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*Original article*

## *The leadership process in high-performance sport in Cuba: characteristics and needs*

*El proceso de liderazgo en el deporte de alto rendimiento en Cuba: características y  
necesidades*

*O processo de liderança no esporte de alto rendimento em Cuba: características e  
necessidades*

Eduardo F. Bustillo Cabrera<sup>1\*</sup> , Melix Ilisástigui Avilés<sup>2\*</sup> , Idalys Ortiz Bocourt<sup>2\*</sup> 

<sup>1\*</sup>Manuel Fajardo University of Physical Culture and Sports Sciences. Havana, Cuba.

<sup>2\*</sup>National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation. Havana, Cuba.

Corresponding author: melissa.ilisstigui@gmail.com

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study addresses leadership management in high-performance sports within the Cuban context, based on an examination of the activities and perspectives of 45 managers working at this level. The objective is to identify the characteristics and needs of leadership



management in high-performance sports in Cuba. Document analysis, observation, and surveys were employed as research methods. The study identifies shortcomings in the performance of the participating professionals and deems it necessary to design a model to improve the management of this activity.

**Keywords:** professional competencies, managers, management, model.

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### RESUMEN

Se aborda la gestión del liderazgo en el deporte de alto rendimiento en las condiciones de Cuba, a partir del acercamiento a las actividades y criterios de 45 directivos que se desempeñan en este nivel. Se declara, como objetivo, identificar las características y necesidades de la gestión del proceso de liderazgo en el deporte de alto rendimiento, en las condiciones de Cuba. Como métodos de investigación se aplica el análisis de documentos, la observación y la encuesta. Se identifican deficiencias en el desempeño de los profesionales participantes en la investigación y se considera necesario el diseño de un modelo que contribuya al perfeccionamiento de la gestión de esta actividad.

**Palabras claves:** competencias profesionales, directivos, gestión, modelo.

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### RESUMO

A gestão da liderança no esporte de alto rendimento nas condições cubanas é abordada examinando as atividades e os critérios de 45 executivos que trabalham nesse nível. O objetivo declarado é identificar as características e necessidades de gestão do processo de liderança no esporte de alto rendimento, nas condições cubanas. Os métodos de pesquisa utilizados são análise documental, observação e levantamentos. Foram identificadas deficiências no desempenho dos profissionais participantes da pesquisa, sendo considerada necessária a construção de um modelo que contribua para o aprimoramento da gestão dessa atividade.



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**Palabras-chave:** competencias profesionales, gestores, gestión, modelo.

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## INTRODUCTION

The growing competitive demands present in the global sports context require the application of adequate knowledge management by all members of the organizations that comprise it, related to the mastery of information and knowledge linked to the dynamics of high-performance sports organizations worldwide.

According to Fonseca (2019), this process relates to the capacity to influence people to enthusiastically and responsibly pursue common goals, with the aim of achieving competitive excellence in their sport in the short, medium, and long term, based on the principle: there is no team without a leader, nor a leader without a team. To achieve this, three essential aspects must be demonstrated: diagnosis, flexibility in using different management styles, and adaptation to the leadership style.

For some authors (Meza and Ramos, 2021; Cantón and García, 2023), the process has as its main objective to identify its leaders among the team members and, according to Blanco (2019), to better prepare athletes in terms of understanding the objectives of preparation and competitive action in the condition of high mastery in major competitions, to promote the development of the sport and to contribute to the management of their networks of contacts and the flow of information.

High-performance sport demands specific attention to the management of the leadership process since it is, in particular, an activity where educational work is manifested to a very high degree in the conditions of Cuba.

High-performance sports managers in Cuba direct their activities based on two work strategies: preparation for the Olympic cycle and development of young athletes. They carry out diverse activities related to leadership and their preparation, including individual development, participation in scientific events, involvement in research projects, and participation in methodological and administrative meetings, among others.



In accordance with the above, the following objective of the work is assumed: to identify the characteristics and needs of the management of the leadership process in high-performance sport, under the conditions of Cuba.

