



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

LEADERSHIP

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1.1. Scientific research

1.1.1. Definition

Leadership is one of those concepts that does not have a specific definition that everyone agrees with, much like love and peace. The definition of leadership is commonly a direct result of the experiences of the individual (Northouse, 2001).

In its simplest form, leadership can be defined as the ability to influence and guide those around you. A more refined definition, as provided by the New Oxford Dictionary of English, is that leadership is “the action of leading a group of people or an organisation” (The New Oxford Dictionary of English, 2001). Iszatt-White et al. (2017) state that leadership is a process where an individual can influence a group of other individuals to achieve common goals. One of their implications is that for someone to be considered a leader, they should be able to build authentic relationships with people, and they must be able to influence those following them to behave in a certain way that allows them to reach their common goals (Iszatt-White et al., 2017). The research surrounding leadership first started with looking at leadership styles from CEOs and managers of multimillion-dollar companies within the business sector, and that is still the case for the bulk of research on the topic. This is important to note as some of the definitions and concepts that will be explored are in relation to said business sector. However, they have carefully been adapted to the sports context.

Leadership can also be seen as the ability to motivate and inspire people to see and engage with a vision as well as coaching and building a team that can effectively achieve said vision (Iszatt-White et al., 2017). The traits most associated with leadership, according to evidence reviewed by Kirkpatrick and Locke (1996) are the following: (a) drive—the ability to achieve and motivate, have energy and ambition, and take initiative; (b) leadership motivation—having the desire to lead; (c) honesty and integrity—being able to consolidate your words and actions and be trustworthy; (d) self-confidence—being assertive, decisive, and emotionally stable; (e) cognitive ability—being able to analyse situations, have problem-solving skills, and manage perceptions; (f) knowledge of the business—being able to gather and assimilate extensive information about the field you are in, and being able to provide suitable visions, goals, and

strategies for those that you are leading.

Ubuntu

Ubuntu is an old South African term that speaks to humanness (Nzimakwe, 2014). It also speaks to how a person becomes who they are through those around them (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). It is best recognised as a form of humanism in the South African perspective. It provides a glimpse into the South African worldview of societal relations and how they demonstrate their social and humanistic ethics (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). Ubuntu stresses the importance of community, solidarity, and caring (Nzimakwe, 2014). It is considered a foundation for basic values that are seen in the ways that South African people think and act towards each other and those that they encounter in their paths of life (Sulamoyo, 2010).

There are many ways to interpret what Ubuntu can mean to different South Africans. What can be agreed upon is that it is a philosophy of life, a way of living that embodies and acknowledges the human experience. It represents the essence of being, humanity, and morality (Brack et al., 2003).

Ubuntu speaks to the bonds one has with others; in most African languages, it can be expressed as “being self because of others.” The most commercialised version of this saying is “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu” in the South African isiZulu language. The quote can be directly translated as “a person is a person by people.” Such statements as “I am because we are” and “I am human because I belong” express this principle (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013).

Ubuntu carries the essence that what is good for the community is good for the individual. What humiliates a member of the community is humiliating to the community. Forgiveness is an integral part of the spirit of Ubuntu (Van Rensberg, 2007).

Throughout the years, many words and statements have been used to describe the feeling and presence of Ubuntu. Words such as sympathy, compassion, benevolence, solidarity, hospitality, generosity, sharing, openness, affirming, available, kindness, caring, harmony, interdependence, obedience, collectivity, and consensus.

As evident in the discussion above, Ubuntu has many characteristics and definitions, and according to Muncie (2011), some of those characteristics are treating people with respect, a sense of universal brotherhood and sharing, contributing positively to those around you and in the community or society,

and being non-discriminatory in your actions and choices to be helpful and kind to those around you no matter the ethnical or socio-economical background (Nzimakwe, 2014).

Nzimakwe (2014) mentions a few examples of the behaviours associated with Ubuntu. It is said that Ubuntu can be seen in a few ways, such as the way an individual speaks, the words they use, their tone, and their positive mannerisms. Ubuntu can be seen in the way someone walks, the way they smile, the way they treat others, especially elders, children, and those in need, the way they greet you with warmth and care, and most importantly, their values and morals, which is the way they show compassion and empathy and their respect for others on a daily basis (Nzimakwe, 2014).

1.1.2. Values-based Leadership Style

Values-based leadership is an approach that is built on the basis of shared values and improving team cohesiveness and willingness to work together toward a common goal (Gleeson, 2021). It is a leadership style that is change-oriented and value-driven, and it is a developmental leadership style (Nzimakwe, 2014). It carries a foundation of believing that everyone on a team should be able to engage, and it creates expectations that the leader is honest and operates from a perspective that the goals and achievements of the group are more important than their personal agendas (Scott, 2023).

Values-based leadership believes the leader has well-developed character traits that allow them to build and maintain an environment that fosters mutual respect, fairness, trust, and healthy communication. The power of values-based leadership lies in the approach, which allows for the leader to act according to their core values, creating a positive impact on team performance and culture (Scott, 2023). It is important to note that the core perspective that comes with values-based leadership is that the leader and the team share the idea that their motivation comes from integrating personal values into their work and activities (Cartier, 2022).

For values-based leadership to be successful and effective, it is important that it is ingrained in the culture of the team and not just a set of rules put in place telling the team members what to do (Cartier, 2022). A notable purpose of values-based leadership is to help team members develop and change to become proactive contributors to the effectiveness of the team when striving to reach their common goals (Nzimakwe, 2014).

Much like servant and authentic leadership, which will be discussed later, values-based leadership is a leadership behaviour guided by ethical values. It allows the leader the ability to create a culture that is influenced by their personal beliefs within the team (Nzimakwe, 2014).

The culture in question is a culture of equal participation in decision-making processes, support of risk-taking, the ability to confront change, development of communities within the team and as a team, being passionate and having strong emotional conviction, and creating a sense of belonging and belief in the common goals within the team members (Nzimakwe, 2014).

One of the many ways Ubuntu can be applied within a team setting is by the use and application of values-based leadership. As mentioned before values-based leadership provides a climate and environment that is able to nurture the positive values within the team (Nzimakwe, 2014).

Poovan et al. (2006), in the South African Journal of Business Management, advised that it would be wise for African leaders to develop a values-based leadership style within team settings, specifically within the country leadership, as it integrates the social values of Ubuntu, which would allow the leaders to connect with their people (Poovan, Du Toit, & Engelbrecht, 2006). It is further stated that Afro-centric leadership is based on the inclusivity principles of Ubuntu-based value systems, where the leading strategy is not about the individual leader but about the interdependence of people within teams and workplaces (Nzimakwe, 2014). Here are some of the commonalities between Ubuntu and values-based leadership:

- **Ethical behaviour and integrity:**
Ubuntu is a concept that is based on ethical principles, the support of positive action-based contributions to communities, and respect for the dignity of others (Novicevic et al., 2006). This concept is aligned with values-based leadership as it too emphasises the importance of ethical behaviour and integrity. This is seen by the commitment these leaders have to fairness, moral conduct, and transparency just as those who practice Ubuntu (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).
- **Respect and dignity:**
Ubuntu is very clear about its promotion and intent to treat every person with respect and acknowledge their worth just for being a person. This is very closely aligned with values-based leadership as it also enforces the importance and concept of

respecting others and valuing their contributions within the team no matter their rank within the team (Novicevic et al., 2006). By doing this, these leaders are fostering an environment that carries values such as mutual respect and dignity at their centre just as those who lead with Ubuntu.

- **Inclusivity and collaboration:**

With both values-based leadership and Ubuntu, there is a clear emphasis on the importance of having a collaborative spirit and an inclusive mindset. Ubuntu encourages this collaborative spirit, celebrating and magnifying the success of the community or collective, by way of mutual support (Novicevic et al., 2006). This is also true for values-based leadership as it values teamwork and fosters environments of inclusiveness from diverse perspectives in order for the team to achieve its goals (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

- **Self-awareness and reflection:**

Values-based leaders are very engaged in self-reflection as it allows them to be able to align themselves and their actions with their core values and helps them to understand their impact and keep them aware of those actions and their impact on their team (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999). Ubuntu also supports self-awareness and encourages the understanding of one's personal roles and standing within a community. By understanding oneself, the individual is able to grow and reflect on their growth (Novicevic et al., 2006).

Important principles of values-based leadership

The following principles are the foundation of building a strong, healthy team that engages in values-based leadership:

- Sets direction
 - A leader creates a values statement to serve as a guiding force for all players and team members.
 - A leader provides meaning and purpose to the players and those involved with the team.
 - A leader reflects the teams' values in everything they do, everywhere they go.
- Creates proactive team culture
 - A leader increases value in the lives of players and their communities.
 - A leader utilises their influence responsibly to achieve goals.
 - A leader creates an environment of mutual respect.
- Improves individuals
 - A leader invests in the development of players.
 - A leader empowers others by developing other leaders.
 - A leader commits to correctly fit tasks to foster player satisfaction and improve effectiveness.
- Expands (professional) sporting opportunities
 - A leader inspires collaboration and partnerships with other sports organisations and clubs and their members.

Advantages and disadvantages

As with any theory within leadership that deals with people, there are some advantages and disadvantages to the values-based leadership style.

+ Advantages

- Values can inspire and motivate players, leading to higher satisfaction and performance since their similar belief system allows them to be in alignment with each other when tackling their goals.
- Values are not rigid, and they can be adapted to changing circumstances and new challenges.
- A successful values-based leadership system drives more cohesive teamwork, more accurate following of instructions, and a greater sense of comradery (Cartier, 2022).

- Disadvantages

- To establish a values-based leadership style with a group takes time and continuous communication about common values and taking action according to those values.
- Values are subjective and can be interpreted differently by different people. Therefore, what the leader may deem as an important value, their players may not see the same way.
- Decisions made on values may not always be the most efficient or effective. This may be difficult for the leader to note if they cannot remain objective.

1.1.3. Authentic Leadership Style

Authentic leadership theory emphasises the importance of being honest both to oneself and to others. According to this theory, authenticity in leadership means being a “moral individual” who assumes “responsibility for personal freedom and organizational and communal obligations.” It also means being an individual who possesses a deep awareness of their own thought processes, their behaviours, and the way they are perceived by others and aware of their own and others' values and beliefs (Novicevic et al., 2006, p. 64; Cooper et al., 2005, p. 478).

