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## Leadership and Organizational Culture in Collegiate Athletic Programs

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Synopsis:

The purpose of this study is to examine the leadership styles of collegiate athletic directors and determine if a relationship exists with the organizational culture that exists in the athletic departments.

Abstract:

### PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the athletic director's leadership style and the organizational culture of their athletic departments at their respective schools. Four research questions were developed to guide this study and address the following: a) whether there are differences in leadership styles among collegiate level athletic directors, b) did a relationship exist between leadership styles and professional collaboration of employees, c) did a relationship exist between leadership styles and affiliative collegiality of employees, and d) did a relationship exist between leadership styles and efficacy/self-determination of employees.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Burns (1978) introduced the concept of transformational leadership while examining U.S. political leaders. He found that transformational leaders cause followers to develop personally and seek personal growth. Transformational leadership promotes the motives, goals, and needs of employees while assisting employees in achieving those needs or goals. This leadership uses the employees' goals to advance the organizations goals and improve organization effectiveness. Transactional leadership is more traditional in that leaders approach employees with the intent of exchanging one thing for another. Transactional leadership crosses the line into effective leadership if there is active management by exception and if the leader constructs an environment of worker satisfaction and higher productivity. Laissez-faire leadership refers to a leader that does nothing regardless of what the employees are doing (Bass, 1985). Passive leaders are reluctant to influence subordinates, give direction, and generally abdicate their leadership roles to others.

Culture has become an important aspect in the study of organizational behavior as well as the effect leaders have upon the culture that exists in organizations. Schein (1985) defined culture as “A pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or redeveloped by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration” (p. 9). Phillips and Wagner (2003) suggested “professional collaboration is the degree to which staff members work together to resolve professional issues, and to encourage and inspire each other” (p. 5). They described affiliative collegiality as “relationships between all members of the school or [work] community demonstrating harmony, respect, mutual support, and enjoyment of each other’s company” (p. 5). They described self-efficacy as “staff members working to improve their skills as true professionals, and not because they see themselves as helpless members of a large, uncaring bureaucracy. They are acting from their own choices with a sense of responsibility for the community” (p.7).

The cultures that exist in organizations affect employees by excluding/including individuals based upon perceived differences, making use of divergent/convergent communication, and use/avoidance of collaborative efforts to solve problems (Wagner, 2006). Successful leaders can have a positive effect on the culture by creating shared visions, correcting inappropriate behaviors, keeping lines of communication open, and integrating/educating new employees into the culture. Sport administrators should pay very close attention to the leadership they provide to the organizations they are responsible for leading. Utilizing transformational, transactional, and laissez faire leadership can have a tremendous impact upon the culture that exists within the departments. This culture, in turn, can affect employee collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy in a positive or a negative way.

#### METHOD

The Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X will be used to determine the leadership styles of athletic directors and the Organizational Culture Triage Survey will be used to assess the health of the athletic departments’ culture. The research focused on athletic departments in the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Southeastern Conference (SEC) and Conference USA (CUSA). A total of 27 athletic departments make up these two conferences and all were asked to participate in this study. Permission to survey employees of the athletic departments will be asked for from the Athletic Director at each respective department. Upon gaining the athletic directors permission, employees of these departments will be asked to participate in the study. The survey has been constructed and will be administered in an online format. The data will be collected and analyzed for presentation before the conference.

#### IMPLICATIONS

Collegiate athletics administrators should consider the relationship that exists between the leadership styles and the organizational cultures that exist in their agencies. Considerations should also be given to the effect that a style of leadership has upon employees and the effectiveness of an organization, the effect that organizational culture can have upon the organization, and the importance of organizational culture maintenance. Collegiate athletics administrators should also consider evaluating the departments for purposes of improving work practices and determining best practices for task and goal completion.

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