The Moderating Effect of Organizational Culture on the Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Affective Commitment, Turnover Intentions and Job Search Behaviors

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Within the sport management discipline, scholars have investigated leadership and its effects on individual and organizational outcomes, and an emerging line of research has begun to examine the outcomes associated with different types of organizational cultures. However, few studies in sport management (see Wallace & Weese, 1995; Weese, 1995; Welty Peachey, Bruening, & Burton, 2011) have examined the interaction of leadership and organizational culture on various organizational outcomes. This is surprising, as organizational culture is created by leaders, and it has been suggested that “the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture” (Schein, 1988, p. 2). Both leadership and organizational culture are salient areas of study for sport management scholars, as sport organizations are constantly searching for ways to improve organizational performance and competitive advantage, employee commitment, and retention (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2010). As well, sport organizations are looking to limit job search behavior on the part of their employees in order to reduce voluntary turnover.

Not only are leadership and organizational culture important areas of study for sport management scholars, the influence of these constructs on organizational outcomes could be unique in the context of intercollegiate athletics (Schroeder, 2010). For instance, Welty Peachey and Bruening (2011) argued that dominant logics of action (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and traditions and values associated with the cultures of intercollegiate athletic departments could constrain decision making during organizational change more than in other sport or business sectors due to relatively few new actors entering the field. Weinberg and Gould (2007) also suggest that sport can foster high levels of identification and pride, which in the intercollegiate context, could create rich traditions and cultures that might have different affects on organizational outcomes than in other sport or business sectors. As well, due to the external influence of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) regulations (Schroeder, 2010), and push factors (i.e., aspects related to the context of the organization) and pull factors (i.e., aspects external to the organization) (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge, 1994) within the field of intercollegiate athletics, the impact of leadership and culture on organizational outcomes may be different than in other environments.

This gap in our understanding of how leadership and organizational culture together influence organizational outcomes in the intercollegiate setting has led to the initiation of the present study. Hence, the purpose of this study, set within the NCAA Division I context in the U.S., was to investigate the moderating effect of organizational culture on the relationship between transformational leadership and three outcome variables – affective organizational commitment, turnover intentions and job search behaviors.

Data were collected from 188 Division I intercollegiate athletic administrators. Using an online survey, participants were asked their perceptions of their athletic directors' transformational leadership behaviors (α = .93) and were asked to assess their athletic department on the four culture types identified in the Competing Values Framework: group (α = .85), developmental (α = .80), rational (α = .87) and hierarchical cultures (α = .61). Participants also rated their affective organizational commitment (α = .81), turnover intentions (α = .91), and job search behaviors (α = .86). Hierarchical regression analysis was used to evaluate affective organizational commitment, turnover intention and job search behavior based on the perceptions of transformational leadership of the participant's athletic director and perceptions of organizational culture within the participant's athletic department, and to assess if organizational culture type served as a moderator.

The first regression model indicated that transformational leadership had a significant positive influence on affective organizational commitment (β = .326, p < .01). In addition, group culture had a significant positive influence on affective organizational commitment (β = .347, p < .01). Rational culture had a significant negative influence on organizational commitment (β = -.236, p < .05), but hierarchical culture did not. There was no support for any culture type moderating the relationship between transformational leadership and organizational commitment. The
second regression model indicated that transformational leadership had no influence on turnover intentions. In addition, none of the culture types had an influence on turnover intentions. When examining how culture types moderated the relationship between transformational leadership and turnover intentions, a hierarchical culture moderated the influence of transformational leadership ($\beta = .204, p = .005$) in regard to turnover intentions. Turnover intentions were highest when participants perceived a less hierarchical culture and the athletic director exhibited fewer transformational leadership behaviors. The final regression model indicated that transformational leadership was not significantly associated with job search behaviors. However, group culture was significantly negatively related to job search behaviors ($\beta = -.247, p < .10$), but developmental culture was not. Rational and hierarchical cultures were not significantly related to job search behaviors. There was no support for types of culture moderating the relationship between transformational leadership and job search behaviors.

Our findings were consistent with previous research that indicated a positive influence of transformational leadership and group culture on affective commitment (Choi et al., 2007; Lok & Crawford, 1999). We did not find support for a positive relationship between a developmental culture and affective commitment, counter to previous work. This could be due to the rich traditions associated with intercollegiate athletic departments. Contrary to other research, our findings did not support a negative relationship between a hierarchal culture and affective commitment. Our participants may interpret a culture that emphasizes rules and regulations as a culture that supports compliance to the rules governing intercollegiate athletics. Therefore, a hierarchal culture may not have a negative impact on an affective commitment. We found no direct relationship between transformational leadership behaviors and intentions to quit, contrary to previous research (Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011). Only group culture impacted job search behaviors; transformational leadership and other organizational culture types did not directly influence job search behaviors. Pull factors of available jobs at other institutions could influence job search intentions more than leadership and organizational culture.

Theoretically, we contributed to our understanding of the relationship between transformational leadership, organizational culture, and the outcome variables of affective commitment, turnover intentions and job search behaviors within the intercollegiate setting. From a practical standpoint, sport managers should strive to cultivate a transformational leadership style and organizational culture that values relationships and facilitates trust, and that focuses on internal process and control functions. A number of future research directions will also be explored.