

**ETHICAL LEADERSHIP OF ARTISTIC GYMNASTICS COACHES AND ITS RELATION TO JOB SATISFACTION****\*Amalia Drakou**

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**Abstract**

Ethical leadership in sport has been investigated from various perspectives such as coaches', volunteers', sport administrators' and sport fans' perspectives. During the last decades, it has begun to claim much of the scientific attention, due to the existence of scandals in sports that receive a lot of publicity from the mass media. The aim of this study was to investigate the perspective of artistic gymnastics coaches on ethical leadership. Coaches' job satisfaction and its relationship to ethical leadership was also explored. The sample consisted of 34 Greek artistic gymnastics coaches who coached in sport clubs of Thessaloniki, Greece. The self-reported questionnaire of ethical leadership (QueL) was used to assess coaches' ethical leadership. It consists of 27 items distributed to two factors: "telos" which represents the ethical goal of a leader's behavior (16 items) and "ethos" which reflects the ethical principles underlying the leader's personal attitudes and characteristics (11 items). The answers were given in a 6 points Likert scale format (1=It does not characterize at all to 6=It totally characterizes me). The short form of Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was used to assess Coaches' job satisfaction, that consists of 20 items, 12 of which belong to "intrinsic job satisfaction" (feelings regarding the inherent characteristics of the job) and eight of them belong to "extrinsic job satisfaction" (feelings about aspects external to the actual work). The answers were given in a 5 points Likert scale format (1=totally disagree to 5=totally agree). The questionnaires showed satisfactory internal consistency with values over .70 (Cronbach, 1951). Results showed that "telos" and "ethos" were highly correlated with "extrinsic job satisfaction". A low, but significant correlation was noticed between "telos" and coaches' age. The findings of the study are discussed in a "closed circuit" approach of sport clubs, that include all stakeholders and have the possibility to create and cultivate ethical behaviors. This study's significance lies in the fact that ethical leadership forms the cornerstone for ensuring a sustainable and healthy sport organization, such as an artistic gymnastics club, which in turn contributes to sports' moral influence upon individuals and society. Proposals for future research are also given.

**Keywords:** Ethical leadership, Artistic gymnastics, Coaches, Job satisfaction.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Leadership has been studied for decades in various and diverse environments such as politics (Peele, 2005), education (Crisol Moya *et al.*, 2020), the workplace (Decuyper & Schaufeli, 2020), industries (Fatas-Villafranca, 2009) and sports (Sagas & Wigley, 2014; Riemer & Chelladurai, 1995). According to Northouse (2018), leadership is the process where an individual (leader) influences the behavior of a group of people, so that a common target is fulfilled. Various theories about leadership have been developed within the field of organizational behavior and psychology which can be categorized to the following: a) trait theories (they deal with the characteristics of leaders' personality), b) behavioral theories (they deal with the behavior that leaders present), c) contingency theories (they deal with leaders' ability to adapt in new situations and remain effective) and d) contemporary theories. Leadership's importance is decisive for the achievement of goals (Saputa, 2021). Goal setting on the other hand, is a fundamental aspect of sports and coaches are the ones who lead athletes to achieve goals. A lot of research has been conducted on sport coaches' leadership styles (González-García, Martinent, & Nicolas, 2022; Kim & Cruz, 2016) and how they influence important variables such as team / athletes' satisfaction, athletes' motivation, team performance, goal attainment and team cohesion. During the last decades, the ethical dimensions of sport leadership have begun to claim much of the scientific attention, and this may be due to the

existence of scandals in sports that receive a lot of publicity from the mass media (Cleret, McNamee & Page, 2015). In most of the relevant studies, coach leadership styles and behaviors are investigated through their athletes' perceptions and opinions. In this study, the coaches' ethical leadership will be investigated through their own perceptions.

