academy
Over 15 boys	"Men's ski team"	Individually / academy

Figure 1

This is how Ounasvaara's skiing club has organised their athletes and there are many other ways for clubs to arrange trainings. As seen on the figure 1, skiers under 15 has simultaneously trainings twice a week. At this age, children usually have other hobbies too and skiing trainings might not be the only arranged sport activities during a week even during the same day. After the age of 15 skiing becomes more of individual sport and arranged trainings disappear. Lack of group trainings has covered with local sport academies. These kind of academies have grown significantly their part of organised trainings among young athletes. Now there are 21 sport academies in Finland. Amount of activities in sport academies depends on the academy but for example in Rovaniemi, there are trainings arranged to athletes studying at High School and Vocational school, Universities and for athletes doing their military service. Therefore, even though local skiing club is not organising group trainings for athletes over 15, there is chance for organised training.

Starting at the age of 12 young athletes can participate at the area coaching which is part of the "Hopeasompa" (silver ski pole basket). In Lapland for example

athletes at the age of 12-15 have training camp approximately once a month held in the region they represent (in this case Lapland). Part of the “Hopeasompa” age young athletes have possibility to participate on the national training camp organised by the cross-country unit of the Finnish Ski Association. Approximately one hundred fifty best skiers from three categories are invited to join this training camp.

At the age of 16-17, young skiers in Finland have possibility to join the “Habita” squad. This squad and its training camps are organised by the cross-country unit of the Finnish Ski Association and each year approximately 60 best athletes from this age group are selected to this squad. According to athlete’s residence or place of study, this squad is divided into four teams. (Sivenius, Suomen Hiihtoliitto, 2015)

After this age, best youth skiers in Finland are selected to the National junior ski team. Amount of athletes varies but this year there are total of thirteen skiers in this squad. Squad has several training camps together and their main competition is junior Ski world championships each year. This training squad is the first actual national team. What is interesting to point out that for outsider as I am, this team seems the most solid group when comparing to other national teams.

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When groups train together, they have one shared goal, which is to develop themselves and get days routines done. One particular thing is that group has to have a leader, typically in sport it is coach. Coaches, whether it is some child’s parent or educated coach mission is to tell athletes instructions and guide them. (Dolan, 2012). Maybe the fact that coach has these responsibilities even when dealing with adults is the reason why normally coaches are the ones getting the blame. This leads to adult skiing and training squads, which are the ones that also audience sees. In those squads we have the best skiers from Finland and especially back in the days those athletes were some the most interesting athletes in Finland. During recent years, there has been discussion of bad atmosphere between

National team athletes in Finland. This discussion has been related to cross-country skiing. Athletes who have been part of National team of Finland, especially in National A and B-team have had problems with getting along with each other.

Best skiers in Finland belong to National A-squad. In this squad, there are seven women and thirteen men skiers. Inside the whole group there is National sprint squad which has five skiers specialized in sprint skiing. Squad has several training camps during the year and they travel to the competition with this team. During the race season, assembly may vary but the body is the same. Assembly may vary because of the variation of competition and due to the shape of each athlete. Behind National A-squad is X-Country Ski Team Finland B (Challengers). This squad carries this year the name "challengers". This squad contains ten athletes, four women and six men. According to its name "challengers" this group has the second best skiers in Finland who may be the next athletes participating to National A-squad. Behind these squads there just started for this season squad called "Akademia". Head of this group selected overall of 20 athletes from the base of applications. This squad has had four training camps during this season. These athletes are the ones who do not get to the national squads and are too old for junior national ski team. After graduating from high school many skiers have to start training alone without any training groups. Akademia squad offers those athletes one path to develop their career.

One of the biggest problems in adult skiing is that the gap between National A-squad and second best skiers is too big. Athletes need to take a huge leap in order to get to the National A-squad. This leads to problems with getting sponsorships, which leads to difficulties to train as a professional skier. It is important to remember that most of the skiers do not belong to any group. In addition, if their skiing clubs do not organise any activities, they have to survive by themselves. Vuokatti sport offers one solution by organising junior challenger and senior challenger training camps.

