

An evaluation of Role Congruity in Sport Organizations via an analysis of Power

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In recent years, women have made great strides breaking through the “glass ceiling.” For example, in 2008, Nancy Pelosi was the first female Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Hillary Clinton received more than eighteen million votes for the Democrats’ presidential nomination, and Sarah Palin ran as John McCain’s vice presidential candidate in the US Presidential election. Data also show women are increasing in leadership positions in Fortune 500 companies, and in the top-earning corporate officer positions (Sczesny, Bosak, Neff, & Schyns, 2004). Moreover, female business managers have increased from 21% in 1976 to 46% in 1999 (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002).

However, research still supports the glass ceiling’s presence and Schein’s (1973) notion, “think manager, think male”, as there is a reliable correlation between managerial traits and masculinity (e.g., Brenner, Tomkiewicz, & Schein, 1989; Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995; Kunkel, Dennis, & Waters, 2003; Powell, Butterfield & Parent, 2002; Schein, 1973, 1975; Schein, Muller, & Jacobson, 1989; Sczesny, 2003; Willemsen, 2002). Additionally, women are evaluated unfavorably compared to men when holding leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Knoppers, 1992; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). Researchers have also determined that men are traditionally placed in positions of power and influence, thus bolstering the gender stereotype (Shaw & Hoerber, 2003). The belief that men have more power is commonplace (see Knoppers, 1992); however, the methods in which men and women utilize their power may give further insight into leadership stereotypes. Centered in role congruity theory, the purpose of our study was to examine the way role congruity predicts how people perceive women’s exercise of power, and if either orientation of power sharing is viewed as more congruent with successful leaders. For instance, are women in leadership positions expected to act in a cooperative manner and share their power, and are men expected to act more competitively in their search for power. Moreover, is one sharing power method more congruent with good leadership?

The answer to these questions may give further insight into why women and leadership are considered incongruent in current discourses (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Additionally, if the findings suggest women effectively share power within an organization, then this may be used to assist in changing the discourse surrounding leadership positions. Power sharing may be defined as the “act of enhancing, supporting, or not obstructing another’s ability to bring about the outcomes s/he seeks”(Coleman, 2004, p. 299). Power sharing can occur through sharing leadership, resources, rewards, outcomes, increased autonomy for workers, decentralization, participation of others in decision making, goal setting and problem solving, or delegation of authority (Burke, 1986, Yukl, 1994). Through power sharing, organizations may increase decision acceptance, commitment, quality, and employee satisfaction (Organ & Bateman, 1991). An effective power sharing strategy has been linked to overall managerial success (Hall, 1976) and organizational success (Kirkham & Rosen, 1999). Wish et al., (1979) suggest power may be shared through a cooperation or competition orientation. Leaders who possess cooperation orientation are more apt to share power; whereas, leaders with a competition orientation would be more likely hold power. To further this point, Coleman (2004) found leaders who held more competition power orientation were significantly less likely to involve their subordinates in the decision making process. Alternatively, those with a cooperation orientation increase power sharing through delegation. Power sharing through cooperation rather than competition may lead to better organizational outcomes. For instance, Organ and Bateman (1991) found that sharing power enhances decision acceptance, commitment, and quality. Furthermore, they found that employee development, satisfaction and commitment are higher when a manager utilized a power sharing orientation. Finally, power sharing has been linked to perceived managerial and organizational success (Deming, 1993; Hall, 1976; Kirkham & Rosen, 1999; Lorsch, 1995; McClelland & Burnham, 1976).

In terms of gender stereotypes, women may be perceived as more congruent with a cooperation orientation towards power sharing, and men may be considered to be more congruent with a competition orientation power sharing style. Women are viewed as being supportive, nurturing, and caring, and thus, one would expect them to view power in a more cooperative manner (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Conversely, men are stereotyped as being competitive, logical, aggressive, and responsible (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These traits would be consistent with a competitive view towards power sharing. Thus, consistent with role congruity theory, women should be considered more congruent with cooperative power sharing orientation, while men are more congruent with competitive power sharing orientation. Given the above literature we put forward the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: A leader demonstrating a cooperative power sharing method will be perceived as female.

Hypothesis 2: A leader demonstrating a competitive power sharing method will be considered as male.

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Hypothesis 3: Leaders portrayed as cooperative power sharers will be considered more effective than leaders who demonstrate competitive power sharing methods.

Although this study is still in progress, we will utilize the following techniques to attain our data. First, the sample will consist of sport management students at a public university in the Southwest United States. Participants will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which will first ask them to read through a vignette depicting a decision process in intercollegiate athletics, and then answer questions accordingly. The vignette was adapted from the work of Vroom and Jago (1988) who asked respondents to place themselves into a managerial decision making process; however, in the current study, respondents will be asked to make judgments based on an athletic director's decision rather than making the decision themselves. Additionally, students will be asked to complete a short scale modeled after the work of Coleman (2004). This scale will act as a manipulation check to determine if the decisions made by the athletic director falls into the cooperative or competitive category. Finally, the respondents will be asked to indicate if they believe the athletic director is either a man or a woman.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 will be examined through chi-square analysis, with the condition (i.e., cooperative v. competitive power sharing) and the respondent's perception of the manager's sex included. Hypothesis 3 will be tested through analysis of variance with the condition serving as the independent variable and the effectiveness rating serving as the dependent variable. The results of this analysis will first indicate if different power sharing orientations are more congruent with either men or women. Further, if the hypotheses are supported and women are more congruent with cooperative power sharing and cooperative power sharing is more congruent with successful leadership, then the findings may begin to challenge the "think manager, think male" notion.