**Ethical leadership- Traits and behaviors**

As Mendonca argues (2001), ethical leadership forms the cornerstone for ensuring a sustainable and healthy organization. It belongs to the contemporary theories, together with transactional and transformational leadership. According to Brown and his colleagues (2015), ethical leadership is about "demonstrating normatively appropriate behavior through personal actions and interpersonal relationships and promoting this behavior to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision making". One of the basic components of ethical leadership is integrity (Kolthoff *et al.*, 2010; Brown & Treviño, 2006). A leader's integrity is reflected in the consistency between his/her beliefs and his/her actions, in the display of exemplary behavior that is a model for the subordinates, in respecting the laws, moral principles and commonly accepted values. Sarros and his colleagues (2006) add the characteristics of "wisdom", "compassion" "humility", "humor", and "courage" at the list with the ethical leader's traits. Hendrix and his colleagues (2004) talk about "moral excellence" involving in ethical leadership while Peterson and Seligman (2004) argue that "moral excellence" can be developed. All the above examples of behavior make the leader trustworthy and able to motivate other people to behave in an ethically correct way by the leader's own paradigm. Main

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concern of ethical leadership is the values and socially accepted norms that a leader follows during the decision-making process. Therefore, an ethical leader makes decisions based on ethical values and is characterized by reliability and justice (Brown & Treviño, 2006) as well as prudence and courage (Stouten, Van Dijke & De Kremer, 2012), facts that make him/her a strong influencer upon the followers' behaviors.

### Ethical leadership – dimensions

Trevino, Hartman and Brown (2000) argue that ethical leadership consists of two distinct dimensions, the moral person and the moral manager and that the ethical leader is the person who scores high in both dimensions. The moral person dimension (or else ethical facet) is about all the personal characteristics of the leader (such as honesty, sincerity, integrity) and all the behaviors which show concern for other people (decision making based on values, being fair, etc). Instead, the moral manager is about the leader's effort to influence the followers' ethical behaviors (by communicating ethical values, functioning as role model, creating a fair organizational system). At the same vein, Mitropoulou and her colleagues (2020), developed a new theoretical framework which consists of 27 ethical leadership dimensions. These dimensions are categorized into two factors, "telos" and "ethos." Both words come from ancient Greek. "Telos" represents the ethical objective, intent or ultimate aim of a leader's behavior) and "ethos" represents the moral groundwork and values that form the leader's individual attitudes and traits. In terms of sports, Minlanovic and her colleagues (2021) argue that ethics is all the unwritten rules that people who are involved in sports follow in order to maintain fair relations in all sport aspects. They go on by highlighting that ethical environment in sports increases sports' moral influence and refines moral climate among young people. Ethical behavior can be defined as a low frequency of unfair play or involvement in undesirable social behaviors (Chow, Murray, & Feltz, 2009). It is exercised from sport administrators, sport coaches, sport athletes and sport governing bodies.

### Job satisfaction

Coaches' job satisfaction will be also explored to add knowledge to how artistic gymnastics coaches feel about their job. It is a concept very much studied, because of its well-established relationship with important psychological and organizational issues such as burnout, absenteeism, turnover, organizational commitment, life satisfaction and motivation (Theodosiou *et al.*, 2020). Job satisfaction consists of multiple dimensions, encompassing factors like salary, colleagues, career progression, working conditions, social recognition, supervision, job nature, autonomy, and security. Weiss and his colleagues (1977) argued that job satisfaction dimensions can be categorized in two factors: intrinsic job satisfaction (which includes all integral qualities related to a job) and extrinsic job satisfaction (which includes all peripheral characteristics of a job). Many researchers up to now, seem to agree with this categorization (Bhagwandeem, 2021; Lakatamitou, 2020; Hirschfield, 2000).

### Research on Ethical Leadership in Sport

Ethical leadership in sport has been investigated from various perspectives such as coaches (Constandt *et al.*, 2018), volunteers in non-profit sport organizations (Benevene, *et al.*,

2018), sport administrators (Burton *et al.*, 2017) and sport fans (Constandt *et al.*, 2020). Constandt *et al.* (2018) investigated how coach ethical leadership influence non-professional soccer players. A sample of 436 adult players completed an online questionnaire which consisted of the Ethical Leadership Scale of Brown *et al.* (2005), the Ethical Climate Index of Arnaud (2010) and the Affective Commitment Scale which measures affective organizational commitment. The findings suggest that the impact of coach ethical leadership as perceived by players on their affective organizational commitment is partly mediated by the ethical climate perceived within the club. Additionally, players' organizational tenure has a modest influence on their affective organizational commitment.