Authentic leadership theory is focused on cultivating leaders who actively create positive work environments and carry themselves in an ethical and socially responsible way (Cooper et al., 2005, p. 477). By creating and fostering such environments, authentic leaders can enhance morale and strengthen commitment to themselves as the leader and the team objective or goal (Cooper et al., 2005).

Authentic leadership theory also converges with concepts from social psychology, particularly within the ideas of impression management. A core aspect of authentic leadership used in impression management is the team members' influenceability and commitment.

Authentic leadership is somewhat of a biproduct of team environment ethics (Cooper et al., 2005). Ethical leadership involves upholding team or club beliefs while maintaining personal values, which can be particularly challenging during times of significant change or social upheaval. In such periods of social strain, authentic leadership becomes even more crucial because of the tension between individual freedom and the need to conform to social norms (Novicevic et al., 2006, p. 67).

Authentic leadership also focuses on bridging the gap between personal wants and the team's needs. It needs leaders to keep the balance by staying true to their values while remaining committed to their leadership roles and the goals and objectives of the team and the players.

There are two fundamental perspectives on what authenticity can or should be within authentic leadership theory. The first perspective is that authenticity is a personal attribute that a person has, which means that authentic leaders who possess this trait or attribute of authenticity are more likely to build meaningful and deep relationships with their team members. The second perspective is that authenticity is considered as a function of social roles, which then

leads to the perception that authenticity is defined by the acceptance or rejection of the leader's claims by others in the relevant social context (Novicevic et al., 2006, p. 68).

Below are some of the traits of authentic leadership; the core similarities between authentic leadership and Ubuntu are truly seen in their shared commitment to ethical behaviour, respect for others, and the importance of community.

- **Emphasis on community and relationships:**
Ubuntu focuses on the interconnectedness of the well-being of the individual and community, which is a concept that appears in authentic leadership that values strong, respectful relationships and recognises the importance of community in achieving collective goals (Novicevic et al., 2006; Cooper et al., 2005).
- **Mutual respect and dignity:**
The concept of Ubuntu is focused on the promotion and cultivation of values such as respect and dignity as well as treating others well in conjunction with those two values. Authentic leaders value leading with empathy and fostering an environment where everyone's contributions and ideas are respected, ensuring that interactions between team members and those outside of the team as well are respectful and kind (Cooper et al., 2005).
- **Ethical behaviour and integrity:**
The ethical principles associated with Ubuntu include being a positive influence and making positive contributions to the community and those around it. The same exists with authentic leadership where it is important to behave ethically and lead by example (Cooper et al., 2005).
- **Inclusivity and collaboration:**
Authentic leaders encourage the sharing of diverse ideas and working together as a team. Ubuntu leadership tends to create environments that encourage inclusivity and teamwork in order to reach goals (Novicevic et al., 2006).

Advantages and disadvantages of authentic leadership:

+ Advantages

- **Strong trust and credibility:**
Due to their transparency and consistency in actions and decision-making, authentic leaders can gain the trust of their team members, and they become more credible the more consistent they are. This allows the team to develop trust and remain loyal to their leader (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).
- **Increased team engagement and team spirit:**
The leader can create an environment of positivity and support by being their authentic self and true to their values. By doing this, they boost the team morale/spirit and they keep engagement and participation high, which makes the team more productive and motivated to reach their set team goals and objectives (Walumbwa et al., 2008).
- **Promotes ethical behaviour:**
The cornerstones of authentic leadership are integrity and ethical behaviour. These two things set the standard for the team, they reduce unethical behaviour in the team and from the staff surrounding them, and they contribute to the positive team culture and the fostering of genuine trust with all involved (Cooper et al., 2005).

- Disadvantages

- **Risk of oversharing and vulnerability:**
Being genuine and transparent could lead to potential issues with oversharing personal information and experiences in an attempt to build rapport or garner favour and connection with team members. The result of this could be the opposite of the intended purpose where it now creates an air of discomfort for the team, or it could cause an undermining of leadership because there was too much friendly oversharing which removed the professionalism from the leader and team member dynamic.
- **Difficult to implement across different cultures:**
Openness, vulnerability, and honesty are vital to this leadership style. This may not be commonplace for most cultures when dealing with a leader and team member relationship. Friction could occur as this form of leadership goes against cultural norms for some individuals, which could affect the implementation process of this leadership style.
- **Potential for team misalignment:**
Authenticity along with individual values can also cause some friction in leadership if there is any misalignment between what the leader believes and what the team goals, priorities, and objectives are. This could potentially cause a lack of cohesion within the team, which then affects productivity and results.

1.1.4. Servant Leadership Style

Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) first described the then new leadership style: servant leadership. He believes that a change of motivation happens by how a leader leads; a leader needs to serve first, after which the opportunity to lead will arise. In his opinion, leaders are making a difference if they can affirm the following questions:

Do those being served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or at least not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14)

The servant leadership style may sound contradictory, posing the question of how a leader can be a servant simultaneously. However, this leadership style offers an interesting perspective on leadership (Northouse, 2018). While the servant leadership style has not yet rigorously been researched in a sports context, findings from research in organizational spaces show positive and promising results (Westre, 2008).

Servant leaders empathise with their followers, and they are concerned about their followers' needs. Furthermore, servant leaders usually put their followers' needs before their own needs and aim to serve the goal of their organisation, community, or society. Servant leaders aim to serve their followers to reach their highest individual potential. While servant leadership, similar to authentic leadership, includes an ethical dimension, it is unique as it defines altruism

as its central idea, making it the only leadership that puts caring for others first. Servant leaders should share and give up control rather than seek to influence (Northouse, 2018).

Although arguments exist that servant leadership is a trait and comes easier to some than others, servant leadership can and will be viewed in this context as a behaviour. Several different conceptualisations of servant leadership have been brought forward which often involve many different characteristics. Consequently, scholars are not in agreement on the specific characteristics that make up a servant leader (Northouse, 2018).

Nevertheless, Spears (2010) identifies ten characteristics of servant leaders which are mentioned often amongst scholars and deemed relevant.

- First, servant leaders communicate by listening. They are aware that hearing and understanding another's point of view is a crucial part of communicating.
- Second, a servant leader is able to show empathy. They are able to understand what followers think and feel which, in turn, makes them feel validated and unique.
- Third, healing is a characteristic of a servant leader. They care about their followers' problems and help overcome them. This heals the followers as well as the leader himself.
- Fourth, awareness involves being able to understand the impact the leader has on others and seeing the wider context of a situation. They are receptive to the political, social, and physical environment.
- Fifth, a servant leader uses persuasion instead of coercion to convince others to change. Thereby, persuasion uses gentle arguments.
- Sixth, a servant leader has the ability of conceptualisation, meaning that they are able to establish a sense of an organisation's, or team's, long-term goals. Additionally, they are able to provide creative solutions to problems.
- The seventh characteristic of a servant leader is foresight. Thereby, the leader is able to foresee future events based on events in the past and present.
- Eighth, servant leaders take on stewardship, hence they accept their role as a leader and the consequent responsibilities.
- Ninth, servant leaders show commitment to the growth of people. This growth, professionally as a player and individually as a person, expands beyond their input in the team. Servant leaders

understand that each player is unique, and they provide commitment in the form of involving the players in decision-making, showing interest in their personal stories, or providing them with skills training that go beyond the football field.

- The tenth and final characteristic of servant leaders involves building community. By being part of a community, defined as "a collection of individuals who have shared interests and pursuits and feel a sense of unity and relatedness," players tend to feel safe and connected with each other while having space to be themselves (Spears, 2010). Liden et al. (2008) define servant leaders as having seven characteristics. The authors mention, similar to Spears (2010), conceptualising, emotional healing, and helping followers grow and succeed as characteristics. Additionally, putting followers first, behaving ethically, empowering, and creating value for the community are put forth as important traits of a servant leader.

A model on servant leadership, suggested by Northouse (2018), describes how the impact of a servant leader depends on the context and culture, the receptivity of the followers or players, and the leader's attributes. Consequently, the way servant leadership may be performed can vary whether it is a leader on the football field or in a corporate business, or whether it is in a culture with low-power hierarchies or high-power hierarchies. Furthermore, individuals differ in their emotional intelligence, moral development, or self-determinedness, influencing how servant leadership is performed. Finally, and importantly, not all followers, or players, desire to be helped or guided by a servant leader. Consequently, for some players, servant leadership may not be effective (Northouse, 2018).

Just as in the other leadership styles, there are many commonalities between Ubuntu and servant leadership. They have both been referred to as African leadership styles because of their focus on community, and cohesion (Okecha & Branine, 2017). Some of the commonalities seen between Ubuntu and servant leadership are:

- Community focus:
Both these styles of leadership look at community involvement and emphasise it. The focus of the Ubuntu philosophy or leadership style deeply prioritises the connections people have with one another, hence the phrase "I am because you are." Servant leadership is similar in that same sense of emphasising being of service to the collective and the common goals set (Meylahn & Musiyambiri, 2017).

- **Empathy:**
Servant leadership and Ubuntu are both concepts that, at the core of their values, there is empathy and understanding. If both these concepts are used in leadership, it becomes very simple to see the care the leaders have for their followers or team members (Meylahn & Musiyambiri, 2017).
- **Collaboration:**
Both these leadership styles or concepts seek to foster and strengthen collaboration, and they try and encourage a spirit or value of being interconnected as team members or members of the community (Meylahn & Musiyambiri, 2017).

Advantages and Disadvantages of the servant leadership style

+ Advantages

- **Greater self-actualisation:**
Through the recognition of players' contributions to the team and supporting them in their personal and professional growth, servant leaders can give players greater self-actualisation. For a football player, this can mean the maximisation of their athletic potential, their mental and emotional growth, or their holistic development on and off the field (Northouse, 2018). Servant leaders often focus on athlete development more than on the outscoring of the opposing team; they recognise that other important successes exist (Westre, 2008).
- **Improved decision-making and motivation:**
By empowering athletes to bring their ideas to the table, listen to their stories, and give them the authority to decide, decision-making processes, commitment, and motivation improve (Westre, 2008).
- **Social impact:**
Players who receive empowerment and care from their coaches are likely to perform the same behaviour and treat others in a similar way. This behaviour is expected to influence societies as a whole as the players take it to their communities (Northouse, 2018).
- **Team performance:**
Research has found, in an organizational setting, that followers are more likely to perform tasks beyond their basic duties. In a football setting, this can translate to players putting work into their football that goes beyond the team training sessions; they might work additionally by themselves (Northouse, 2018).

