Leadership Styles, Behaviors, and Outcomes of Athletic Training Education Program Directors

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Context: With the increase in athletic training education programs, the demand for a highly qualified faculty member to serve as program director (PD) and fill the multiple roles and responsibilities of the position has increased. A successful PD must possess leadership skills crucial for the evolving academic environment. Research suggests that educational leaders must provide both transactional and transformational leadership if athletic trainers are to secure a legitimate place as healthcare providers. **Objective:** To describe the leadership styles and behaviors of athletic training education PDs and to describe the associations between leadership style, behavior, outcome, and experience. **Design:** We will utilize a survey design to identify the leadership styles, behaviors, outcomes, and experiences of athletic training education PDs. **Setting:** On-line questionnaire. **Participants:** The population of this study will be limited to the academic PDs of the 360 accredited entry-level athletic training education programs in the United States. **Intervention** The investigation will utilize the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). The MLQ is a validated tool composed of 45 items that identify and measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors shown to be strongly linked with both individual and organizational success. In addition to the leader, it is recommended that all persons working above, below, and directly at the same organizational level as the leader rate the leader. Raters evaluate how frequently, or to what degree, they have observed the leader engage in 32 specific behaviors. **Main Outcome Measure(s):** Statistical analysis will be utilized to describe the associations between leadership styles, behaviors, outcomes, and experiences. **Key words:** Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, Full-Range Model, 360^0 measurement

Athletic Training was officially recognized by the American Medical Association as an allied health profession in 1990. Certified Athletic Trainers (AT) are allied healthcare professionals whose scope of practice includes meeting the healthcare needs of individuals involved in physical activity. To practice as an AT, one must be certified by the Board of Certification, Inc., which is the national professional credentialing agency for the athletic training profession. In addition, many states also require the AT to obtain licensure to practice. ATs practice in a variety of settings, including secondary schools, colleges and universities, professional sports organizations, hospitals, sports medicine clinics, and corporate and industrial work settings.[1]

An aspiring AT must be educated and skilled in several practice domains including: prevention of athletic injuries, recognition, evaluation, immediate care, rehabilitation, healthcare administration, and education and guidance.[1] To be eligible to sit for the national certification exam, one must graduate from an accredited entry-level program, either at the undergraduate or graduate level. Currently, there are 345 Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) accredited undergraduate athletic training education programs in the United States. In addition, there are fifteen CAATE accredited entry-level master degree programs and twenty programs applying for accreditation. Just ten years ago, there were only 84 accredited programs. With this influx of accredited programs comes an influx of program directors.

With the growth of athletic training education programs in colleges and universities, the demand for a highly qualified faculty member to serve as the program director (PD) and fill the multiple roles and responsibilities of the position has increased. The athletic training education PD is the AT responsible for the organization and administration of all aspects of the educational program. This includes, but is not limited to, curricula planning and development, fiscal and budgetary input and management as determined by the institution, distribution of educational opportunities at all clinical and classroom sites, and recognizable institutional responsibility or oversight for the day-to-day operation, coordination, supervision, and evaluation of all components of the athletic training education program (ATEP).[2] The 2005 CAATE standards require that the PD be a full-time employee of the sponsoring institution and have faculty status, rights, responsibilities, and privileges as defined by institution policy, consistent with other similar positions at the institution. The PD must also have programmatic administrative and supervisory responsibility recognized as a department assignment consistent with other similar assignments at the institution and must have an amount of released/reassigned workload that is necessary to meet the administrative responsibilities of the assignment, also consistent with similar assignments at the institution. In addition, the PD must hold current national certification, have a minimum of five years experience as a BOC certified AT, possess a current state athletic training credential for those states that require professional credentialing for athletic trainers, and must demonstrate teaching, scholarship, and service consistent with institutional standards.[2]

In the past 20 years, the PD position has undergone significant changes in administrative responsibilities and institutional expectations.[3] The duties and responsibilities of PDs are multiple and highly diversified. In addition to the minimal CAATE requirements, the PD is involved in recruiting and retaining students; mentoring; assessing; resolving conflicts; innovating and monitoring change; supervising students and staff; abiding by and applying regulations; preparing accreditation materials; and teaching.[3,4] Educational reform in the field of athletic training has placed great demands upon PDs and their faculty members to adapt to new didactic and clinical accreditation standards.[5] A successful PD must possess leadership skills crucial for the evolving academic environment.[4]

Modifications to the Standards for the Accreditation of Entry-Level Athletic Training Education Programs have strengthened the position of the PD, yet the requirements for PDs fail to equal the rigor of other health care professions. Athletic Training is a relatively new profession (as compared to its health care profession counterparts) and is still striving for recognition and respect amongst other health care professions. To be perceived as equal in stature, Athletic Training PDs must be held to the same standards as other health care professions.

The Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE) is the accrediting body for physical therapy programs and outlines in great detail the requirements for their program administrator (program director).[6] One major difference is that an athletic training education PD must only possess a bachelor's degree, whereas a physical therapy program administrator (program director) must possess a doctoral degree. In 1997, the National Athletic Trainers' Association Education Task Force made several recommendations to reform athletic training education.[7] This task force included three reasons for the need for more doctoral-educated ATs. First, there needs to be an increase in doctoral-educated ATs in senior faculty and administration positions to affect higher education policy. Second, athletic training doctoral programs provide leadership in guiding research pertinent to the advancement of the athletic

training profession. Third, athletic training doctoral education programs will provide the next generation of athletic training educators. Currently, there are a few schools that offer doctoral degrees in the area of Athletic Training. Earning a terminal degree has been recommended for those ATs aspiring to become PDs.[8] Doctoral programs designed specifically for ATs must continue to evolve. In conjunction with educational facets and advanced clinical knowledge, an athletic training doctoral program should also provide the student with thorough research, leadership, and administrative training to prepare the student for a career in higher education.[9]

Another major difference between athletic training and physical therapy accreditation standards is that CAPTE requires that the program administrator (program director) provides effective leadership for the program. The standards for an athletic training education PD do not refer to leadership. Leadership in athletic training has become an important issue facing the profession because of the rapidly changing educational environment. PDs must possess effective leadership skills that inspire and allow faculty members and students to perform at high levels.[10]

Leadership

Leadership can be viewed as the focus of group processes, from a personality perspective, or as an act or behavior. It can also be defined in terms of the power relationship between leaders and followers, as an instrument of goal achievement, or from a skills perspective.[11] Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.[11] Leadership is different, however, from management.

According to Nellis (1994), leadership has five main points which differentiate it from management.[12] A leader must really know his or herself and have a realistic, pragmatic understanding of his or her skills, abilities, and attributes. An effective leader must also lead by example. Commitment, professionalism, enthusiasm, dependability, and courage are examples of actions and behaviors that may be contagious. A good leader must also know their profession and their people to be able to gain confidence and trust from his/her followers. The final aspect of leadership described by the author is "loyalty, encouragement, reprimand".[12] By practicing these skills, the leader can build greater trust, confidence, and motivation in their followers.

Management skills are necessary for any organization to run efficiently, and athletic training is no different. Management is concerned with organization, communication, and the development of the facility's mission. Effective management skills combined with effective leadership skills can provide a solid base for organizational success.[12]

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leaders motivate associates by exchanging rewards for services rendered.[13] Bass extended the definition of a transactional leader to the military, industrial, public, and educational sectors.[14,15] He described transactional leaders as those who: 1) recognize what their associates want to get from their work, and try to see that they get it, if their performance warrants; 2) exchange rewards and promises of reward for appropriate levels of effort; and 3) respond to the needs and desires of associates as long as they are getting the job done.[14,15] Transactional leadership can also be described as working with individuals or groups, setting up and defining agreements or contracts to achieve specific work objectives, discovering individual's capabilities, and specifying the compensation and rewards that can be expected upon successful completion of the tasks.[16]

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is a new and encompassing approach to leadership. It is concerned with the process of how certain leaders are able to inspire followers to accomplish great things. This approach stresses that leaders need to understand and adapt to the needs and

motives of followers. Transformational leaders are change agents, are good role models, can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, empower followers to achieve at higher standards, act in ways that make others want to trust them, and give meaning to organizational life.[11]

A transformational leader differs from a transactional one by not merely recognizing associates' needs, but by attempting to develop those needs from lower to higher levels of maturity.[16] Bass described transformational leaders as those who: 1) raise associates' level of awareness of the importance of achieving valued outcomes and the strategies for reaching them; 2) encourage associates' to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the team, organization, or larger policy; and 3) develop associates' needs to higher level in such areas as achievement, autonomy, and affiliation, which can be both work related and not work related.[14,15] Transformational leadership encourages others to develop and perform beyond standard expectations.[16]

Bass' Full-Range of Leadership Model

Bass proposed a model for the relationship between transactional and transformational leadership.[14] The full-range of leadership model incorporates a broad continuum of behaviors used to assess one's leadership style through the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Bass' model includes nine distinct leadership behaviors which form this continuum and includes five transformational behaviors [idealized influence (attributed), idealized influence (behavior), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration], two transactional behaviors [contingent reward, management-by-exception (active)], and two passive avoidant behaviors [management-by-exception (passive), and laissez-faire]. The MLQ also measures three leadership outcomes: follower extra effort, leader effectiveness, and follower satisfaction.[16] Transactional leadership provides a basis for effective leadership, but a greater amount of extra effort, effectiveness, and satisfaction is possible from followers by augmenting transactional leadership with transformational leadership.[14]

