

Transactional or transformational? Leadership preferences of Division III athletic administrators

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Aside from a few earlier research endeavors (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996; Wallace & Weese, 1995; Weese, 1996) there has been a paucity of research in sport management examining the differences between transactional and transformational leadership, specifically examining leader effectiveness when comparing male and female athletic directors. Leadership behavior has been identified as having significant influence on the success of an organization. Specifically, transformational leadership has been associated with more positive organizational outcomes. However, within the sport management literature results have been inconsistent. Transformational leaders were closely linked to coaches' job satisfaction, affective commitment, and altruistic behavior (Choi, Sagas, Park, & Cunningham, 2007) and to perceived leader effectiveness and extra effort (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). In contrast, Weese (1996) reported no relationship between transformational leadership and organization effectiveness within intercollegiate athletic conferences.

Transformational leadership is characterized by leaders who "motivate subordinates to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization" (Powell, Butterfield, & Bartol, 2008, p. 159) through the use of high performance standards. In addition, there is some evidence to support a female advantage in leadership when women demonstrate transformational leadership behavior (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Powell, Butterfield, & Bartol, 2008). Transformational leadership behaviors are positively associated with nurturance (a stereotypically feminine trait) and negatively associated with aggression (a stereotypically masculine trait) (Ross & Offermann, 1997). In contrast to transformational leadership, transactional leadership is focused on clarifying the responsibilities of subordinates and then evaluating how successfully subordinates carry out those responsibilities. Transactional leadership is also more closely linked with stereotypical masculine characteristics (Powell et al., 2008).

Within business management, women, compared to men, have faced greater barriers when entering leadership roles and are often unfavorably evaluated if they espouse more "masculine" traits in order to be successful in leadership roles (Eagley & Karau, 2002). Interestingly though, there is evidence this "role congruity" issue may be mediated by leadership style as women leaders have been rated higher than men when they exhibit transformational leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2003, Powell et al., 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this research was two-fold: 1) to determine whether leadership style (transactional versus transformational) led to more positive perceptions of organizational outcomes, and 2) whether there was a preference for leadership style based on sex of the leader.

Data were collected from 96 current Division III athletic directors. Using an online survey method, athletic directors were provided one of four leadership vignettes: female athletic director as a transformational leader (n = 25), female athletic director as a transactional leader (n = 23), male athletic director as a transformational leader (n = 26), and male athletic director as a transactional leader (n = 22). The leadership vignettes were developed specifically for this study, but were based on previous research that has used transformational and transactional leadership vignettes (Powell et al., 2008). In addition to the leadership vignette, participants completed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ – Form 5X, Bass & Avolio, 2000). Finally, participants rated outcomes associated with leadership behavior on three subscales (extra effort, satisfaction, and effectiveness). Using scores from the MLQ, an overall transactional leadership score was calculated as the average of three transactional leadership subscales ($\alpha = .75$) and an overall transformational leadership score was calculated as the average of the scores from five transformational leadership subscales ($\alpha = .86$). A manipulation check was performed using analyses of variance to examine whether the vignettes actually portrayed transformational and transactional leadership styles. The manipulation check indicated that the vignettes successfully portrayed transactional leadership and transformational leadership as intended.

Multivariate analysis of variance was used to examine the effects of leadership style (transactional or transformational), leader sex, evaluator sex, and the interaction of these variables on outcomes associated with leader's behavior. The three outcomes were extra effort stimulated by the leader, satisfaction with the leader, and leader's effectiveness. The overall MANOVA was significant.

Results indicated a main effect for transformational leadership, Wilkes $\lambda = .75$, $F(9,210) = 2.87$, $p = .003$. However, there were no other significant main effects and the interaction was not significant. Follow-up univariate analyses of variance indicated that transformational leaders were evaluated more favorably on extra effort, $F(3,94) = 8.19$, $p < .001$ and satisfaction, $F(3,94) = 4.22$, $p < .05$, but not on effectiveness $F(3,94) = 1.92$, $p = .13$.

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Thus, consistent with previous business management research (Powell et al., 2008) and some research in sport management (Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996; Choi et al., 2007), transformational leadership was the preferred leadership style for satisfaction with the leader and extra effort stimulated by the leader. However, unlike previous business management research (Eagley & Karau, 2002; Powell et al., 2008), role congruent leaders (female leaders demonstrating transformational leadership, masculine leaders demonstrating transactional leadership) were not evaluated more favorably than gender role incongruent leaders (female leaders demonstrating transactional leadership, masculine leaders demonstrating transformational leadership). Also unlike previous findings in business management (Powell et al., 2008), female and male evaluators did not evaluate female transformational leaders more favorably than male transformational leaders; transformational leaders were preferred overall. As an exploratory study in the sport context, discussion of the results will highlight possible explanations for the inconsistency in findings between this study and the business management work of Powell et al. (2008), and provide suggestions for future research directions.