In another research, Wells and Walker (2016) conducted a qualitative case study where they interviewed nine university stakeholders and analyzed public documents of a ten-year period, to conclude that clear communication, a component of ethical leadership, serves as a crucial factor for success during periods of organizational change in collegiate athletic departments. Benevene and her colleagues (2018) investigated the effect of ethical leadership on volunteers' job satisfaction of non-profit sport organizations. The sample (198 Italian volunteers of different non-profit sport organizations) fulfilled questionnaires which included the Ethical Leadership Scale (Brown *et al.*, 2005) and the Volunteer Satisfaction Index (Vecina *et al.*, 2009). Some important findings were a) ethical leadership was able to create satisfaction to volunteers and b) the level of satisfaction was influenced by how volunteers evaluated the situation in which they were engaged. They finally concluded that being in an ethical environment allowed volunteer to take pride in their work, resulting in increased satisfaction.

Megheirkouni (2022) explored the direct and indirect impacts of the psychological contract on job satisfaction, employing a quantitative research methodology. A total of 1022 surveys were administered within non-profit sports organizations. The findings revealed that servant leadership served as a complete mediator in the connection between the psychological contract and job satisfaction, whereas leader-member exchange (LMX) acted as a partial mediator in this association. Furthermore, a positive correlation was observed between the psychological contract and job satisfaction within the non-profit sports sector.

In another study, Gorsira and her colleagues (2018) investigated the potential correlation between the ethical atmosphere within organizations and instances of corruption, exploring whether such a relationship influences corruption by way of individual motivations for engaging in corrupt behavior. Analysis of Data gathered by 523 individuals from public and private sector showed, among other things, that employees who believe their workplace prioritizes self-interest over ethical values are more likely to engage in corrupt activities. Most studies on ethical leadership focus on the opinions of subordinates or employees (Mitropoulou *et al.*, 2020). However, this study aims to investigate ethical leadership of artistic gymnastics coaches from their own perspective. As Fleenor and his colleagues argue (2010), assessment of leadership based solely on followers' ratings may be insufficient, as it fails to encompass critical dimensions of leadership (such as networking, negotiation strategies, planning and organizing) that may not be fully comprehended or appreciated by followers. The study will also explore the coaches' job satisfaction and its relationship to ethical

leadership. It is hypothesized that ethical leadership of artistic gymnastics coaches relates to their job satisfaction and more specifically to the extrinsic factor of job satisfaction. The study's significance relies on the fact that ethical leadership will be explored from leaders' point of view.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

Thirty-four artistic gymnastics coaches ( $N = 34$ , 13: male, 21: female) with a mean age of 41,29 (SD: 14,13) participated in the study. Most of them (26) were coaching female gymnasts, four of them male gymnasts and three of them both female and male gymnasts.

### Data collection

Data were collected a) through anonymous paper-pencil questionnaires administrated by the author at the end of coaching sessions and b) through google forms to coaches who did not have the time to answer the first way. All participants were ensured that their answers will be confidential and that they will be used only for the purpose of the present study. Even though the size of the sample is small, yet it is representative of the whole population of artistic gymnastics coaches who coach in the 20 sport clubs of Thessaloniki, North Greece.