## ***MATERIALS AND METHODS***

The study was conducted at the "Cerro Pelado" Higher School of Athletic Development in 2024, with the participation of managers involved in high-performance sports, what allowed for the inclusion of head coaches and assistant coaches, as applicable, who were considered personal sources. From a population of 37 managers and 30 coaches, an intentional sample of 45 subjects was selected, which is representative and meets the following inclusion criteria:

- To hold the position for five years or more.
- That the manager's performance be carried out under the rules established for high-performance sport, under the conditions of Cuba.

The following aspects were established as non-personal sources:

- Current legislation on high-performance sport at the national level.
- Standards established for the management of high-performance sport at its different levels.
- Reports of systematic visits and evaluations carried out at different levels of high-performance sport.
- Reports of meetings, workshops, gatherings or other activities.

To characterize the current state of the object of study and to specify the causes that originate the research problem and its manifestations, the information required to assess the management of the leadership process in the conditions of Cuba was collected, the main ones being the documentary review, aimed at identifying the characteristics of the planning that is defined in terms of the management carried out by managers in the context of the leadership process in high performance.



The observation method was also applied to identify the characteristics of the leadership process management carried out by managers.

The methods referred were complemented by the application of a survey to the selected managers in the field of high-performance sport, to assess the current state of the management of the leadership process they carry out and to establish criteria on the current state of the management of the leadership process in high-performance sport.

The recorded responses were subjected to percentage analysis, allowing for an assessment of the status of the collected indicators related to the cognitive, affective, and volitional components of leadership management in high-performance sports. For the purpose of assessing the indicators, the following criteria were established: High (75% or more favorable results); Medium (50 to 74% favorable results); and Low (Less than 50% favorable results).

## ***RESULTS AND DISCUSSION***

In the information gathered from the application of the declared instruments, linked to the leadership performance of the participants in the research in the aspects related to the cognitive, affective and volitional components, the presence of medium and low levels of the following indicators was observed:

- Needs, interests and expectations of high-performance sport.
- Specific professional and management competencies in high-performance sport.
- Ability to use equipment, technologies, media and sports implements required in the management of high-performance sport.
- Ability to identify needs and problems in the high-performance sports management process.
- Design of development policies and implementation strategies for programs, plans and projects.
- Ability to communicate transformative ideas at different levels of high-performance sport.
- Attention span and differentiation of behaviors that occur in high-performance sports.



- Mastery of the legal support and regulatory provisions governing high-performance sport, including economic and financial control.
- Ability to manage the development of scientific research applied to high-performance sport.

### *Results of the survey applied to managers of high-performance sports*

When determining the level of the indicators in the cognitive, affective, and volitional components, it was evident that almost all of the indicators showed ratings in the medium or low categories in all three aspects assessed. The following indicators stand out with medium ratings:

- Fundamentals of sports activity management.
- Approaches to sports management.
- Required sports equipment and implements, as well as a diagnosis of needs and problems.

The indicators listed below showed a low level in the cognitive, affective, and volitional components:

- Technological processes in the sports field.
- Injury prevention and first aid measures.
- Basic principles of accounting.

### *Results of the interview conducted with the managers*

The interview revealed that the managers participating in the research, when self-assessing their leadership management, consider that it is characterized by the following elements:

- Deficiencies that translate into negative impacts on the development of the sport.
- Willingness to assume managerial responsibilities.
- Lack of policies and programs for individual development and improvement of professional performance.



- The evaluations are more focused on the results achieved than on identifying the shortcomings and strengths of the manager.

The foregoing demonstrates that managers responsible for leadership development in high-performance sports suffer from deficiencies in the evaluated cognitive, affective, and volitional indicators, which limits their ability to achieve the intended objective. This highlights the need to design a theoretical model that serves as a starting point for reorienting, through a genuine process of improvement, the actions related to the leadership process inherent to managers of high-performance sports in Cuba.

To identify the aspects related to the elaboration of its contextualization, foundations and theoretical-methodological qualities, the strategic approach was used, which is essential as part of any leadership model, particularly for the Directors of high-performance sports in Cuba, as it fosters a perspective and transformative vision that is based on the current demands of the country, the transformations in management and the changes that occur constantly in the field of high-performance sports at the national and international level.