4 RESULTS

Author interviewed three athletes who had a different background as skiers and they have different personalities. They all are 22-23 years old and live currently in Rovaniemi but represent different skiing clubs. The first person I interviewed was a male skier. He has been high school training group, junior challengers, and "pohjolaryhmä" (now. Habita group) and different smaller training groups. The second interviewed person is the most successful one from these there. She has been National B-squad (Now. The challengers), young and senior challengers, Akatemia squad and in smaller training groups. She also nominated to team Finland on Youth championships and student Olympic Games. Third interviewer had a little bit different background than the two before. She ended skiing few years ago. She is talented runner and skier. She got to the good level without training specified to cross-country ski. Everyone who knew her background realised that this girl was talented. The issue, which was concern to her, was her bad luck with health issues. Her last year as a skier was hard because of being sick often. Reason why I chose her was that I knew that with the care of some coaches that was working with her back then, she might not end her career (Athlete 3). Even though she ended, quite young, she has seen many groups and coaches. After her skiing ended, she has been assistant coach for athletes and from that point of view; she has seen the situation nowadays. Reason why I mentioned the amount of training groups everyone attended is that beforehand I had a strong feeling that the closer athletes is from top level, the competition is more fierce. This might lead to bad atmosphere in-group.

4.1 Experiences from group training

We shared the same opinion that group training is useful also in individual sport. Opinions were similar and something that I expected to be. Athletes want to train together more than alone. I asked do these athletes feel that they benefit from group training, one of the interviewers summed it up like this: "Yes, I do, on my

opinion you can do training better because you want to be better than the other one. Especially when you are doing harder training in which I always try to find out someone to train with so that both of us are able to push harder.” (Athlete 1).

Individual athletes are somehow lonely workers and in some way, it is good to have that kind of personality. I still have a strong feeling that even these lonely workers need to belong in something. One good example is my third athlete that I interviewed who ended her skiing career quite suddenly and in my opinion too early. At that time, we were in high school. At the age where a person needs approval from others the most but there was a lack of support at her case. She felt like no one were interested of how she was doing. Afterwards she has told us that if someone beside her family would have even called and asked how she was doing she might have never ended skiing. (Athlete 3). I interviewed her because she was a cross-country skier and afterwards she has been coaching young athletes. I wanted to know has the situation changed during these few years. Now she has been working with same coaches as in high school. She says there is a clear difference how coaches interact with athletes. Her opinion is that equality between athletes is one of the most important concern. Coach creates this kind of equality. Creating an equal atmosphere, athletes are on the same level and this can lead to a positive group training. Lack of coaches creates unfortunately inequality between athletes. She felt that athletes really wanted to discuss about their concerns if only someone would pay attention to them. There were a chance to be a part of mental coaching but lack of enthusiasm from coaches' side drove them into the situation where athletes did not even have a chance to be part of it. In addition, about the topic that the top-level competition is so fierce that it can lead to shattered atmosphere. Second athlete whom I interviewed was the most successful and the one who has experienced group training at national level. She had also been part of lower level teams so she had experience from both sides. Surprisingly or not, she did not felt bad atmosphere on those lower level teams. On the other hand national level teams and competition trips with national teams had been someway more difficult. There were disagreements between athletes and coaches. For me in the research this gave an

image that this might be the case also in other teams. Of course, lack of interviewed persons might change these results.

4.2 Athletes vision of coach's leadership skills

These athletes had mostly positive coach experiences during their career. Especially male athlete had strongly positive thoughts of the coaches he has been working with. He pointed out that none of the coaches had purely negative impact but some of the coaches he had been working with had stronger positive impact on group trainings. The ones who had stronger positive impact were the ones who pushed athletes to do their best and in their training, coaches encouraged athletes more. One thing that he also mentioned and which have huge impact on athletes performance is trust. (Athlete 1). On the other hand, both of the women had some negative happenings that they remembered causing conflicts on groups' atmosphere. These were not necessarily straight accusations to the coach because when we study it deeper we realised that there might have been shattered atmosphere between athletes. Only concern for coach that he might have done wrong was not to take part of it. They all had the same idea of coach's role in team. He needs to really be part of the team and honestly be present in trainings. One of the athlete said that for example if the coach is constantly checking his/her phone it will give negative impact also to athletes. If the coach is not present mentally, he/she might miss some of the incidents that may occur in-group atmosphere.