### Measures

**Ethical leadership:** The self-reported Questionnaire of ethical Leadership (QueL) of Mitropoulou and her colleagues (2019) was used to assess coaches' ethical leadership. Coaches were asked to evaluate themselves in terms of ethical leadership. The scale consists of 27 items distributed to two factors: "telos" (16 items) and "ethos" (11 items) and it has been used successfully in five studies in Greek environment, giving evidence of adequate validity and reliability (Mitripoulou, *et al.*, 2020). "Telos" represents the ethical goal, purpose, or end of a leader's behavior, while "ethos" reflects the ethical foundations and principles underlying the leader's personal attitudes and characteristics. Each item represents a dimension of ethical leadership. "Telos" dimension includes the following items: "ethical culture", "ethical guidance", "ethical insight", "application of green policies", "ethical evaluation", "forwarding ethical training", "ethical encouragement", "development of ethical vision",

"ethical vision of stakeholders", "ethical determination", "clarification of ethical roles", "ethical vision", "ethical possibility", "ethical strategy", "ethical vigilance" and "ethical self-control". "Ethos" dimension includes the following items: "honesty", "integrity", "sincerity", "reward of ethical behavior", "altruism", "humility", "role-modelling ethical behavior", "collaboration", "ethical responsibility", trust and "power distribution". The answers are given in a 6 points Likert scale format from 1=It does not characterize me at all to 6=It characterizes me very much.

**Job satisfaction:** The short form of Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) (Weiss, *et al.*, 1977) was used to assess Coaches' job satisfaction. This instrument was chosen due to its capability to assess two distinct factors: a) intrinsic and b) extrinsic job satisfaction (Hirschfield, 2000). Intrinsic job satisfaction pertains to individuals' feelings regarding the inherent characteristics of their job tasks, while extrinsic job satisfaction involves their feelings about aspects external to the actual work (Spector, 1997). The MSQ consists of 20 items - statements, 12 of which belong to the intrinsic factor (e.g., "I am satisfied by the feeling of accomplishment I get from my job") and 8 belong to the extrinsic factor (e.g., "I am satisfied by the working conditions"). The answers are given in a 5 points Likert scale format from 1=I totally disagree to 5=I totally agree. This questionnaire has been also used in Greek language showing acceptable validity and reliability (Lakatamitou *et al.*, 2020).

### Statistical analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to assess the internal consistency of the instruments and mean scores were calculated for every subscale of the two questionnaires. Thus, four latent were created: "telos", "ethos", 'intrinsic job satisfaction' and 'extrinsic job satisfaction'. Pearson's r index was used to explore the correlations between the variables that were created.

## RESULTS

The questionnaires' subscales showed satisfactory internal consistency with values over .70 (Cronbach, 1951). The study found significant correlations between certain variables. "Telos" and "ethos" were highly correlated with "extrinsic job satisfaction". "Intrinsic job satisfaction" did not show any correlation with other variables. However, a low but significant correlation was observed between "telos" and the age of the participants, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean scores, standard deviations, Pearson's r values, and Cronbach's alpha in the diagonal

Variable	$M \pm SD$	1	2	3	4	5
1. Telos	5.13 ± .49	.88				
2. Ethos	5.45 ± .39	.72**	.79			
3. Intrinsic JS	4.10 ± .54	.35	.27	.80		
4. Extrinsic JS	5.33 ± .44	.85**	.84**	.24	.89	
5. Age	41,29±14,13	.41*	.32	.13	.26	-

  

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**Table 2. Mean scores and standard deviations of “telos” and “ethos” items**

Telos			Ethos		
Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD
Ethical vigilance	5.62	±.60	Collaboration	5.62	±.60
Ethical insight	5.56	±.56	Reward of ethical behavior	5.59	±.70
Clarification of ethical roles	5.47	±.66	Honesty	5.53	±.61
Ethical encouragement	5.44	±.70	Altruism	5.53	±.66
Ethical possibility	5.26	±.66	Sincerity	5.50	±.66
Ethical culture	5.26	±.71	Ethical behavior role model	5.47	±.56
Ethical mission	5.24	±.65	Integrity	5.47	±.66
Ethical determination	5.18	±.90	Trust	5.47	±.50
Ethical guidance	5.15	±.74	Ethical responsibility	5.47	±.74
Ethical strategy	5.12	±.88	Humility	5.35	±.73
Development of ethical mission	5.09	±.83	Power distribution	4.97	±.100
Ethical evaluation	5.03	±.90			
Ethical self-control	4.97	±.83			
Forwarding ethical training	4.97	±.100			
Ethical influence	4.56	±.116			
Applications of green policies	4.09	±.111			

