

DOES ELITE COLLEGIATE SPORT DEVELOP THE BUSINESS LEADERS OF TOMORROW?

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Context

This paper discusses whether elite collegiate sport participation affects transformational leadership ability and whether graduate recruiters in the business sector are more likely to recruit graduates with sport experience.

Methods

This research seeks to answer three key questions:

- Q1. What are the skills that graduate recruiters require in the graduates that they recruit?
- Q2. Does collegiate sport participation develop the skills that graduate recruiters require?
- Q3. Do student athletes demonstrate greater leadership skills than student non-athletes?

This research employs a mixed methods approach to research, triangulating a systematic review of literature with questionnaire and interview research. Q1 was investigated using a systematic review of literature and validated using semi-structured questionnaire research, Q2 using semi-structured interviews, and Q3 using MLQ (multi-factor leadership) questionnaires.

Systematic Review

A systematic review was identified as the most appropriate method of literature review due to its applicability to a managerial study of this nature. The systematic review identifies key scientific contributions to a question or field and is undertaken in place of a 'traditional' narrative review. It is a positivistic method that has migrated from the medical sciences to the management sciences and has been developed specifically to counter the serendipitous and subjective nature of the narrative literature review.

Interviews

A pre-tested semi-structured interview was conducted with respondents from two research groups. The first group consisted of fifteen sports coaches involved with elite/BUSA (British Universities Sports Association) 1st team level sports teams at Loughborough University (athletics, swimming, tennis, hockey, football and rugby). The second group consisted of fifteen graduate recruitment managers across seven industries (automotive, oil & gas, advertising, corporate banking, retail banking, performance consultancy, accountancy, telecommunications).

Questionnaires

Three hundred MLQ questionnaires were distributed across four groups: student athletes (elite/BUSA-British Universities Sports Association-1st team athletes) and their coaches, and student non-athletes (no sport commitment) and a 'coach equivalent' (e.g. tutor). Athletes self rated their leadership ability and were also rated by their coach or team mates. Non-athletes self rated their leadership ability and were also rated by their manager/team leader or peers.

Results

1. Triangulation of data identifies leadership as the skill perceived to be most desirable to the corporate sector. Leadership is also perceived to be greater amongst collegiate athletes when compared to non-athletes (Self and Other ratings)
2. Multivariate analysis identifies significant differences between the athlete and non-athlete group in perceptions of transformational and transactional leadership ability (Self and Other ratings) and perceptions of Effectiveness and Extra Effort (Self and Other ratings)
3. All transformational measures are positively correlated in the athlete group (Self and Other ratings)
4. Perceptions of Charisma and Inspirational Motivation are highly positively correlated in the athlete group (Self and Other ratings)

5. All graduate recruiters perceive collegiate sport as advantageous in the graduate selection process and infer positive qualities onto graduates with a history of elite/1st team collegiate sport participation.
6. All sport coaches identify leadership, teamwork, social skills and the benefit of an additional learning environment as benefits of elite/1st team collegiate sport participation.
7. A skill match exists between the perceptions of sport coaches and graduate recruiters: whilst all graduate recruiters identify leadership, teamwork, interpersonal skills and exposure to an additional learning environment as desirable, all sport coaches also perceive collegiate sport develops these skills.
8. All sport coaches and graduate recruiters perceive skills developed by sport to be transferable to business.

Discussion

This research identifies the need for further empirical investigation of the 'sport business' metaphor and the effect of elite collegiate sport participation on elicitation &/or development of transformational leadership ability. The research identifies a potential need for development of an instrument to measure transformational leadership ability in elite collegiate athletes.

References

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