I asked from all the athletes that took part in my study what are the qualities of a good coach. There were similarities in the research that read at the book that were used in coaching section. One of the adjectives that was the most used were interaction. Athletes clearly have matters they want to share with their coaches if they would listen. In additional, listening is not enough. Coaches also need to hear what the athletes want to say. 2. Athlete mentioned interesting case from one of the training camps she attended. She was feeling a little bit sick so she asked her coach' advices should she attend to training at all. Coach asked

her own opinion in which she answered, that she could not attend training that day. After this coach was somehow sure that this athlete could still go to trainings as planned even though she had just said she cannot. The coach made her feel like she was skipping trainings just because she did not want to train. Feeling guilty she went to training and afterwards her condition deteriorated. (Athlete 2.). This is a good example how there was interaction between athlete and coach but the coach did not really heard what she was trying to say. This athlete is a little bit over 20 and has so many years of good training behind her that she knows when it is not good time to work out. Coach's reaction made her feel like she was cheating. This way coach showed that he does not really trust on this athletes judgement. It would be important that when dealing with adult athletes it is their own responsibility that training go well. They are usually ambitious athletes and even the thought of skipping the training makes them feel bad athlete. This is the reason why coach's responsibility in these cases is to restrain athletes.

From the entire interviews, one concern that rose up was interaction. All the interviewers mentioned that interaction between athletes and coaches is vital for successful cooperation. Unfortunately, not all of the athletes feel that their voice is heard. Good example came from my third interview. She mentioned that because there was only one professional coach at the trainings some of the athletes told the issues that were bothering them to student coaches. The professional coach did not have a clue how these young athletes felt until the student coaches told him. 3. Athlete told that this was not because the coach did not care but because of the lack of time. Athletes told matters that were bothering them to the girl that I interviewed. She said that they really had problems that might possibly harm their concentration or even performance during training and competitions. (Athlete 3)

5 DISCUSSION

Questions asked are in appendices part of the thesis. The first three questions were study for a background from these three athletes. I wanted to know approximately with how many different coaches and groups the interviewees have been dealing with during their career. The amount of groups and especially the level the groups were important. Important because I had strong feeling that the closer athletes are to the top, the fiercer the competition might be. This actually seemed to be true. Athlete 2. Had been closest to the top and the situation in that group was the worst from these three interviews. The next three questions were more of the actual leadership. They were asked whether some coach has had a positive or negative impact. All the athletes pointed out that no one had a strong negative impact but some have had a stronger positive impact than others. Some coaches just have a good atmosphere and training goes smoothly. The question related to the topic "how would you describe a good leader?" By asking this, wanted to find out if the athletes had the same opinion as in the theory. The last three questions asked, were more of group atmosphere and do the athletes benefit from group training. I asked this because the three interviewees were all individual athletes and compared to team athletes their biggest goal is success in their own individual competition. It was no surprise, that they all answered that they do think they benefit group training. The questions gave me good answers, especially when I asked more information after the actual question. I was lucky that I had good athletes because they gave good answers and interviewees were interested of this topic. Still, questions could have been better and I think that afterwards I would change some of the questions. For example, I would forget the background part because I think I did not get too much information from it.

Before I started the thesis, I had some idea what kind of answers I will get from my interviewees. I had talked with skiers and athletes in general about their relationships with coaches and other athletes. In addition, I had some expectations because of my own background as a skier. I knew that there is some problems and not all the athletes in the field are satisfied with the situation. It turned out to be true and the athletes had something they felt they wanted to share with me.

My feeling before the interviews was that jealousy plays a huge role in sports and in skiing. You might not see it in daily activities but it is present and athletes who are close to one another feel it. Being jealous is unfortunately part of sport and other life areas also. The way people handle it makes it a problem or just normal phenomenon. Every athlete feels jealous sometimes; some feel it stronger than others do. It would be the key thing for a successful group that athletes could honestly celebrate the victory and success of others not only their own. I realised that athletes that I interviewed pointed out that the best atmosphere was in the groups in which all were friends and they were truly happy if someone succeeded inside the group. I sensed this especially from the athlete 2 who has the most experienced of different groups. She had been in the National team and teams that have athletes below the national level. Especially the latest training squad that she was part of had a strong positive atmosphere inside the group. I had a possibility to take part in one of their training camps during this thesis project. I was surprised how well they fit together even though there were so many different personalities and the size of the group is big (20 athletes). What I noticed was that they appreciate each other and they accepted everyone as they are although they did not share the same ideas and ways of training.

What surprised me the most was that athlete 1 did not have any negative concerns he wanted to share. We have been training also together in a training group. At that time, I remember and so do some other athletes that there were some negative things in the group atmosphere. Somehow this made me think that do male athletes have different ways of communicating and can they celebrate success of an other person easier than women. All I can remember that spending time with those boys back then, showed me that if they had problems they said it right away and the problem was solved. Open communication might be the key for successful training in squads.

One thing that came to my mind after interviewing and discussing with different athletes might be one solution in the future. I started to think does the level of competition matter in the atmosphere. One of the athletes that I interviewed had been part of the national B-team but also in the teams that are on the lower level.