**Table 3. Mean scores and standard deviations of “extrinsic satisfaction” and “intrinsic satisfaction” items**

Intrinsic satisfaction			Extrinsic satisfaction		
Item	Mean	SD	Item	Mean	SD
Activity	4.41	±.74	Recognition	3.94	±.127
Social services	4.38	±.73	Co-workers	3.88	±.120
Achievement	4.35	±.69	Supervision (Human resources)	3.85	±.125
Responsibility	4.35	±.81	Sport club's policies and practices	3.85	±.120
Ability utilization	4.29	±.71	Supervision (Technical)	3.71	±.126
Creativity	4.24	±.78	Moral values	3.53	±.116
Social status	4.03	±.102	Compensation	3.35	±.120
Authority	4.00	±.82	Advancement opportunities	3.32	±.131
Variety	3.97	±.111			
Moral values	3.76	±.130			
Security	3.68	±.138			
Autonomy	3.56	±.116			

## DISCUSSION

This study explored artistic gymnastics coaches' ethical leadership and its relation to their job satisfaction. The sample comprised of 34 coaches who represented the 20 artistic gymnastics sport clubs of the second biggest city of Greece, Thessaloniki. Coaches were asked to evaluate themselves about the ethical leadership style they exercise in coaching context. As shown from the results, coaches characterized themselves as ethical leaders scoring high in both “telos” and “ethos”. Regarding job satisfaction, they were satisfied with both “intrinsic job satisfaction” and “extrinsic job satisfaction”.

### Telos

In the realm of leadership, the concept of "telos" encapsulates the overarching ethical goal or purpose driving a leader's actions and decisions. It signifies the aim that guides the leader's behavior towards achieving a desired outcome or vision (Mitropoulou, 2019). “Telos” is very similar to what Trevino and her colleagues (2000) define as “moral manager”. It is a concept that revolves around a leader's endeavors to shape the ethical conduct of their followers, by instilling ethical values through communication, and establishing equitable organizational frameworks. In regard to this study, “ethical vigilance” was the highest scored item of “telos” among coaches. That means that coaches of this study believe they transmit ethical values, and they want their athletes to commit to them (such as treating in a fair manner and telling the truth). They support discussions and clarifications about their athletes' ethical commitments and obligations, aiming to absolute transparency (“clarification of ethical roles”) and they make tough decisions decisively without hesitation when faced with ethical dilemmas (“ethical determination”).

Moreover, they support their athletes' personal development by caring and offering equal opportunities to everyone (“ethical encouragement”), they inspire their athletes to a common vision which is identified by the common good (“ethical vision”), they create and maintain a coaching culture which emphasizes moral values and beliefs (“ethical culture”) and they implement a pure, ethical strategy for handling coaching issues (“ethical strategy”).

### Ethos

“Ethos,” on the other hand, delves into the fundamental moral principles and values that underpin a leader's individual character and beliefs. It aligns with the concept of “moral person” as defined by Trevino, Hartman and Brown (2000), since it encompasses the ethical framework upon which the leader's attitudes, traits, and behaviors are constructed. According to the results, coaches of this study achieved, among “ethos” items, the highest score in “collaboration”. In other words, they strongly believe that they advocate for collaboration and teamwork among athletes, striving for peaceful resolution of conflicts. Among others, they characterize themselves as honest, trustworthy, sincere, and they encourage open dialogue regarding their athletes' ethical standards and practices (“power distribution”).

