

## The Impact of NCAA Division Level on Athletic Director Leadership Frame

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Management/leadership  
Abstract 2009-036

May 28, 2009  
2:00 PM

25 minute oral  
(Congaree A/B)

As academics in the field, it has been suggested that no matter what position we are in that we must take the leadership challenge and attempt, through communication, to help provide direction (Inglis, 2007). Effective leadership establishes a vision, sets standards for performance, and creates focus and direction for subordinates' behavior (Chelladurai, 1999). Changing one's paradigm, by what has been termed 'reframing', suggests that there is an alternative way to view similar occurrences of a leaders' and subordinates' behavior. Bolman and Deal (2003) present a four-frame model that breaks down both leader and subordinate organizational behavior into structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames. The structural frame focuses on outcomes and the context of the work of the group over the individual. The key to the human resource frame is for leaders to understand their personnel and each of their individual relationships within the organization. In the political frame, the leader views an organization as a group of different allies and coalitions in which different identities are constantly competing for power and resources. Lastly, in the symbolic frame, a leader stresses the organizational culture focusing on its values, attitudes, rites and rituals, and 'cultural heroes' that leave behind a legacy (Bolman and Deal, 2003).

While intercollegiate athletics are part of most universities, there are many differences among them in regards to size, structure and philosophy (Trail and Chelladurai, 2000). Athletics institutions at the Division I level are sometimes seen as having the same vision as financial enterprises (Parks, Zanger, and Quartermann, 1998), while Division III institutions are sometimes associated with the small liberal arts colleges where there is a vision that 'education comes first' (Putler and Wolfe, 1999).

There are many different stakeholders both internal and external to the organization to consider when exploring evaluation standards of college athletics (Gerdy, 1997). Therefore, measuring a leader's frame can provide some indication as to how leaders view behavior in their organization and in their field as a whole. The purpose of the study was to assess NCAA athletic directors' leadership frame according to their Division status.

The sample population consisted of athletic directors ( $n = 278$ ) in the NCAA across all divisions who responded to an electronic survey using Bolman and Deal's Leadership Orientations Scale II (LOS II). First, athletic director (AD)'s leadership frame was examined according to their status as an NCAA Division I, II, and III institution. Secondly, a mixed-design repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for help gain an understanding of the differences by frame according to their division level. This statistical method was chosen in an effort to gain an understanding of the main effect of frame, the within-subjects factor, the between-subjects factor of division, and the interaction of division by frame.

When looking at leadership frame, there is a significant difference across frame scores  $F = (3, 274), 54.219, p < .001$ . Overall, ADs ( $n = 278$ ) have a stronger human resource frame ( $M = 18.43, SD 3.61$ ), followed by a structural frame ( $M = 15.53, SD 4.36$ ), a symbolic frame ( $M = 13.31, SD 3.74$ ), and lastly, a political frame ( $M = 12.70, SD 3.34$ ). Frame and division were then analyzed using a two-factor mixed design repeated ANOVA. The effect of frame was statistically significant,  $F (3, 274) = 94.657, p < .05$ . The interaction effect of frame x division was also statistically significant,  $F (9, 822) = 3.296, p < .05$ . All pairwise comparisons were significant different except for the difference between political frame and symbolic frame at the Division III level. For the purposes of presentation, two line graphs are used to help illustrate these effects. Overall, it appears that the human resource frame is the most popular leadership frame overall for ADs. Bolman and Deal (2003) describe human resource leaders as 'humanists.' Perhaps ADs in the human resource frame are more likely to see themselves to possess strong interpersonal skills, be good listeners, as good coaches and developers of people, and with the leadership trait to show concern for people.

From this perspective, they would also see their athletic department as an organization made up of individuals each with different wants, needs, desires, feelings, limitations, different views, and skills (Bolman and Deal, 2003). An interesting point of the study may arise when analyzing the structural and symbolic frames by division. The gap between these two ratings increases as it shifts its focus into Division II and Division III. The data presents a symbolic frame given a lower rating by athletic directors in Division III and a structural frame given a higher rating by athletic directors in Division III. From these data, it might be concluded that athletic directors in Division III are perhaps less likely to regard their organization as a unique culture driven by stories, ceremonies, rituals and heroes. Perhaps, with less people under their authority to delegate responsibility than the larger Division I institutions, these athletic directors are more moved towards a structural-driven organization driven by rules, authority or policy.

## **2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)**

The research literature also citing an increasing pressure that Division I ADs have in compliance with the many NCAA bylaws, rules and regulations, these findings in terms of a lower structural leadership frame may also be unexpected. When the focus shifted to Division I, another point of interest may exist for researchers of college sport when analyzing the main effects of the political frame. With the amount of stakeholders involved in an athletic department (Trail and Chelladurai, 2000), it was also unanticipated in how low the political frame scores were given by ADs. Division did not have any effect on this variable and it would seem that in the usually larger Division I institutions that the political frame may play a larger role than indicated by the data.

Bolman and Deal (2003) suggest leaders who operate out of multiple frames may be generally more effective overall. Therefore, it is also anticipated that this presentation will generate discussion centering on the suggestion that it may be that the AD's who have a more balanced leadership framing perspective, rather than one specific predominant frame, that are more effective.

Future research may be needed to confirm some of the findings of this study and examine other methods to assess athletic directors' ability to meet the needs of the many stakeholders involved in NCAA intercollegiate athletics.