She had the most difficulties in-group atmosphere in national B-team. In addition, when she was training in the squads that were competing on the lower level she did not have any problems. This made me think if the athletes who are closer to the top and know it, have such fierce competition that it is shown in the group chemistry. They know that they are close to the professional ski career or maybe the best skiers in the world and they have more passion in everything they do. On the other hand, the athletes, that train on lower level or are younger and are not so close to the top yet and because of that have a better atmosphere in the group. This is just something that I think might be one thing causing bad atmosphere. It might be that the athletes that are for example in national level groups know that they are close to a break through and because of this they want to do things better and every little detail counts.

5.1 Leadership in sport and working life

There is similarities in these two still quite different areas. When working in teams whether it is in sport or in work, group atmosphere matters. Working in a group that appreciates each individual and their work can benefit all the others also. Problems may occur but it would be a necessity to discuss those problems openly. In-group training and working it is also helpful to its members. A group that shares opinions, trust each other, cares and has a safe environment can help its members to better results. When group members give instructions constructively and listen to everyone's opinions and respects them, the group can boost each other to its best. The most important thing in these both areas is interaction. I have not counted how many times it has been mentioned in this thesis but the amount is big. It is one of the most important characteristic for coach. Interaction between athlete, coach, and boss subordinate. When asking the athlete, how are you doing or do you have something on your mind can influence for better performance in training and competitions. Athletes feel appreciated and they might even tell the coach something they did not know is important until they say it aloud. In working life, subordinates whose opinion is heard feel that their output

is important. Open conversation can lead to new solutions and hopefully better communications in the future.

Thing not mentioned before is that the coach or boss is not always the one to blame. They have a big responsibility for sure but what if one of the athletes or subordinates do not want to make an effort for a better group atmosphere. There might be a person who poisons the atmosphere on purpose. Even if the leader would do his best to clear the air, this one person is making working together hard. In these cases, it is hard to figure out how to improve the situation. The coach or boss can be as positive, constructive and caring as possible but this one person is doing everything to sabotage the situation.

My opinion is that the same leadership skills are needed in sport and in working life. Even though the goals are different, the same rules apply in communication, goal setting and people skills. In both areas, it is vital that there is an open atmosphere and trust between people. Giving feedback and setting hard, reachable goals will make the company better in the future and gives motivation to push harder, whether it is about work or training. Sometimes leaders at work actually see themselves as a coach and why not. Their job is to coach their employees to better results as sport coach does. As a conclusion, I would say that for a good result, the leader should listen, communicate, set goals, give feedback and be a motivator but most important to build trust between him and subordinates and this trust will become by appreciating the employees or athletes.

5.2 Self-development

My own development during this thesis project was huge. I started the thesis almost a year ago when we had the course where we presented our thesis plan. That course did not go so well, I passed the course but with the lowest amount of workload. The reason why did not do that course properly was that I did not understand the importance of the course. Afterwards I have realised the importance.

All that was covered during the course I had to study again and ask from several people. It would have helped me a lot if I had studied during that course. The last day of the course sums it up pretty well. We had presentations in which we had to tell what the thesis idea is and presented it as we have to in the real thesis presentation. Of course, I did not attend the lesson in which they told this to everyone. As a result, I did not know the instructions, which were extremely important in this presentation. I got bad feedback but also something I could improve in the future. The teacher specifically said that I have good skills in English so I will be fine doing the presentation in the future. That sentence gave me confidence.

The writing process started slowly. The idea was clear but was not sure how to start. I struggled with the limitations and did not get much done during the summer. I can explain it with the fact that I had to work, which took more time than I expected but that, would be lie. I had enough time but I was inefficient to be honest. I postponed my starting so that before I noticed it was fall already. At fall I write whenever I felt like it but the speed was too slow. In addition, I did not graduate before Christmas as planned. That was a shame but expected. Before Christmas, I started to write faster and now finally this thesis is almost finished.

I have to say that lot of things have happened during this process. My life changed and went upside down. All of this has made me feel more confident and somehow I now trust myself more than before. As a subject, this gave me completely new angles in life. I learnt many things of group dynamics and leadership skills. I also went deep in my own thoughts of what kind of a leader I would be and I can use some of the results that I came up in my thesis in real life. This leader topic and to study it deeper can help me in my future career, which I hope will be a police.

