Voluntary Organizational Turnover Intentions: Do Leadership Behaviors and Satisfaction with the Leader Matter?

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Since 21st century managers must design and execute a variety of team-based tasks, projects and processes to meet the business climate needs (Polychroniou, 2009), effective leadership is a relevant pursuit for researchers as well as practitioners (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). The evolution of leadership theories has shifted from focusing merely on the behaviors of effective leaders to more inclusive ideas that incorporate the force of leadership behaviors, the dynamic leader follower relationship, and the influence of situational factors (Strang, 2005). Presently, much of the work in leadership centers upon transformational and transactional leadership behavior (Bass 1985, 1990; Burns, 1978). To date, sport management scholars have examined transformational and transactional leadership behavior and its effects on organizations (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi, Sagas, Park, & Cunningham, 2007; Doherty & Danlychuck, 1996), as well as causes and consequences of voluntary organizational turnover intentions (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Hill, 2009; Sagas & Ashley, 2001), but no sport management studies have combined these constructs to examine the effects of leadership behaviors on voluntary organizational turnover intentions. Additionally, very few studies, and none within sport management, have examined possible mediating influences on this relationship, such as satisfaction with the leader (Tse & Lam, 2008). Thus, to address this significant gap in the sport management literature, the purpose of our study was to explore the direct effect of leadership behaviors (transformational and transactional) of the head coach on the voluntary organizational turnover intentions of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I non-revenue sport assistant coaches, and the indirect (mediating) effect of the assistant coach’s satisfaction with their leader on the relationship between leadership behaviors and voluntary organizational turnover intentions.

Transactional and transformational leadership (Bass 1985, 1990; Burns, 1978) continues to emerge in sport and business management literature as an undergirding framework for leadership studies (Doherty, 1997). While transactional leaders emphasize rewards for accomplishment, transformational leaders create a vision to meet employee’s needs (Bass, 1985, 1990). Recently, sport management scholars have focused on the outcomes of leadership behaviors, with findings revealing a positive relationship between transformational leadership and leader effectiveness, extra effort, altruistic behavior, affective commitment, and job and leader satisfaction (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi et al., 2007; Doherty & Danlychuck, 1996).

As well, given that voluntary organizational turnover has been found to be dysfunctional and detrimental to organizations (Mobley, 1982), it is no surprise that several sport management studies have revealed negative effects of voluntary organizational turnover on performance (Hill, 2009; Salomo & Teichmann, 2000; White, Persad, & Gee, 2007). Besides the financial costs of organizational turnover (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000), organizations must also consider the effects on customer relations, job efficiency, and employee morale (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000).

While the leader behavior and organizational turnover intention relationship has not been explored within sport management, several business management researchers have investigated this relationship through various intermediary lenses: organizational ethics (Shapira-Lischinsky & Rosenblatt, 2009), psychological climate and morale (Langkamer & Ervin, 2008), and job satisfaction components (Clemens, Milsom, & Cashwell, 2009; Coomber & Barribal, 2007; Harris, Wheeler, & Kacmar, 2009). However, the mediating effect of satisfaction with the leader (Bass, 1985, 1990) has yet to be researched. Additionally, the majority of leadership and turnover studies have focused on professional sport, or intercollegiate head coaches and athletic directors (see Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi et al., 2007; Nezhad & Keshtan, 2010; Yusof & Shah, 2008), and have not incorporated the perspectives of assistant coaches. Therefore, as discussed above, we undertook this research with Division I non-revenue sport assistant coaches (softball and volleyball) to assess these variables and address this empirical gap.

To access Division I softball and volleyball assistant coaches, we contacted their respective professional associations to obtain email addresses of members. Online and in-person survey methodologies were used to distribute the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ – Form 5X, Bass & Avolio, 2000) and an organizational voluntary turnover intent questionnaire (Cunningham, 2007; Haggar, Chatzsparantis, & Biddle, 2001). Two hundred and eight assistant coaches evaluated their head coach’s leadership behavior, and rated their satisfaction with the leader and voluntary organizational turnover intentions. To examine the predictabilities and mediating influence of satisfaction with the leader, multiple hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to control for the assistant coach’s age, sport, gender, and organizational tenure. Results demonstrated a direct negative relationship between leadership behaviors (transformational and transactional) and voluntary organizational turnover intentions. Also, satisfaction with the leader was found to fully mediate the relationship between leadership behaviors (transformational and transactional) and voluntary organizational turnover intentions. In our discussion, we examine these
results in light of the extant literature and situate our findings within exit voice theory (Freeman & Medoff, 1984) and justice theory (Cobb, Wooten, & Folger, 1995). Further results, research directions, and implications will also be discussed in the presentation.