- Disadvantages

- **Lack of a theoretical framework:**
Due to the different ideas surrounding the servant leadership style in literature, no explicit theoretical framework exists. Consequently, there is a lack of clarity on how to execute this leadership style (Northouse, 2018). It can also become difficult to act as a servant leader in situations that previously had been dealt with an authoritarian leadership style or a team that is used to an authoritarian leadership style (Westre, 2008).
- **Inconsistency with other ideas of leadership:**
While putting caring about others first is commendable, this idea clashes with concerns for output or success, goal setting, and having a vision (Northouse, 2018).
- **Time-consuming:**
McGee-Cooper (1995) found that practicing servant leadership may be more time-consuming than other leadership styles. However, she also argues that this disadvantage is being made up for by improved decision-making and increased motivation for those involved to support their team. Nevertheless, the effort, in terms of time but also emotions, can be draining for a servant leader. They often need to find outlets for this added drain outside of the football field (Westre, 2008).

1.1.5. Situational Leadership Style

Situational leadership theory is unique because of its flexible and adaptable approach. It was first coined by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in the 1960s. This leadership theory suggests that for a leader to be effective, they need to be able to adjust their leadership style to suit the needs of the team they are working with as well as the demands of the situation itself (Kidston, 2024). In simple terms, situational leadership theory strongly suggests that there is no one leadership style that is the best or most appropriate. Instead, this theory of leadership is about the leader's ability to be strategic and knowing which style to use for specific tasks, specific group objectives, specific group members, and specific group cultures (Cherry, 2023).

Situational Leaders tend to strive for four things: driving results by answering the question of what and how in regards to their project or objective, developing people and appropriate teams, establishing relationships and motivating team members, and lastly, recognising when it is time to adapt to a new style of leadership over time (Herrity, 2024).

As mentioned before, the research on leadership has been mostly focused on the business sector. Some of the themes discussed in this passage are in alignment with business and management rhetoric. However, efforts have been made to reconcile the discussion to lead back into a sporting context and team discipline.

Over the last few years, people within the business sector have been trying to research which leadership style can be considered the "best." Their research has brought up a clear indication that there is no one or individual leadership style that is appropriate for all situations. It is apparent that for a leader to be successful, they need to be able to adapt their behaviours to meet the situation at hand as each individual circumstance carries its own set of demands and challenges (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

According to Blanchard and Hershey, there are four primary situational leadership styles. These four styles are what make this type of leadership distinct, and understanding them can empower leaders to navigate a variety of challenges and lead their teams to success (Kidston, 2024).

- Telling and directing leadership style (S1): These leaders make decisions and direct the actions of the team through communicating and interacting with the members. They provide support, close supervision, and specific guidance (Herrity, 2024). A strong characteristic of this type of leadership is the

presence of high task direction with low relationship behaviour from the team leader. This leadership style is most effective when dealing with unskilled or inexperienced members who need clear guidance, direction, and structure to complete their tasks effectively (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988).

- Selling and coaching leadership style (S2): This is considered the "explaining and persuading style," where input is accepted from team members as they are encouraged to submit ideas and communicate their suggestions. This coaching style, unlike S1, is more focused on high task direction along with high relationship behaviour. Leaders who implement this approach can guide their team using instructions and support, with the aim of building their confidence and developing their skills over time (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). These leaders are meant to effectively sell their concept or goal to the team so they can gain their cooperation through discourse and collaboration, although they still have the final say as leader (Herrity, 2024). This form of coaching is effective and beneficial when working with a team that has enthusiasm and drive but lacks the skill sets or experience to complete tasks alone (Northouse, 2018). With some constructive feedback, the leader can foster a culture of learning, growth, and improvement.
- Participating and supporting leadership style (S3): With these leaders, it is most common for them to offer less direction and delegate decision-making responsibilities to others on the team while they offer support and encouragement (Herrity, 2024). They are commonly known for their low task direction and high relationship behaviour. They trust their team to make good and sound decisions. For this style to be effective, the team members need to have the necessary skills and experience to be able to complete their tasks on their own (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). By allowing the members to take responsibility, the leader can foster a sense of autonomy, support, and accountability for the team (Blanchard et al., 1985).
- Delegating leadership style (S4): This leadership style is associated with low task direction and low relationship behaviour. These leaders commonly limit their own participation, allowing their team members to take on more responsibility. They allow for occasional consultation and supervision, but the bulk of the responsibility, decision-making, and goal direction lies with the team members (Herrity, 2024). This leadership style is best suited for team members who have shown that they have high competence and commitment to the team goals and are able to complete tasks

on their own with very little supervision. With the use of this leadership style, it becomes possible to foster autonomy, empower team members, and develop accountability while creating a culture of trust and collaboration (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). However, it is still of paramount importance for the leader to monitor the team's progress to ensure that tasks are completed, and objectives are reached successfully.

Situational leadership theory maturity levels

This is a leadership theory that carries a basis of having the leader match their leadership style to the team members' maturity levels. Maturity in this instance is defined by Herrity (2024) as a member's readiness level based on their knowledge of their role as well as their competence to perform tasks. These maturity levels can be affected by time on the team, previous experiences, enthusiasm, and job confidence (Herrity, 2024). Below are the different categories of maturity:

- Low Maturity, also known as readiness level 1 (M1). At this level, team members are new and have high enthusiasm, but they do not have the skill set to complete tasks on their own (Kenton, Yashina, & Logan, 2024).
- Moderate Low Maturity, readiness level 2 (M2). Team members have some confidence and they are eager to complete tasks, but they will need supervision (Kenton, Yashina, & Logan, 2024).
- Moderate High Maturity, readiness level 3 (M3). Team members are competent and skilled enough to complete tasks, but they struggle with the confidence to take full responsibility for the task, so the decision-making and responsibility remain with the leader (Kenton, Yashina, & Logan, 2024).
- High Maturity, readiness level 4 (M4). This is the highest maturity level.

Team members in this category have autonomy and can complete tasks on their own with confidence, and they have the necessary experience and skills to do so (Kenton, Yashina, & Logan, 2024).

Matching maturity levels and appropriate leadership styles

Leadership styles within situational leadership can be matched with maturity levels to achieve the best results. Here are some of the most appropriate matches for the different maturity levels according to the Hersey-Blanchard model of situational leadership (Cherry, 2023):

- Low Maturity (M1) would be well suited to the telling and directing leadership style (S1).

- Moderate Low Maturity (M2) would be well suited to the use of the selling and coaching leadership style (S2).
- Moderate High Maturity (M3) would be well suited to the use of the participating and supporting leadership style (S3).
- High Maturity (M4) would be best suited to the use of the delegating leadership style (S4).

Situational leadership theory development levels

In the revised literature, it is mentioned that for leaders to be effective, they must base their behaviour on the developmental levels of the team when facing specific challenges. These developmental levels paired with maturity levels can determine what leadership style is appropriate for different tasks (Herrity, 2024). In order for these levels to be raised, the situational leader needs to encourage the members to cultivate their skills and become self-motivated and confident in their work (Cherry, 2023). These developmental levels for team members are determined by low, medium, or high competence or commitment, and once that is determined, they are assigned one of four designations:

- Enthusiastic Beginner, also known as Development Level 1 (D1): Team members show low competence but high commitment.
- Disillusioned Learner, also known as Development Level 2 (D2): Team members show some competence, but they have encountered setbacks that have led to low commitment.
- Capable but Cautious Performer, also known as Development Level 3 (D3): Team members show growth and development in their competence; however, their level of commitment varies from task to task.
- Self-reliant Achiever, also known as Development Level 4 (D4): Team members show high competence and high commitment.

Just as in the other leadership styles where there are great similarities between the leadership style and Ubuntu, situational leadership is no different. This leadership style is all about adapting to whatever task or situation is in front of you as a leader, and this is also similar to Ubuntu leadership. Here are a few other similarities that exist between Ubuntu and situational leadership:

Empathy and support: Ubuntu, as mentioned before, is a very humanistic concept developed around the interdependence of individuals in and outside of a community. As a leader using Ubuntu, there must be a level of understanding and compassion between

you as the leader and your individual followers. These are also qualities that are crucial in situational leadership (Van der Walt, 2015). By being aware and compassionate with their followers' needs, development, and growth, the leader is able to provide the appropriate support.

Interdependence: Much like how Ubuntu relates to servant leadership and authentic leadership, it relates to situational leadership in the same sense that it continues to encourage interconnectedness. With situational leadership, it is important to be adaptable with the style of leadership to meet the needs of the team, recognising individual strengths and weaknesses, and how these factors affect the overall team and goals to be achieved (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013; Nkoane, 2015).

Empowerment: Ubuntu leaders would also be leaders who want to focus on empowering those around them. By way of delegating responsibilities and allowing members of the team to take initiative and have autonomy, situational leadership leans into that same concept of empowerment as Ubuntu does. This not only builds self-trust in the members, but it also uplifts the community (Hersey & Blanchard, 2013; Nkoane, 2015).

Advantages and disadvantages of situational leadership:

Just as with any other theory, the situational leadership theory also has its advantages and disadvantages as it may not be applicable to every scenario (Kenton, Yashina, & Logan, 2024).

+ Advantages

- It allows the leader to adjust their leadership style based on the needs of the situation or challenge, permitting more effective use of resources within the team at all levels.
- This leadership style creates an atmosphere for collaboration between the leader and team members that can result in improved outcomes due to its common objective focus.
- As a leader, they themselves acquire valuable insights of how to best lead as well as gain skills that are fashioned to assist with the direction of each team member so they too can grow and develop with the leader. This reaching of new levels from both the leader and the team members assists in the efficiency of the team as a whole, which leads to great successes in terms of team objectives and goals (Chaudhury, 2023).