I think I had good athletes for my interview. They were people that have been close to me and sport for a while. Knowing these athletes was a good because it helped them to open up because they trusted me. Even though I knew all of them well, there were surprises in the interviews. One thing that I did well was that I

chose athletes from both genders. It made me realise that there are huge differences in how boys and girls see the same situation. Surprisingly the mishaps girls noticed and were sad about did not bother boys at all. This difference would be nice to study more. Is it just between my athletes or is it common also in other sports. For my own experience, girls like to speak behind back and boys are known to say things aloud. This might be one reason why there are not a big problem between boys. Boys clear the atmosphere right away while girls put the problem back and share it with other girls who might also be part of the team. This leads to the situation where girls create groups inside the group.

It would be interesting to carry out a similar study for athletes who are in the national A-team and from different nationalities. I do know that some of the national teams have put an effort in improving team spirit and they have improved their skills on the track. A recent document made by Norwegians pointed out that improving team spirit and putting an effort in it is now shown on the results. They pointed out as my athletes that when there is a good spirit inside the team they feel that they are pushing each other forward. (Verdens beste skijenter, 2015, Norsk Rikskringkasting)

5.3 Reliability

I had a strong sense of the results that I will get. This was because of my own background and from the discussions that I have had beforehand, even way before I chose this topic. These expectations guide my research. There are pros and cons for having so hard expectations that I had. It was definitely a good thing that I had my own experiences because then I knew what kind of matters I wanted to ask and know. I also had some kind of expectation of who the people are that I want to interview. Somehow I knew what they are going to answer and from this angle I knew that I could get really good opinions from them. In addition, opinions that supported my prior knowledge. On the other hand, my own expectations

were so strong that it distracted the research a little bit. If I would not have expectations, I might have chosen different athletes and it might have changed the results. Because of the strong opinions beforehand, I think this research is not that reliable and it would have needed more interviewed persons in order to get results that are more reliable.

Little amount of athletes is one reason why this research is not that comprehensive. It would need more athletes and from different backgrounds. I also strongly believe that genders have different views also in this specific matter. It was clear even in my research even though I did not even have so many male skiers that I interviewed. On the other hand, it is clear even on my research that there are issues that athletes find important to fix in order to improve the atmosphere inside the group. I also realised that no matter what gender or age the qualities that athletes find important are quite the same. In addition, the qualities of a good coach were quite the same. Even though the amount of interviewees was small and there was only one male participating, they strongly shared the same opinions. These results and studying theory gives me strong feeling that these qualities are the ones that truly matter.

In order to make research more comprehensive it would be good to compare different sports and individual sport versus team sport. It would show whether the things I found are common also in other individual sports not just in skiing. The comparison between individual and team sport would be interesting because in team sport athletes have a shared goal to go for versus individual athletes have their own goals. If the results would support the fact that teams have a better atmosphere than in individualistic sports these could be used as instructions in the future for better communication between athletes and coaches.

In addition to get stronger view on cross-country skiing, it would be interesting to interview athletes from different age groups and levels. Now I had athletes from almost the same age group, one male and two women. One of the athletes was more successful than others were. Results are not reliable because for this research, I spoke these matters with the women athlete beforehand and it directed

my questions. I kind of lead interviewees to the answers that I wanted to have. With the male interviewee, I did not speak beforehand and the results were different. The reason might be the fact that I did not have so strong expectations that I had with girls but probably male athletes have more relaxed atmosphere between athletes than women do.

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Interview questions

1. How long have you been skiing?
 2. In what kind of groups have you been part?
 3. For example, size, name and what have been the amount of coaches in these groups.
 4. Approximately, with how many coaches have you been dealing with?
 5. Has different coaches have had positive/negative impact on group's performance?
 6. How about group atmosphere?
 7. How would you describe a good leader? In this case coach
 8. Does group atmosphere matter in individual sport?
 9. Do you feel that you benefit of group training?
 10. Have you felt inequality between athletes?
-
1. Kauan harrastanu ko. lajia?
 2. Minkälaisiin ryhmiin on kuulunut "uransa" aikana?
 3. Arviolta kuinka monen valmentajan kanssa olet ollut tekemisissä?
 4. Onko eri valmentajilla tai heidän johtamistaidoillaan ollut positiivinen/negatiivinen vaikutus sinun/ryhmäsi suorittamiseen?
 5. Entä ryhmä henkeen?

6. Millainen on hyvä johtaja? Tässä tapauksessa valmentaja.

7. Onko ryhmähengellä väliä yksilöurheilussa?

8. Koetko hyötyväsi ryhmätreenaamisesta?

11. Oletko kokenut eriarvoisuutta valmennettavien välillä?