The Impact of Leadership Behavior, Gender, Effectiveness, and Subordinate Satisfaction on Turnover Intentions: A Structural Analysis

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Effective leadership is a central question for organizations, scholars, and practitioners (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). For the past 50 years, a vast body of literature has focused on the evolution of leadership paradigms (Higgs, 2003; Strang, 2005). Within the sport context, researchers have investigated the relationships between leadership behaviors, gender of the leader, and organizational outcomes (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi, Sagas, Park, & Cunningham, 2007; Doherty & Danlychuck, 1996; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011), as well as antecedents and consequences of turnover intentions (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Hill, 2009; Sagas & Ashley, 2001); however, scant research has combined these topics. Therefore, the aim of this study was twofold: (1) to investigate the influence of National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I head coaches’ leadership behavior, gender and effectiveness on assistant coaches’ satisfaction and voluntary organizational turnover intentions; and 2) to present a useful structural model.

Initially conceptualized by Burns (1978) then later tailored by Bass (1985, 1990), transactional and transformational leadership has gained traction with sport and management scholars (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Doherty, 1997; Duehr & Bono, 2006; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003; Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011). While transactional and transformational leadership are distinct, they are also interrelated; to be effective, a combination of leadership behaviors must be used (Bass, 1990). Transactional leaders exchange value rewards for accomplished tasks (Yukl, 2006). In contrast, transformational leaders transcend the exchange-based process of transactional leaders by engaging followers’ values (Bass, 1985). Recently, outcomes (e.g., affective commitment, extra effort, leader effectiveness, turnover intentions, job and subordinate satisfaction, leader and organizational effectiveness) associated with transformational and transactional leadership behaviors have been of interest to sport management scholars (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi et al., 2007; Doherty & Danlychuck, 1996; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011; Weese, 1996).

In general, sport and management literature have linked more positive organizational outcomes with transformational leadership than transactional leadership. For example, Judge and Piccolo’s (2004) study revealed positive effects of transformational leadership behavior on the outcomes of employee attitude, employee motivation, performance, and leader effectiveness. Recently, transformational leadership has been associated with higher work team effectiveness, leader effectiveness, and performance (Polychroniou, 2009; Strang, 2005; Wang & Huang, 2009). As well, in male dominated organizations such as sport, women have been evaluated as less effective than men in leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Eagly, 2007). Women leaders have been perceived as more effective when acting as transformational leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2003). In contrast, male leaders have been perceived as more effective when demonstrating transactional leadership behaviors (Eagly & Carli, 2003; Powell, Butterfield, & Bartol et al., 2008). In addition, numerous studies have discovered leader effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction are influenced by leader behaviors (e.g., Brooks, 1955; Day, 1961; Korman, 1966; Halpin, 1957). However, limited research has investigated the influence of gender (Welty Peachey & Burton, 2011) on perceived leadership effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction; therefore to narrow this gap, we examined teams with both male and female leaders.

Given that turnover can be costly (Abbasi & Hollman, 2000) and detrimental (Mobley, 1982) to organizations, voluntary organizational turnover intentions was the outcome focus of this study. The majority of voluntary organizational turnover literature has revealed negative effects on organizational performance (Hill, 2009; Salomo & Teichmann, 2000; White, Persad, & Gee, 2007). Additionally, since most of the turnover studies in sport have focused on professional sport, head coaches, and athletic directors (see Burton & Peachey, 2009; Choi et al., 2007; Nezhand & Keshtan, 2010; Yusof & Shah, 2008), studying the perspectives of assistant coaches is unique to the literature.
To gain insight into head coach’s leadership behaviors, effectiveness, and subordinate satisfaction the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ – Form 5X, Bass & Avolio, 2000) was administered to 294 NCAA Division I assistant basketball, softball and volleyball coaches. The assistant coaches were asked to rate their head coaches’ leadership behavior and effectiveness. Additionally, a turnover intent questionnaire (Cunningham, 2007; Haggar, Chatzsarantis, & Biddle, 2001) was used to measure the assistant coaches’ voluntary organizational turnover intentions.

Data analysis was conducted using Muthen & Muthen’s Mplus Version 6. A hybrid model was tested to assess the overall fit of the measurement model and structural model. The proposed structural equation model tested the relationship between leadership behaviors (transactional and transformational), gender of the head coach, perceived leader effectiveness, subordinate satisfaction, and voluntary organizational turnover intentions. Results of the first model demonstrated a positive relationship between leadership behaviors and perceived leader effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction. Specifically, this model suggested that a head coach’s gender does not directly affect subordinate satisfaction or leader effectiveness. Fit indices for the first Model were obtained $\chi^2 (2, 208) = 70.57$ and $p < 0.00$, RMSEA = 0.34, CFI = 0.95, and SRMR = 0.03. Considering that the low fit indices and the direct effect of transformational and transactional leadership on voluntary turnover intentions was relatively nil, a revised model was formed, eliminating many of the non-significant relationships and creating a fully mediated model. Fit indices for Model 2 indicate that $\chi^2 (3, 208) = 70.502$, $p < 0.000$ and RMSEA = 0.28, CFI = 0.95, and SRMR = 0.03.

Overall, the results revealed that leadership behaviors, perceived leadership effectiveness and subordinate satisfaction are significant predictors of voluntary organizational turnover intentions. Therefore, it is important for Athletic Directors to note these predictive behaviors when hiring coaches to mitigate turnover intentions. Findings of this study extend the literature by establishing a structural model and by highlighting that leader's gender does not directly influence satisfaction and effectiveness. Moreover, this research, as well as other future endeavors investigating the relationship between an assistant coach, head coach, and athletic director, may assist scholars and practitioners in understanding turnover intention predictors. Further results and implications will be addressed in the presentation.