Authentic Leadership as a Predictor of Occupational Commitment in Intercollegiate Coaches

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Peer-reviewed literature related to the leadership behaviors of coaches has primarily consisted of studies designed to examine outcomes of coaches’ leadership behaviors as they relate to individual athletes, small groups within a team (e.g., assistant coaches, starters or nonstarters), a whole team, or a broader athletic organization (Gilbert, 2002). Frederick and Morrison (1999) suggested that relatively little is known about the psychological characteristics of intercollegiate coaches beyond what is anecdotally observed. In an examination of 30 years of published research related to coaches, Gilbert (2002) noted that “simply recording what coaches do has always been, and continues to be the most studied area of coaching” (p. 15). As such, coaches are often viewed as mere conduits of knowledge to aid student-athletes in achieving performance gains. Additionally, coaches bear the responsibility of positively contributing to the psychological development and well-being of student-athletes.

Vealey (2005) has recommended that practical and appropriate models of coaching development should be designed with close consideration of a triad of psychological objectives that are related directly to the well-being of athletes: optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experience. In addition to affecting the psychological well-being and performance of athletes, the behavior of a coach may also influence his or her own psychological well-being and performance. In an effort to increase understanding of the individuals who occupy coaching positions and to incorporate their experiences into future designs of appropriate models of coaching development, the self-perceived authenticity of leadership behaviors and commitment to the coaching profession were examined.

Vocational psychology scholars (e.g., Cohen, 2003; Homan, 1986) have examined individual careers through an existential lens. Through this lens, the career an individual chooses to pursue and the manner in which he exists within a chosen profession are products of his own volition. One basic tenet of existentialism is that life itself is a choice. Likewise, the career an individual chooses is a manifestation of choice. The incorporation of authenticity as a variable within vocational scholarship has been previously noted by Bloland and Walker (1981) who conceptualized one’s vocation as “a means for fulfillment and a way of existing in the world” (p. 199). Similarly, Homan (1986) drew upon the work of Heidegger (1962), stating that one’s vocation is and should be “a quest for authentic existence” (p. 14). More recently, Cohen (2003) utilized existential themes, including authenticity, in an examination of career-related decisions. If authentic behavior is considered to be a means of fulfillment, then a coach who leads authentically may experience greater feelings of commitment to his or her coaching career.

Although authenticity has yet to be operationalized within the sport domain, the construct has been identified, anecdotally, as a quality that is valued in sport leaders (Wooden & Jamison, 2005). Although radically individualistic positions may be uncommon and even unsettling positions from which to consider developing coaches, the notion of “being true to oneself,” of being authentic, should not be dismissed without consideration. The well-being of coaches and athletes may be enhanced through the development of coaches who are self-aware and who act in concordance with their espoused values and beliefs.

710 coaches completed the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire-Self Version (Walumbwa et al., 2008) and the Affective Occupational Commitment (AOC) subscale of an Occupational commitment instrument adapted by Meyer et al. (1993). Participants included 374 full-time head and 336 full-time assistant coaches of intercollegiate athletic teams from NCAA Division I, Division II, and Division III institutions. Data were collected from male (n = 430) and female (n = 280) coaches of the following men’s and women’s team sports: baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo. The sports represented in the data with the greatest frequency included: football (15.5%), women’s soccer (14.2%), women’s basketball (12.9%), and women’s volleyball (12.5%). The average age of all coaches was 36.23 (SD = 9.16).

A structural equation modeling analysis was used to assess a two-way structural model. Using LISREL 8.54 statistical software (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993, 1995), the predictive relationships among the latent constructs of Self-
Awareness (SA), Relational Transparency (RT), Internalized Moral Perspective (IM), Balanced Processing (BP), and AOC were examined through structural equation modeling.

The only effect that was significantly different from zero was the direct effect between IM and AOC ($\gamma = .27, t(2.94), p < .05$). The gamma value provided evidence of a weak positive relationship between IM and AOC; indicating that when IM scores were high, AOC scores were also high. Conversely, when IM scores were low, AOC scores were also low. No significant ($p > .05$) relationships were identified between the remaining three factors of the ALQ-Self and AOC. The psi estimate for AOC (.91) was an indication of low reliability in the predictive utility of the model.

To determine the fit of the proposed structural model, several fit indices were analyzed. The chi-square value for the structural model was significant ($\chi^2 = 1523.70, df = 517, p < .001$). Additional fit indices were examined to make a decision about the fit of the structural model to the sample data. The CN of 277.74 for the structural model is greater than 200, thereby indicating very strong power for testing the model. The RMSEA point estimate for the structural model was .054 ($p < .02$). The estimate of the 90% confidence interval for RMSEA ranged from .051 to .057. The upper and lower limits for the 90% confidence interval were less than .08, indicating very low error of approximation in the structural model (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The CFI value for the structural model was weak (.92). Based upon the recommendation of Hu and Bentler (1999) that an adequate CFI value should be greater than or equal to .95, the model may be misspecified. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended that the cut-off value for the SRMR should be less than or equal to .08; therefore, the SRMR value of .079 indicated a strong fit between the sample matrix and the structural model.

With the exception of a significant ($p < .05$) positive relationship between IM and AOC, no significant predictive relationships were identified between authentic leadership and affective occupational commitment. The fit indices for the SEM model demonstrated strong support for the model fit to the sample data.