The design of this model offers a proposal that serves as a guide for the development of high-performance sports organizations that are committed to quality in the results of their work areas.

The similarities and differences that distinguish the proposed model from those already existing for high performance in Cuba and other models from international authors were analyzed (Barba and Delgado, 2021 and Cantón and García, 2023).

The structuring of the model and the elaboration of its theoretical foundations were based on philosophical, sociological, psychological and pedagogical sciences, which allows, from a theoretical point of view, to offer coherence, scientificity and organization in the planning of the activities that make it up.

The arguments of Hernández (2017) and Lugo and Villasmil (2019) are accepted, as they consider that organizations, within their culture, must encourage the exchange of knowledge because, otherwise, technology cannot solve the organization's cognitive



problems, responsiveness, productivity, and organizational competence. In this position, the unity between instruction and education is evident, which presupposes that the appropriation process is linked to both the cognitive and affective domains.

The functional approach is adopted from the field of educational science, providing the necessary theoretical foundations for modeling the methodology required for the leadership process. In this sense, the approach adopted is that advocated by Valle (2018), who identifies four basic functions: planning, organization, implementation, and evaluation.

It is accepted that leadership has two components: on the one hand, the management component, which translates into the adoption of functions such as planning, organization, direction, and control of processes to achieve the proposed objectives, according to the mission and vision of these organizations; and on the other hand, the capacity and talent of individuals and organizations to transform leadership to obtain competitive advantages that support the functioning of the organic processes of high-performance sports, generating creativity and innovation power, which offers security and optimizes the management system implemented in the Directorate of Sports in Cuba.

Based on the systematization of the theoretical foundations found in the scientific literature reviewed (Fonseca, 2019; Valverde and Ortiz, 2020), among others, and the results derived from the diagnostic assessment of the current state of leadership in high-performance sports, a theoretical model is proposed. This model aims to provide a foundation for policies, strategies, and programs for developing competencies related to the topic at hand. Based on its supporting theoretical elements, this model should constitute the frame of reference for identifying pathways, methods, approaches, and procedures for addressing the performance competency profile.

The theoretical model, being a conceptual, symbolic, and therefore indirect representation, is based on principles identified by Valverde and Ortiz (2020), among others. These are:

1. Principle of deduction by analogy.
2. Principle of consistency,



3. principle of the systemic approach
4. Principle of simplicity and affordability.

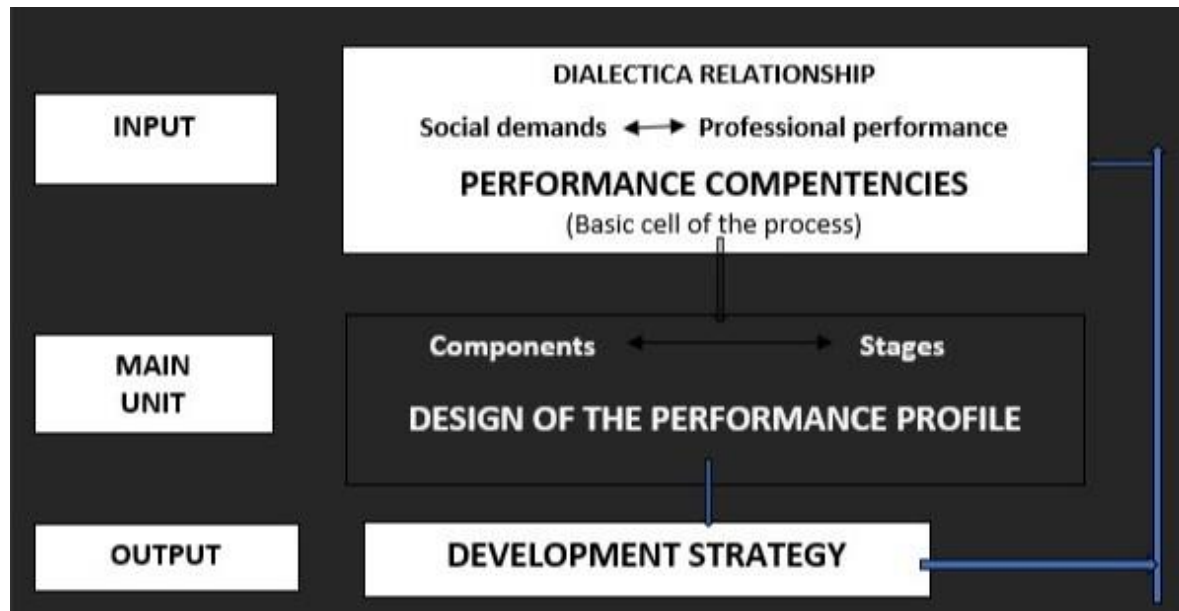
On the other hand, the essential characteristics of theoretical models, according to Meza and Ramos (2021), are those declared below:

- To assume the structure and dynamics of a system.
- They comprise a set of assumptions about some object or system.
- To reflect or reproduce the object of investigation.
- To describe a type of object or system, attributing to it what could be called an internal structure, which reflects the composition of a mechanism that explains, by taking it as a reference, various properties of the same.
- Considered a useful approximation for certain purposes.

The theoretical model proposed for the management of the leadership process in high-performance sport assumes the relationship of the affective, the cognitive and the volitional, in dynamic integration with knowledge, know-how and know-how, through the consonance between instruction, education and development of the personality of sports leaders, which should promote the concordance of the needs, purposes, interests and demands of the social mandate of these professionals (Columbié , Quintana and Del Canto, 2023) .

The design of the model presented takes into account accepted requirements for knowledge construction, on the one hand, and the impossibility of adopting previous models designed for other spheres of professional or social activity, on the other. Furthermore, the aspects highlighted emphasize the need to consider a set of premises and principles associated with an intensive process of reflection that, in its development, enabled the identification of the close link between theory and practice.





*Figure 1. Conceptual scheme of the proposed theoretical model*

Managerial competencies must also be enriched by elements that are particular to them, as they are geared towards enhancing the training of managers who manage the leadership process in high-performance sports, making it a necessity to take into account as an essential element to evaluate the degree of integration achieved between knowledge, skills and values in order to perfect performance.

The development of competencies for the performance of managers in charge of managing the leadership process in high performance cannot be interpreted as a self-generating process: it must be treated as a conscious activity, subject to a management process characterized by the forecasting and conception of planning, organization, regulation, control and evaluation actions that contribute to the achievement of the planned objectives.

When taken as the essence of performance, the indicators that characterize them are, to a similar extent, the guideline for a possible and, why not, necessary improvement strategy for the development of skills for the performance of high-performance sports managers.

The process-based approach to developing performance competencies allows the Model with its components of preparation (input), implementation (main element), and



evaluation (output) as well as the recommended continuous improvement strategy with its stages and actions, to leverage the appropriate structural relationship between the different methods used. Its content must correspond to the managerial competencies defined as part of the profile, establishing its gradual progression, which includes evaluation as a quality management mechanism for the managerial competency development process.

The analysis carried out, which provides the necessary and positive external and phenomenological characterization of the object of study, is insufficient and does not exhaust the object's richness. This necessitates a deeper analysis of its dynamics, its development, and its own dialectic; furthermore, it requires the revelation of the dialectical contradiction, which provides the driving force for the object's transformation and upon which the entire causal analysis of the object can be based.

The process must recreate the logic of its evolution, which requires the development of systemic (structural-functional, positivist), dialectical (based on the dialectical contradiction that must be revealed and developed in the structuring of the content), and genetic (revelation and use of the basic cell of the process) epistemological approaches. From a constructivist point of view, one must start from the dialectical contradiction, formalize the cell with it, and, with both, shape the structural-functional approach in order to subsequently apply these to the derivation of the theory and to the application of content variations, which provides the logical path for the development of the theory.

## CONCLUSIONS

A marked tendency is identified to present deficiencies related to cognitive, affective and volitional components, which implies the impairment of leadership management that is inherent to professionals who work in this sphere of sport in Cuba. The results recorded highlight the need to establish a work guide aimed at improving this activity, which should begin with the design and evaluation of a theoretical model that responds to the needs detected.



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The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest.

***Author's contribution:***

The author is responsible for writing the work and analyzing the documents.



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