- Disadvantages

- The implementation of situational leadership can be more complex and time-consuming than it appears at first glance. This is due to the level of detail that must be taken when attempting to accurately assess the teams' developmental levels.
- Additionally, there might be a struggle to find an appropriate approach as there is no easy guide to move from D1 to D4 in the developmental levels, and it is also important to note that real world scenarios can present as far more complicated than assumed in this leadership model (Chaudhury, 2023).
- Lastly, external factors that the leader cannot control such as cultural beliefs and team diversity were not considered during the creation of the situational leadership model. This may lead those trying to follow this model astray.

1.1.6. Combining different Leadership styles to Ubuntu Leadership

Throughout the research, a common theme is present in that every team leader has sets of values and goals that they try to get every team member to participate in. The similar themes that are present in all these leadership styles as well as Ubuntu, just to mention a few, have been the presence of empathy on the leader's side so they can understand their team members and meet them where they are to help them develop and grow; collaboration amongst team members and leadership is also very important in ensuring that the team keeps the values of respect, tolerance, and kindness; it is also important for the leader to lead with integrity and to conduct themselves ethically, setting an example to not only those they are leading in the team but to the community they are in as well. They can do this by being respectful, treating others with dignity, and empowering others on their team and in said community.

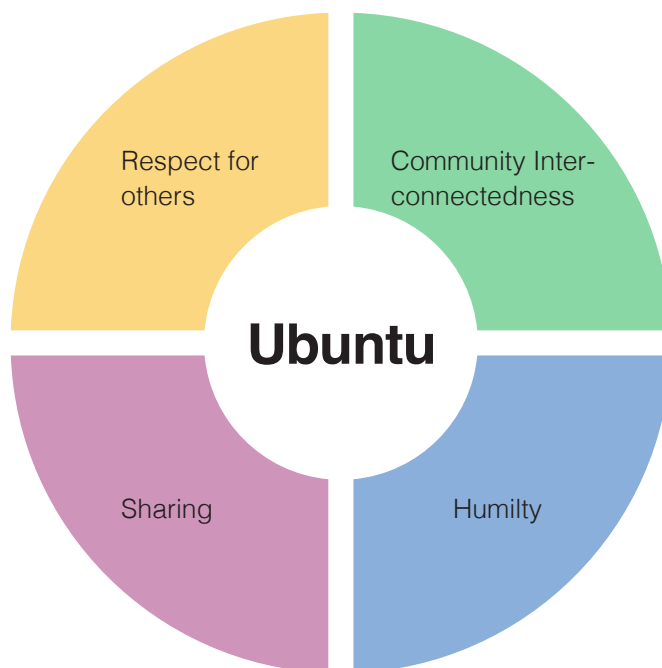
Table 1: A comparison table of the traits that each leader would need to possess to be a successful leader.

Values-based leadership	Authentic leadership	Situational leadership	Servant leadership
Self-reflection	Transparency	Insight	Empowerment
Balance	People-centred connections	Flexibility	Empathy
Humility	Strong values	Trust	Humility
	Sense of purpose	Problem-Solving	Selflessness

Diagram Key:

- Respect for others – Transparency, empathy, and trust
- Community Inter-connectedness – People-centred connections, and sense of purpose
- Humility – Self-reflection, insight, balance, and humility itself
- Sharing – Empowerment, flexibility, strong values, and problem-solving

In diagram 1 below, there is an illustration showing how some of the traits in the leadership styles above relate to Ubuntu. When you look at the traits, you will see that they match the Ubuntu characteristics in the diagram. Each trait that has a similarity to an Ubuntu characteristic is colour coded. For example, in the Ubuntu wheel, you see that “respect for others” is coded in blue, and all the traits in the different leadership styles that relate to this characteristic are also coded as blue, such as empathy in servant leadership, humility in values-based and servant leadership, and strong values in authentic leadership.



The integration of values-based, authentic, servant, and situational leadership reveals strong conceptual overlap across ethical, relational, and adaptive dimensions of leadership. Although each model emphasises different aspects of leadership behaviour, they converge around shared principles: integrity, relational awareness, humility, empowerment, adaptability, and responsibility toward others (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Spears, 2010; Scott, 2023; Van der Walt, 2015).

When interpreted through the Ubuntu philosophy, these converging principles are reframed within a community-centred worldview in which personhood is relational and leadership legitimacy emerges from contribution to collective well-being (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019; Sulamoyo, 2010). Ubuntu emphasises that “a person is who they are through others,” positioning leadership as shared moral responsibility rather than positional dominance.

From this synthesis, four defining traits of an Ubuntu-oriented leader emerge. Each trait integrates specific competences drawn from the leadership models discussed.

Respect for Others

(Transparency, Empathy, Trust, Ethical Integrity)

Respect forms the relational foundation of Ubuntu leadership. It includes:

- **Transparency**
Leaders communicate openly and honestly, building trust and psychological safety. Transparent communication enables concerns to be raised and reduces fear-based dynamics.
- **Empathy**
Servant leadership highlights the importance of attentive listening and understanding the needs and circumstances of team members. Empathy strengthens relational trust and reinforces mutual support.
- **Trust cultivation**
Effective leaders actively build compassionate and supportive relationships, ensuring that team members feel included in decision-making processes and experience a sense of ownership.
- **Ethical integrity**
Values-based leadership emphasises honesty, moral consistency, and fairness (Gleeson, 2021). Leaders must make complex decisions guided by core values rather than convenience, modelling credibility and reliability.

Respect, therefore, is not passive courtesy; it is an active ethical stance that stabilises relational dynamics within the team.

In the modern sports world, characterised by intense performance pressure, public scrutiny, and increasingly diverse team environments, respect grounded in transparency, empathy, and ethical integrity becomes essential to prevent fragmentation, safeguard athlete well-being, and sustain trust in high-stakes competitive contexts.

Community Inter-connectedness

(People-centred connections, Sense of purpose, Shared identity)

Ubuntu leadership emphasises relational interdependence and collective identity.

- **People-centred connections**
Authentic leaders thrive in community environments where relationships are prioritised. They value dialogue and cultivate mentorship-like connections.
- **Sense of purpose**
Leaders articulate a long-term vision and help players understand the broader meaning of their efforts.
- **Shared identity**
Ubuntu reframes success as collective rather than individual. Leaders consistently reinforce that individual performance gains significance only within the collective framework.

Community inter-connectedness transforms a group of individuals into a cohesive unit grounded in shared purpose and mutual accountability.

In an era where individual branding, social media exposure, and personal performance metrics often overshadow collective identity, fostering community inter-connectedness is exceptionally important to counteract ego-driven dynamics and reinforce shared responsibility, unity, and long-term team culture.

Humility

(Self-reflection, Insight, Balance, Accountability)

Humility distinguishes relational leadership from ego-driven authority.

- Self-reflection
Leaders regularly evaluate their decisions, motivations, and values (Gleeson, 2021). Reflection strengthens authenticity and moral clarity.
- Insight
Situational leadership requires awareness of team members' capabilities and task demands (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988). Leaders must assess context accurately before acting.
- Balance
Values-based leadership highlights the ability to integrate multiple perspectives while remaining grounded in core values.
- Accountability
Humble leaders admit mistakes, seek feedback, and prioritise learning over status.

Humility prevents dominance-based leadership and strengthens relational credibility, reinforcing long-term trust and stability.

Within modern sport systems that frequently reward status, visibility, and results over reflection, humility serves as a stabilising leadership trait that promotes continuous learning, reduces power imbalances, and protects teams from ego-centred decision-making that can undermine cohesion and ethical standards.



Sharing

(Empowerment, Flexibility, Problem-solving, Delegation)

Sharing reflects distributed leadership and collective ownership.

- Empowerment
Servant leaders prioritise the growth and development of others, placing team well-being above personal recognition.
- Flexibility
Situational leadership requires adaptability in response to changing conditions.
- Problem-solving
Effective leaders assess challenges, shift leadership approaches when necessary, and guide teams toward collaborative solutions.
- Delegation and shared responsibility
Leaders create opportunities for players to assume leadership roles, reinforcing autonomy and competence.

Sharing transforms authority into collective capacity. It strengthens engagement, motivation, and long-term leadership development within the team.

In high-performance environments marked by rapid change, tactical complexity, and developmental diversity, the ability to share responsibility, empower others, and engage in collaborative problem-solving is crucial for building adaptive, resilient teams capable of responding effectively to dynamic competitive demands.

Taken together, these four traits define the Ubuntu Leadership model within the Sharing Goals framework. This model integrates Western leadership theory with African philosophical foundations, emphasising relational depth, ethical grounding, adaptability, humility, empowerment, and collective identity.

Leadership, therefore, is not defined as control or status, but as the capacity to align values, cultivate trust, empower others, and sustain collective purpose through relational influence and shared responsibility.

1.1.7. Impact on Performance

Leadership has a direct and indirect influence on team performance in sport contexts. In football specifically, positive coach leadership has been identified as a key factor contributing to team success on and off the field (Shehu, 2019).

Leadership that is values-based, authentic, servant-oriented, or situational in nature creates clarity of direction, strengthens motivation, and enhances collective responsibility, which are essential components of sustained performance.

Authentic leadership has been associated with higher levels of trust, engagement, and ethical behaviour within teams (Walumbwa et al., 2008). When athletes perceive their leader as authentic and value-driven, they are more likely to commit to shared goals and align their individual efforts with collective objectives. This alignment improves coordination, role clarity, and decision-making consistency under pressure.

Servant leadership emphasises the development and empowerment of followers (Spears, 2010; Westre, 2008). In sport settings, this approach contributes to athlete growth, intrinsic motivation, and psychological readiness, all of which positively affect performance stability. Similarly, situational leadership highlights the importance of adapting leadership behaviour to the needs of the team and the demands of the moment (Van der Walt, 2015). The ability to adjust leadership style according to context enhances tactical responsiveness and supports optimal functioning in dynamic game situations.

Taken together, research suggests that effective leadership influences performance by increasing motivation, strengthening commitment to shared goals, enhancing decision-making quality, and stabilising team functioning under competitive pressure.