As educational reform and growth continues in athletic training, the characteristics and roles and responsibilities of PDs are constantly evolving. Peer and Rakich stated that educational leaders must provide both transactional and transformational leadership if ATs are to secure a legitimate place as healthcare providers in a highly competitive managed care environment.[17] Although present at all times, transformational leaders are more likely to emerge in times of growth, change, and crisis; flourishing under these conditions to initiate change and improvements.[16] The purpose of this study is to describe the leadership styles and behaviors of the current population of athletic training PDs. Another purpose is to describe the associations between leadership style, behavior, outcome, and experience.

Methods

Experimental Design

This research investigation will utilize a survey research design. The research questions that we will attempt to answer through this investigation are: (1) What is the association between leadership style and leadership outcome? (2) What is the association between leadership behavior and leadership outcome? (3) What is the association between experience and leadership outcome?

Participants

The population of this study was limited to the PDs of the 360 accredited entry-level athletic training education programs in the United States. Institutions were identified using the list of accredited athletic training education programs posted on the Commission on Accreditation of

Athletic Training Education (CAATE) website (www.caate.net). The investigators will seek approval from the Florida International University Institutional Review Board.

Instrument

The investigation will utilize the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (5X-Short). The MLQ is a validated tool composed of 45 items that identify and measure key leadership and effectiveness behaviors shown in prior research to be strongly linked with both individual and organizational success. The factor structure of the MLQ has been validated by both discriminatory and confirmatory factor analysis. In addition to the leader completing the questionnaire, it is recommended that all persons working above, below, and directly at the same organizational level as the leader rate the leader. Raters completing the MLQ evaluate how frequently, or to what degree, they have observed the leader engage in 32 specific behaviors. It should take each rater approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.[16]

Procedures

The principal investigator will send an email to each academic PD requesting their participation in this study. The purpose of the study and an explanation of the PD's role in the study will be contained in the body of the email. If the PD agrees to participate, he or she will be instructed to reply to the initial email, identify an approximate number of participants from their respective institution, and complete the demographic questionnaire attached to the email. The principal investigator will email the PDs who agree to participate in the study a survey webpage created by Mind Garden, Inc. The PD they will complete the MLQ survey and enter the email addresses of the raters (one immediate supervisor, all students in their final year of the program, and at least 3 colleagues) who will also participate in the study. Each rater will receive a separate survey webpage from Mind Garden, Inc., from which they can complete the MLQ survey and submit it directly to Mind Garden, Inc. Two weeks from the initial email, a reminder will be sent to those that did not respond to the request for participation. A reminder will also be sent to those who did agree to participate but who have not completed the surveys approximately two weeks after receiving the survey webpage.

Statistical Analysis

Statistical analysis for the quantitative data will be completed in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 13.0) utilizing descriptive statistics and correlational analysis.

Null Hypothesis

1. There will be no association between leadership style and leadership outcome.
2. There will be no association between leadership behavior and leadership outcome.
3. There will be no association between experience and leadership outcome.

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Figure 1. Bass' Full-Range of Leadership Model
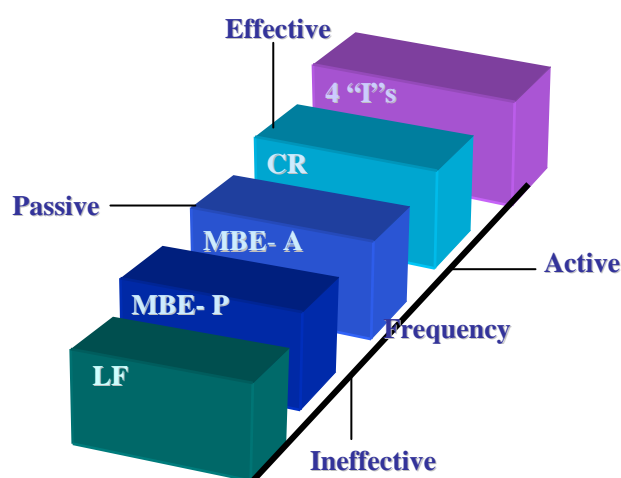
Legend
Passive/Avoidant
LF Laissez-Faire
MBE-P Mgmt by Exception Passive
Transactional
MBE-A Mgmt by Exception Active
CR Contingent Reward
Transformational
Idealized Influence
Inspirational Motivation
Intellectual Stimulation
Individualized Consideration