### Ethical leadership factors and extrinsic satisfaction

From the results of this study, it depicts that both “telos” and “ethos” are highly correlated to “extrinsic satisfaction”. As mentioned previously, “extrinsic satisfaction” refers to how individuals feel regarding factors external to their jobs' qualities (Hirschfield, 2000; Spector, 1997). The items that

were used to investigate “external” satisfaction explored feelings about a) coaches’ supervisor (how supervisors treat their subordinates and their ability to make decisions), b) sport clubs’ policies (reliability between policies and their actual implementation, reward system, development prospects and salary/quantity of work) and c) feelings about working environment (colleagues and working conditions). One explanation of this finding may be the following: coaches are the leaders in the coaching session, training and guiding their athletes. However, at the same time, they are the followers of a head coach who oversees coaching in the sport club, or of the director of the sport club, or even of the board of Greek gymnastics federation. No matter who the direct supervisor of the coach is, he/she has the “power” through administrating the sport, to create (or not create) an ethical environment that will influence coaches. He/she may as well act as role model, exactly just like coaches act for their athletes. In ideal conditions, this may create a closed circuit that will create and maintain ethical behaviors. As Minlanovic and her colleagues (2021) argue, the cultivation of an ethical environment within sports augments the moral influence of sports and fosters a heightened ethical ambiance, thereby refining ethos of individuals who are exposed to sports (participants, administrators, fans, etc). Additionally, literature has shown that “moral excellence” which is a fundamental quality of ethical leadership can be developed (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and this may be the issue that this correlation implies about coaches’ behaviors.

On the contrary, if the supervisors support an ambiguous coaching climate, this may force coaches respond with obscure strategies (influence upon “telos”), even if they have ethical background (high score in “ethos”). This explanation is in accordance with the findings of Gorsira’s and her colleagues’ study (2018) about corruption in organizations, where they claim that, employees who hold the perception that their organizational climate prioritize self-interest over ethical principles, are more likely to exhibit a greater susceptibility to engaging in unethical behavior.

### Age and “telos”

As shown from the results, age significantly correlates with ethical leadership, and more specifically with the factor “telos”. In previous studies, the age of a follower has been identified as a factor that impacts ethical reasoning and ethical decision-making (Cagle & Baucus, 2006). As followers age and accumulate experience, they tend to mature, broaden their perspectives, and enhance their understanding of various contexts and situations, bringing their experiences closer to reality. With age comes an advancement in ethical development (Forte, 2004). Similarly, as coaches get older, they accumulate experience and deepen their comprehension of diverse contexts and situations, thereby aligning their experiences more closely with reality. Taking into account that a) there was a significant correlation between coaches’ age and “telos” and b) coaches of this study are in the beginning of the fifth decade of their lives, this may imply that with advancing age, there is a progression in ethical development among coaches. Nevertheless, the results found in this study lack of a theoretical model’s support and this can be recorded as a weakness of the study. They, however, imply a sophisticated relationship among the beliefs of coaches about their ethical leadership and their feelings about certain aspects of their job,

that could lead to an inclusive model embracing all sport clubs stakeholders in future research.

### Conclusion

This study explored ethical leadership of artistic gymnastics coaches and its relation to job satisfaction. Coaches evaluated their ethical leadership with high scores in both ethical leadership factors, “telos” (ethical objective, intent, or ultimate aim of a leader’s behavior) and “ethos” (moral groundwork and values that form the leader’s individual attitudes and traits). “Telos” and “ethos” were highly correlated with “extrinsic job satisfaction”, and this may be explained by the fact that coaches have a double role. The first role is to act as leaders in coaching context leading their athletes and the second role is to act as followers lead by their direct supervisor. The direct supervisor is responsible for implementing policies and procedures of the sport club. Supervision and sport policies play an important role in “extrinsic satisfaction” of sport coaches. One might argue that athletes, coaches, and coaches’ supervisors are the key-parts of a closed circuit which has the potential to create and maintain an ethical environment, which in turn may increase sports’ moral influence in general. Future research with larger samples will shed light on ethical leadership differences in relation to individual attributes like coaches’ gender and level of athletes. It would also be interested to explore ethical leadership of coaches in a context that would cover all stakeholders of the sport unit (club and/or federation), including parents’ athletes and superior supervisors. That would give answers and interpretations about issues that involve misunderstanding in what ethical behavior is about.

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