1.1.8. Impact on Cohesion

Leadership plays a central role in shaping team cohesion by establishing shared values, ethical standards, and a clear collective direction. Values-based leadership strengthens unity by aligning individual motivations with common goals and reinforcing a shared sense of purpose (Scott, 2023; Gleeson, 2021). When leaders consistently act in accordance with articulated values, trust and mutual respect within the team are reinforced, creating a stable relational foundation for cooperation.

Authentic leadership further contributes to cohesion by promoting transparency, relational awareness, and ethical consistency (Walumbwa et al., 2008). When players perceive their leader as genuine and self-aware, relational bonds strengthen and psychological distance decreases. This authenticity supports open communication, collective accountability, and stronger identification with the team.

Servant leadership enhances cohesion by prioritising the development and well-being of team members (Spears, 2010; Westre, 2008). By placing the needs of the group above personal recognition, leaders cultivate an environment of mutual care and shared responsibility. Such climates promote prosocial behaviour, collective resilience, and stronger emotional bonds between players.

The Ubuntu philosophy further reinforces the relational dimension of cohesion by emphasising interdependence and collective identity (Sulamoyo, 2010; Van der Walt, 2015). When leadership reflects the principle that “a person is who they are through others,” individual success becomes inseparable from team success. This shared identity strengthens unity, increases cooperation, and enhances long-term team culture.

Overall, leadership contributes to cohesion by aligning values, strengthening relational bonds, fostering collective responsibility, and promoting a shared vision that connects individual effort to collective achievement.

1.2. Window of opportunities

A window of opportunity describes a period during development when a competence, or the components underlying it, is especially receptive to training — not because learning is impossible outside that period, but because the same coaching input produces disproportionately larger gains during it than before or after.

Leadership differs from the other social competences in one important respect: it is not a single capacity with its own developmental timetable, but a role that becomes available once the underlying competences are in place. In childhood, the components are already forming. Murphy and Johnson (2011) argue that the seeds of leadership are sown well before adulthood, and set out the leadership tasks that children and adolescents can meet at successive ages, together with the skills each task requires.

Across middle childhood, those components are the ones described elsewhere in this framework: communicating clearly, taking another perspective, regulating emotion and behaving reliably. Genuine leadership opportunities remain limited at this stage, because groups are still largely organised by adults. What can be developed is the substrate rather than the role itself.

Adolescence is when the opportunity structure changes. Peer groups begin to organise themselves, and positions of influence become genuinely available.

Longitudinal evidence indicates that this period carries real predictive weight: in the Fullerton Longitudinal Study, adolescent extraversion measured at seventeen predicted leader emergence and transformational leadership at twenty-nine, over a twelve-year span and independently of adolescent intelligence (Reichard et al., 2011).

The mechanism behind that link is what makes this section actionable. The relationship between adolescent extraversion and adult leadership potential was fully mediated by social skills, while adolescent intelligence showed no direct effect (Guerin et al., 2011). Leadership is not transmitted directly from temperament; it operates through competences that can be taught. No narrow window has been established for leadership itself, but adolescence is when the role first becomes available and when its social foundations are most actively in use.

Football gives this a setting that few others provide. Captaincy, warm-up leadership, small-group organisation and responsibility for younger players are real roles with real consequences, and they can be distributed deliberately rather than left to the loudest voice. Because the evidence points to social skills as the operative mechanism, rotating these roles matters more than identifying natural leaders early.

Leadership therefore warrants attention at every stage, with the emphasis moving from the underlying social competences in the early stages to genuine delegated responsibility in the later ones.



1.3. Correlation with other skills and competencies

Leadership is essentially connected to all competences as the coach's leadership style affects the learning of all competences. However, on an increased level, connections can be seen to the following:



Correlation with Emotional Competencies

Leadership is strongly connected to emotional competences because leaders influence how individuals respond to challenges, opportunities, and personal growth. Through their attitude and behaviour, coaches foster motivation and passion, helping participants stay engaged and committed to meaningful goals.

Leadership is equally rooted in responsibility and integrity. By acting with honesty, fairness, and accountability, coaches serve as role models and encourage participants to take ownership of their own actions and decisions. In addition, leadership supports the development of perseverance and determination. Effective leaders help individuals remain focused and resilient when facing setbacks, reinforcing the confidence needed to continue pursuing long-term goals. In this way, leadership strengthens the emotional foundations that enable sustainable learning, growth, and achievement.

Correlation with Social Competencies

Leadership is also closely connected to the development of other social competences, as the way a coach leads directly influences how people interact and work together. Effective leadership requires strong communication to create clarity, understanding, and shared goals. At the same time, leaders build trust by acting consistently, creating a safe environment in which participants feel confident to contribute, take risks, and learn from mistakes.

Leadership is also linked to empathy and compassion, as coaches need to understand and respond to the needs, perspectives, and emotions of others. This helps individuals feel valued and strengthens relationships within the group. Furthermore, leaders play an important role in conflict management by addressing disagreements constructively and guiding participants toward positive solutions. Through these social interactions, leadership creates the conditions in which individuals can develop and apply their social competences.

1.4. Key learnings

- Leadership is the ability to influence and guide others toward common goals.
- Positive leadership contributes to team performance and success on and off the field.
- While effective leadership is context-specific, four styles provide the strongest insights for success: values-based, authentic, servant, and situational leadership.
- Values-based leadership is built on shared values, strengthening team cohesion and commitment to common goals.
- Authentic leaders are aware of their own and others' thoughts, behaviours, and values, acting ethically and responsibly.
- Servant leaders prioritise their followers' needs, showing empathy and helping them reach their full potential.
- Situational leaders adapt their style to the needs of the team and the demands of each situation.
- All four leadership styles reflect the Ubuntu philosophy: a person becomes who they are through others.
- Shared themes include mutual respect, kindness, empathy, compassion, ethical behaviour, conflict management, and autonomy.

1.5. From science to practice

Stage 1 7-8 years



Belonging, fairness, helping

At this stage, leadership is experienced as simple social responsibility within the group. Players begin to understand that their behaviour affects others, but leadership is not yet connected to abstract values or identity. Coaches support leadership development by reinforcing inclusion, fairness, and helping behaviour, creating a stable foundation for later value alignment.

Stage 2 9-10 years



Responsibility, encouragement, team awareness

As social awareness expands, leadership becomes linked to visible responsibility and supportive influence. Players begin to recognise how encouragement and respectful behaviour shape team climate. Coaches translate leadership theory into practice by consistently naming responsible actions and connecting effort to team benefit.

Stage 3 11-12 years



Accountability, influence, behavioural standards

Leadership increasingly involves ownership of behaviour and awareness of relational impact. Players understand that their actions influence peers and that leadership is shown through consistency rather than status. At this stage, coaches reinforce accountability and constructive influence without yet emphasising collective value articulation.

Stage 4 13-14 years



Peer influence, value formation, composure under pressure

With stronger peer comparison and identity development, shared values begin to gain importance. Players become more sensitive to group norms and social evaluation, making this a critical stage for intentional value clarification. Coaches translate leadership theory into practice by facilitating discussions about what the team stands for, modelling composure in high-pressure moments, and reinforcing that leadership protects collective standards.

Stage 5 15-16 years



Shared ownership, cultural responsibility, empowerment

Leadership now extends to proactive protection of team culture. Players are capable of internalising and defending shared values, especially in situations of conflict or competitive stress. Coaches strengthen leadership development by empowering athletes to co-create, uphold, and monitor team standards, reinforcing that leadership serves collective identity rather than individual recognition.

Stage 6 17-18 years



Mentorship, identity stewardship, performance impact

At the highest developmental stage, leadership integrates reflection, mentorship, and long-term cultural responsibility. Players understand that shared values influence cohesion, communication, and performance stability. Coaches support this stage by encouraging senior athletes to model humility, respect, interconnectedness, and shared responsibility as foundations of sustainable team leadership.

2. COACHES' BEHAVIOUR

2.1. Coaching style

2.1.1. Scientific grounding

Leadership in sport extends beyond authority or decision-making; it is a relational and developmental process that shapes team culture, motivation, and collective functioning. Research across values-based, authentic, servant, and situational leadership demonstrates that effective leadership is grounded in ethical consistency, relational awareness, adaptability, and shared responsibility (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Spears, 2010; Van der Walt, 2015; Scott, 2023). In football contexts specifically, leadership has been identified as a significant factor influencing team effectiveness and sustained success (Shehu, 2019).

The integration of these leadership approaches within the Ubuntu philosophy emphasises interdependence, humility, respect, and collective identity (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013; Mutwarasibo & Iken, 2019). Rather than positioning leadership as hierarchical control, Ubuntu frames leadership as relational influence rooted in shared values and community-centred responsibility (Sulamoyo, 2010; Van der Walt, 2015).

In youth sport settings, coaches function not only as tactical guides but as cultural role models. Leadership effectiveness therefore depends on the alignment between articulated values and daily behaviour, the ability to adapt leadership to developmental stages, and the capacity to connect individual motivation with collective purpose.

2.1.2. Practical implications

Practically, this means that leadership in sport is expressed through daily relational behaviour that reflects respect, humility, responsibility, and collective alignment. Team values should not be imposed unilaterally but developed through a collective alignment process in which players actively contribute to defining what the team stands for and how it wants to behave. Leadership, in this sense, becomes a shared cultural practice rather than a positional authority.

An Ubuntu-oriented leader demonstrates:

- Respect for others
 - Models transparency and fairness in communication
 - Listens actively and acknowledges different perspectives
 - Builds trust through consistent and ethical behaviour
- Community inter-connectedness
 - Strengthens a sense of shared purpose
 - Emphasises that individual success is linked to team success
 - Encourages cooperation and mutual accountability
- Humility
 - Engages in self-reflection and admits mistakes
 - Seeks feedback from players
 - Maintains balance between authority and approachability
- Sharing
 - Empowers players to take responsibility
 - Delegates leadership roles appropriately
 - Encourages collaborative problem-solving

Especially in high-pressure situations, these leadership traits become visible and influential. Respect prevents fragmentation, humility prevents ego-driven reactions, and shared responsibility stabilises the team's emotional climate. When leaders embody interconnectedness and collective accountability, players internalise these standards and reproduce them within the group.

When consistently modelled, Ubuntu-oriented leadership strengthens cohesion by reinforcing shared identity, relational trust, and collective responsibility. Performance benefits because aligned values reduce internal friction, enhance communication efficiency, support resilient responses to adversity, and increase coordinated action under pressure.

2.2. Choice of words

Leadership is communicated through language that shapes responsibility, shared values, and collective identity. Research shows that influence is exercised not only through decisions and actions but also through how expectations and values are articulated (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Scott, 2023). In sport environments, a coach's vocabulary shapes how players understand accountability and service to the team. Leadership-oriented language therefore reinforces responsibility, ethical standards, and collective purpose.

As players mature, language becomes a key tool for transferring leadership from coach to team. Coaches must provide direction while encouraging ownership, initiative, and value-based decision-making. By emphasising contribution and mutual accountability, they help players internalise leadership as a relational practice.

In modern sport contexts marked by performance pressure and individual incentives, leadership language should consistently reinforce collective identity and shared standards. Coaches can do this by referencing team values, recognising responsible behaviour, and framing challenges as opportunities to strengthen team culture. Communication in decisive moments shapes how players understand responsibility and influence.

With increasing maturity, leadership language shifts from modelling responsibility to facilitating it. Younger players are introduced to fairness and helping behaviours, while older athletes are encouraged to reflect on their impact, uphold shared values, and mentor others. This progression reflects the transition from guided participation to autonomous leadership within the team.

Stage 1 7-8 years



Language should introduce leadership as helping others and acting fairly within the group.

- Reinforce kindness and inclusion
- Highlight simple responsibility
- Encourage helping behaviour
- Connect actions to team fairness

Example tone: *"We help each other.", "A leader is kind."*

Stage 2 9-10 years



Language should encourage awareness of responsibility and the impact of behaviour on the team.

- Emphasize personal responsibility
- Encourage respectful communication
- Reinforce shared rules
- Connect effort to team benefit

Example tone: *"How can you help the team right now?", "What does our team need?"*

Stage 3 11-12 years



Language should strengthen ownership of shared standards and leading by example.

- Refer to agreed team values
- Encourage accountability
- Reinforce fairness and integrity
- Connect behaviour to influence

Example tone: *"Does this match what we agreed?", "Leadership means setting the standard."*

Stage 4 13-14 years



Language should guide players to lead constructively under pressure and model responsible influence.

- Promote calm leadership in tense moments
- Encourage constructive peer guidance
- Reinforce emotional regulation
- Emphasise responsibility for group climate

Example tone: *"What does the team need from you right now?"*

Stage 5 15-16 years



Language should promote proactive leadership and protection of team culture.

- Encourage initiative and ownership
- Reinforce shared identity
- Connect actions to collective standards
- Promote accountability for team values

Example tone: *"What standard are you setting?", "How are you influencing the group?"*

Stage 6 17-18 years



Language should support cultural leadership and mentorship within the team.

- Encourage reflective leadership
- Connect behaviour to long-term team identity
- Reinforce service to the collective
- Promote peer mentoring

Example tone: *"How can you model this for others?", "What does our identity require?"*

2.3. Body Language

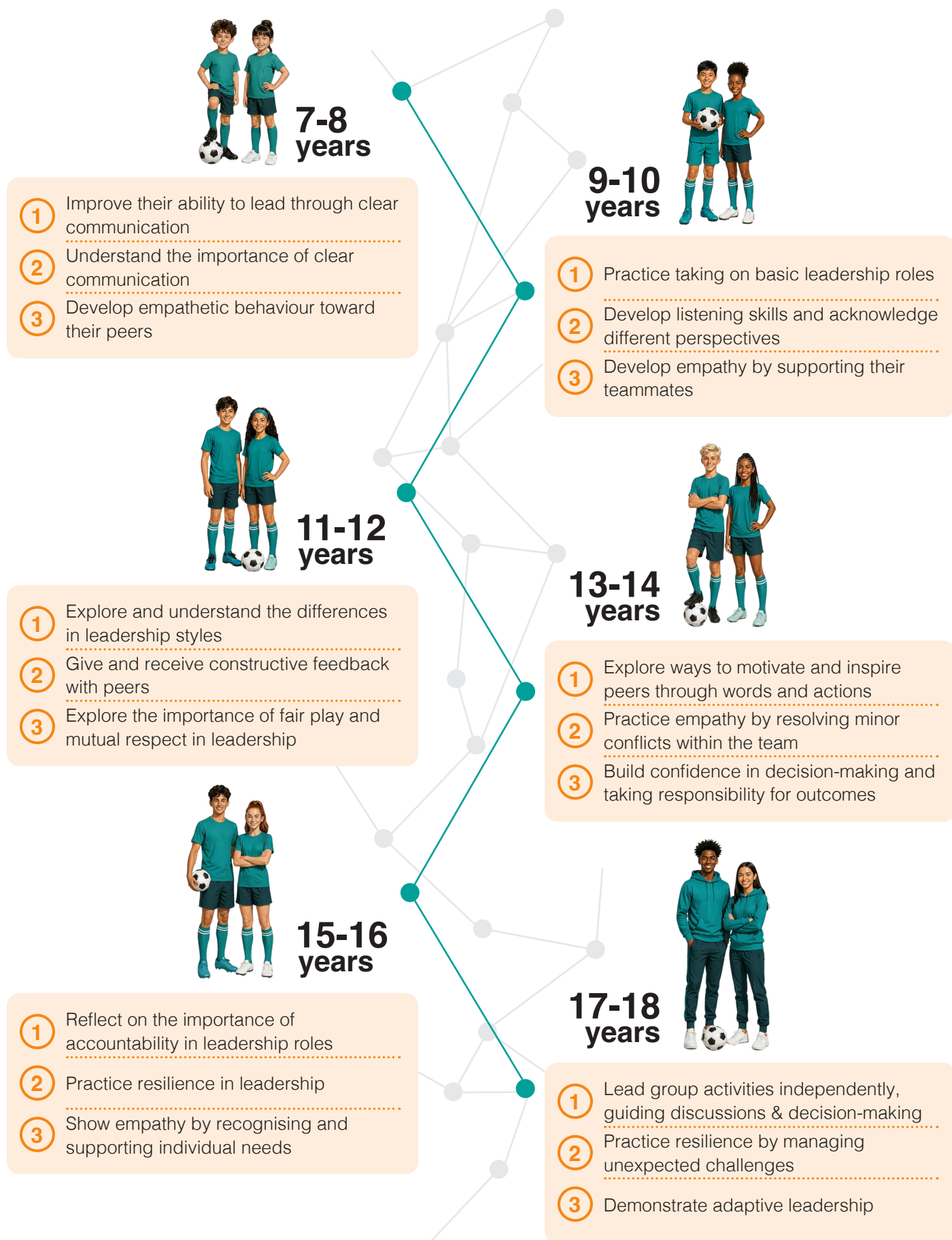
Leadership is communicated as much through non-verbal behaviour as through words. In team environments, players continuously observe how a leader carries themselves, especially in moments of tension, success, or failure. Consistent and value-aligned body language reinforces credibility, authority grounded in respect, and collective stability.



When body language consistently reflects respect, humility, and collective alignment, cohesion strengthens because players experience stability and fairness. Performance benefits because calm and credible non-verbal leadership reduces uncertainty, supports emotional regulation, and reinforces coordinated action under pressure.

3. TRAINING

The development journey of leadership from foundation to maturity:



Training

7-8
years



3.1. Stage 1 (7-8 years)

3.1.1. Stage characteristics

In this age group, it is important to make use of fun exercises that incorporate gentle leadership skills. Children can flexibly change their attention and start to memorise processes, making repetitions and clear instructions important.

3.1.2. Specific learning objectives

Players in this stage are in their early stages of development and do not yet understand the importance and concepts around leadership. Clear instructions should be used to explain tasks and exercises which should be fun. Children themselves start learning the relevance of clear communication and instructions. Furthermore, in this stage, the players develop empathetic behaviour and start being able to relate to their peers, which is identified as one important ability of positive leadership.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

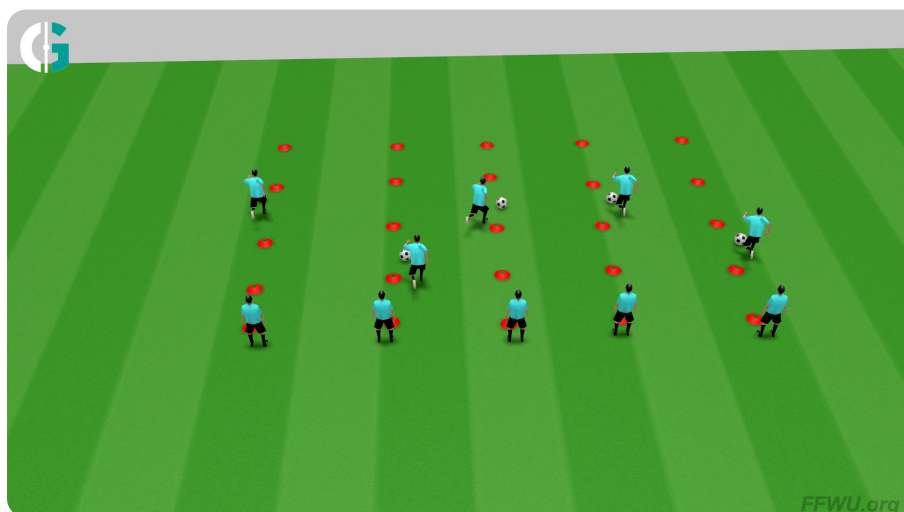
- ① Improve their ability to lead through clear communication
- ② Understand the importance of clear communication
- ③ Develop empathetic behaviour toward their peers

3.1.3. Coach insight

At this stage, leadership should not be framed as status or authority. Coaches should emphasise helping behaviour, fairness, and inclusion as the first expressions of leadership. Young players need concrete examples and immediate reinforcement when they act responsibly toward others. Leadership is built through visible modelling and repetition rather than abstract discussion.

EXERCISE

DRIBBLING PARKOUR



	Players	5+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	20 x 20 m
	Equipment	5 balls, 20 cones
	Duration	total: 12 min play: 3 x 3 min breaks: 1 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Multiple stations are set up as parkour with cones according to the number of players available.
- For the first round, the players are instructed to dribble through the cones without touching the cones.
- For the second round, the players pair up:
 - One player is blindfolded and dribbles through the cones while the other one leads.
 - After one round, the players change their roles.
- For the third round, the pairs can discuss a strategy before one player is blindfolded.
- Variations:
 - Use of both feet
 - Leading only by touching
 - Leading through vocal demands

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage the players to **touch the ball as often as possible** while dribbling.
2. It might be easier for players to **control the ball with the sole** of their foot when blindfolded.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players improve their **ability** to lead through **clear communication**.

- What words or signs did you use to communicate (i.e. left, right, slower, faster, etc.)?

2

Players **understand the importance** of clear communication.

- What words or signs worked better to help the other player through the parkour?
- Why do you think some worked better than others?

3

Players develop **empathetic behaviour** toward their peers.

- What did your partner do well (i.e. short and clear commands, listened very closely, short touches on the ball, etc.)?

Training

9-10
years



3.2. Stage 2 (9-10 years)

3.2.1. Stage characteristics

Children in this stage are in their early social and emotional development. They are starting to recognise how their actions affect other people and players and starting to become comfortable working in groups. Their understanding of leadership is still limited, and they need clear instructions and structure. Children in this age group should experience positive reinforcement and engage in activities on empathy and cooperation.

3.2.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, children start to understand group dynamics and how their actions impact other people or players. They begin to understand that they are part of a team and are equipped to take on basic leadership responsibility. Activities should be easy and fun and focus on basic leadership traits, such as empathy and communication.

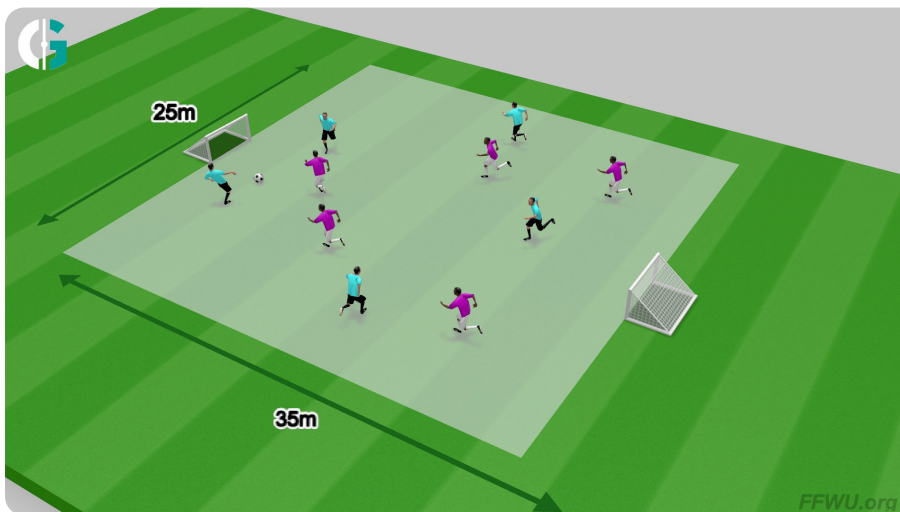
In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

- 1 Practice taking on basic leadership roles
- 2 Develop listening skills and acknowledge different perspectives
- 3 Develop empathy by supporting their teammates

3.2.3. Coach insight

Leadership begins to involve responsibility for how behaviour influences the group. Coaches should consistently name responsible actions and reinforce encouragement as a leadership behaviour. It is important to avoid labelling specific players as “leaders” too early; instead, leadership should be presented as a behaviour anyone can demonstrate.

FOOTBALL 3



	Players	6+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	25×35 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 2 mini-goals, 5 bibs, 6 cones
	Duration	total: 24 min play: 4× 5 min breaks: 1 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Players are divided into two teams.
- They are told that this game is played in three parts:
 - First part, the players decide on three rules to follow while playing (i.e. these can be fun or football-specific, like everyone needs to touch the ball before a goal is scored).
 - The second part is the game, to be played in 20 minutes.
 - The third part includes a reflection on the game and following the rules.
- All discussions are guided by the players. No referee exists, and the players decide for themselves, i.e. fouls.
- Variations:
 - A tournament version can be played with more teams.
 - Points can be allocated for following the rules and then added to the usual football points: 1 point for following one rule, 2 points for following two rules, 3 points for following all rules

Coaching Tips

1. When this is first played, the coach should **help with communication** throughout the three parts.
2. Then, the players should **take on the leadership** themselves and not rely on the coach.
3. Make sure to find an **appropriate discussion space**, be it under a tree or somewhere else quiet and comfortable.
4. Take your time, and encourage your players to **take their time** for discussions.



Learning Objectives

1

Players practice taking on **basic leadership roles**.

2

Players develop **listening skills** and acknowledging **different perspectives**.

3

Players **develop empathy** by supporting their teammates.



Reflection Questions

- What was difficult when deciding on your own rules?
- How did you come to an agreement (i.e. counting hands, choosing a leader, etc.)?
- How did you feel reflecting on the game?
- Who guided the discussion?
- How did you deal with disagreements?
- Did you support your other teammates?
- How did you support them (in each half-time)?

Training

11-12
years



3.3. Stage 3 (11-12 years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

In this stage, adolescents become more self-aware and spend more time with their peers in a group context. They start to understand group dynamics and different roles within a group that can lead to better team success. Furthermore, adolescents in this stage start to understand more abstract concepts surrounding leadership, like setting goals, reflecting on experiences, and learning from mistakes.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

Players in this stage develop an increased understanding of specific leadership traits, such as goal setting, giving and receiving feedback, and supporting each other. Consequently, activities can include discussions on empathy, respect, and fairness, all seen as building blocks of a positive leader.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

1

Explore and understanding the differences in leadership styles

2

Giving and receive constructive feedback with peers

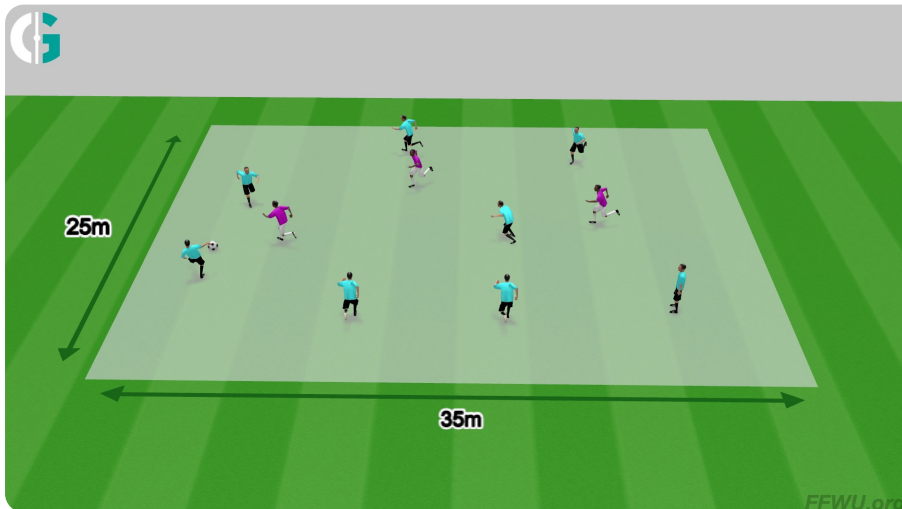
3

Explore the importance of fair play and mutual respect in leadership

3.3.3. Coach insight

Players are now capable of understanding influence and shared standards. Coaches should link leadership to consistency and accountability rather than popularity or dominance. This is a critical stage for preventing ego-driven interpretations of leadership. Reinforcing that leadership is shown through daily behaviour strengthens relational credibility.

LEADERSHIP ROLE



	Players	8+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	25×35 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 3 bibs, 8 cones
	Duration	total: 27 min play: 3× 7 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- A team of 6 attacking players play in a grid against 2 defending players.
- The attacking team is given the ball and instructed to pass the ball among themselves while moving around the grid, avoiding the defending players, to intercept the ball. Points are given after 10 completed passes.
- The roles should be swapped after 3.5 minutes.
- Each group chooses one leader within their team. This leader is given information on different leadership styles by the coach and acts them out within his/her team.
- A reflection on each leadership style should be incorporated at the end of each exercise.
- Variations:
 - Different exercises can be used to do this exercise: Simpler passing drills, more complicated game situations

Coaching Tips

1. Make use of the styles discussed in this chapter for learning purposes:
 - **Authoritative:** dictate movements and passing strategies.
 - **Servant:** ask players what they need to succeed. Make adjustments to support each player.
 - **Values-based:** reinforce team values, such as “work hard” and “support your teammates.”
 - **Authentic:** share a personal story of when you had to stay true to your strengths in a challenging situation. Then encourage players to focus on what they’re good at.
2. A **reflection** at the end of this exercise.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players explore and understand the **differences in leadership styles**.

- What was different among the different leadership styles? What did you like and what didn't you like?

2

Players practice **giving and receiving constructive feedback** with peers.

- What did the leader do well?
- What did your teammates do well?
- What can they still improve?

3

Players explore **the importance of fair play** and mutual respect in leadership.

- How did the authoritative leadership make you feel?
- Why do you think positive encouragement makes you feel different from dictative instructions?

Training

13-14
years



3.4. Stage 4 (13-14 years)

3.4.1. Stage characteristics

Early adolescents in this stage are starting to form a stronger sense of self and are influenced by relationships with their peers, as well as social acceptance. They become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses and often look for validation from their peers. Furthermore, they have developed a bigger sense of responsibility and appreciate having a say in team decisions.

3.4.2. Specific learning objectives

For this age group, personal leadership qualities, motivation, and decision-making can be introduced. Players start understanding their personal strengths and how they can play a role in leadership roles. Activities on independence, responsibility, and conflict resolution are useful for players in this stage.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

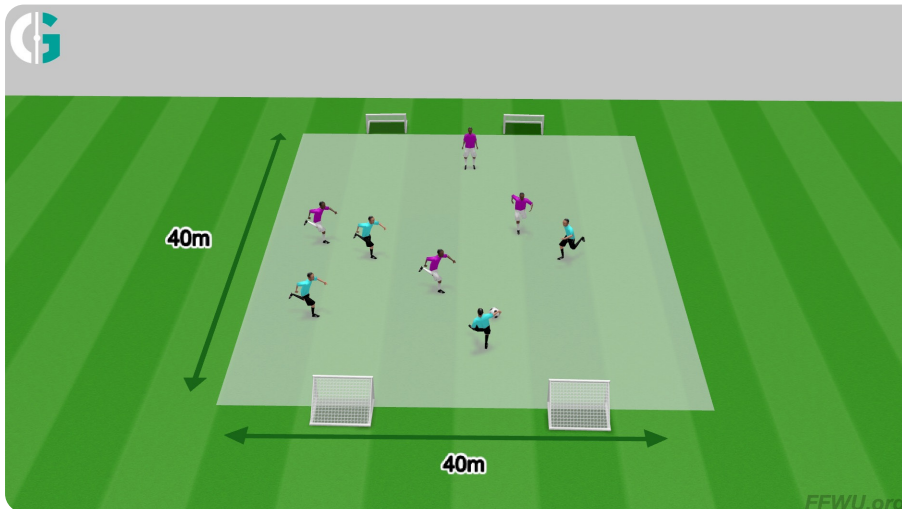
- 1 Explore ways to motivate and inspire peers through words and actions
- 2 Practice empathy by resolving minor conflicts within the team
- 3 Build confidence in decision-making and taking responsibility for outcomes

3.4.3. Coach insight

Peer comparison intensifies, and informal leaders emerge. Coaches must guide value discussions intentionally and model composure under pressure. Leadership education should include how to influence constructively without humiliating or overpowering teammates. This stage requires careful facilitation of value clarification and respectful debate.

EXERCISE

LEADERSHIP GAME ON FOUR GOALS



	Players	8+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	40×40 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 4 mini-goals, 5 bibs, 8 cones
	Duration	total: 21 min play: 3× 5 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Set up the field with four goals, two on opposite sides.
- Two teams of 4 players compete against each other.
- Each team has 2–3 minutes before the game to:
 - First, decide who the leader is.
 - Second, the leader makes a decision on the playing formation (i.e. 1-2-1).
 - Third, the leader assigns positions to the players. The teams then play and each team has to defend and attack two goals.
- After 5 minutes, the teams come together again for 2 minutes and adapt their strategy or make any changes they find necessary. After that, another 5 minutes are played.
- Variations:
 - A tournament version is possible, making it necessary for the players to adapt their strategy to the opponent.
 - The roles can be changed.

Coaching Tips

1. Encourage the players to **communicate and listen** to each other.
2. If they take longer to discuss, **let them**.
3. Make sure to **switch between the teams** and listen to how the leaders act and behave to be able to lead a better reflection afterward.
 - How does the leader make decisions? i.e. asking vs. assigning.
4. Especially in the beginning, **advise and support** the strategy discussion.
5. Later on, let the **players lead** these themselves.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players explore ways to **motivate and inspire peers** through words and actions.

- How did you, as a leader, try to motivate your teammates?
- What other ways can you think of motivating and inspiring them?

2

Players practice empathy by **resolving minor conflicts** within the team.

- Did any disagreements happen on the field?
- How did you solve these?
- What role did the leader take on when conflicts happened?

3

Players build **confidence in decision-making** and taking responsibility for outcomes.

- How did you go about making strategic decisions?
- How did it make you feel to lead your team and make decisions?

Training

15-16
years



3.5. Stage 5 (15-16 years)

3.5.1. Stage characteristics

At this stage, players are developing an increased sense of responsibility and start focusing on future goals. Furthermore, they start finding their autonomy important and are interested in developing their own unique leadership style. They are also able to understand more abstract concepts of positive leadership, such as accountability and resilience.

3.5.2. Specific learning objectives

For players in this stage, activities on accountability, resilience, and peer mentorship are relevant. Players can now handle leadership roles and guide others, dealing with setbacks. Consequently, they should learn about mentorship and have guided autonomy experiences first.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

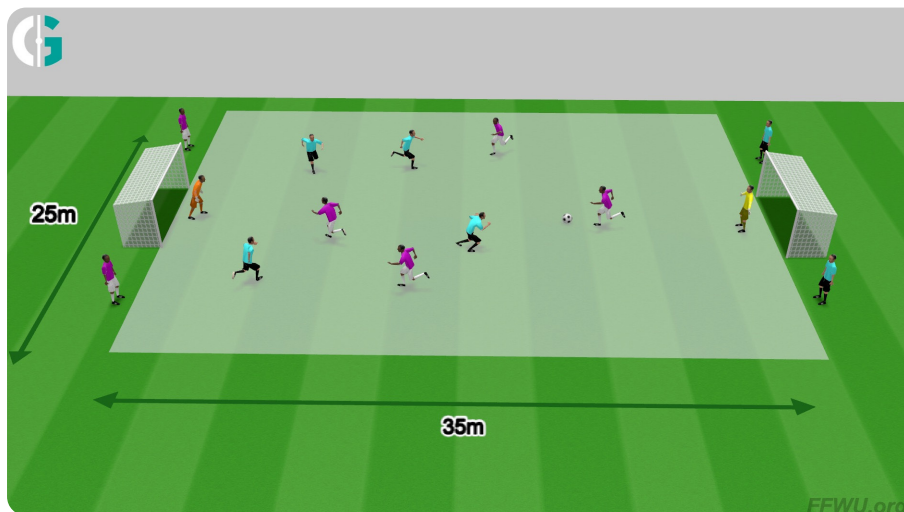
- 1 Reflect on the importance of accountability in leadership roles
- 2 Practice resilience in leadership
- 3 Show empathy by recognising and supporting individual needs

3.5.3. Coach insight

Players are capable of co-creating and protecting team culture. Coaches should gradually shift from directing leadership to facilitating it. Empowerment becomes essential, including delegation of responsibility and structured opportunities for player-led decision-making. Leadership should be framed as service to the group rather than individual recognition.

EXERCISE

CAPTAIN'S DEFENSIVE & ATTACKING SHAPE



	Players	8+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	25×35 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 6 bibs, 8 cones
	Duration	total: 21 min play: 3× 5 min breaks: 2 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Three teams of 4 (or more) players are set up, two positioned on the field and from one team; the players spread out next to the goals as passing players.
- The team outside is neutral, hence both teams can make use of all four players outside.
- The players outside need to pass the ball back to the team they received it from.
- Each team is given 5 minutes to discuss: Who is the team leader? (1 min), Defence strategy (2 min), Offence strategy (2 min)
- The game is played according to the discussed strategies. The team leader is responsible for their team, ensures that roles are known, motivates and communicates.
- After 5 minutes, the teams come together again to adjust their strategies with feedback given from the players and the coach.
- Variations:
 - Pressure is possible, such as a countdown or scoring incentives.

Coaching Tips

1. Support the players in their discussions if this exercise is new, then **let them lead and discuss for themselves** and support where needed.
2. Provide feedback but **let the players have responsibility** over this exercise.
3. Tell the teams **when to switch** between discussing defence and offence strategy.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players reflect on the **importance of accountability** in leadership roles.

- Were there moments you had to make decisions quickly?
- How did you manage them?
- What might you do differently, looking back?

2

Players practice **resilience** in leadership.

- What was a challenging moment you faced in this exercise and what did you learn from it about handling setbacks?

3

Players demonstrate empathy by **recognizing and supporting individual needs**.

- How did you motivate your team and keep everyone focused on the plan? Did you have to adapt your strategy depending on who you were trying to motivate?

Training

17-18
years



3.6. Stage 6 (17-18 years)

3.6.1. Stage characteristics

Young adults at this age are able to transition into more structured leadership roles. They are able to reflect on their actions and motivations, are becoming self-reliant, and can critically think about leadership styles. Furthermore, young adults can now understand the complexities of group dynamics and consider the long-term impact of their decisions.

3.6.2. Specific learning objectives

Young adults in this age group can take on independent leadership tasks, such as leading projects or exercises. Activities should enable them to reflect on their leadership style and consider the impact that their leadership has on individuals and the team. They are now ready to take on responsibility for the team's success and are able to act as role models for younger players.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

- 1 Lead group activities independently, guiding discussions & decision-making
- 2 Practice resilience by managing unexpected challenges
- 3 Demonstrate adaptive leadership

3.6.3. Coach insight

At the highest stage, leadership involves mentorship and long-term cultural responsibility. Coaches should support reflective practice and connect leadership behaviour to cohesion and performance stability. Senior players must be encouraged to model humility, respect, interconnectedness, and shared responsibility consistently, especially in high-pressure situations.

EXERCISE

PLAYER-LED EXERCISE



	Players	8+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	full field
	Equipment	various
	Duration	total: 30 min
	Author	SJ Weber

Description

- Divide players into groups of four. Each group discusses how they'll design an exercise (based on the objective). They should consider:
 - The setup (space, equipment, number of players needed)
 - Rules and any variations
 - What they want to achieve (e.g., teamwork, quick decisions, specific skills)
 - How to give feedback and keep their teammates engaged
- Each group takes turns leading their exercise. The group members should:
 - Explain the purpose and rules of their drill.
 - Guide their teammates through the activity, giving feedback, encouragement, and any necessary corrections.
- Variations:
 - To make this more challenging, time limits and scoring systems can be introduced.

Coaching Tips

1. If the players struggle, you can **choose a broad drill objective** that the team needs to work on, such as „ball control,“ „possession,“ or „decision-making under pressure.“
2. Especially in the beginning, give the players **time to prepare**.
3. After each group's exercise, gather everyone for **a quick discussion on the experience**.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players **lead group activities independently**, facilitating discussions and decision-making.

- What strategies did you use to keep your teammates focused, especially when opinions differed?

2

Players practice resilience by **managing unexpected challenges**.

- What did you do when the drill did not go as planned? Did you have any strategies?

3

Players demonstrate **adaptive leadership**.

- What adjustments did you make to the exercise when you realised your teammates needed something different?
- How did you recognise that a change was needed?

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