

Exploring Cognitive Restructure: A Multi-Foci Leadership Perspective

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The nature of intercollegiate athletic departments is one in which team culture fluctuates with constant change (i.e., player turnover). Thus, teams often rely on shared values associated with winning, high-level performance, and (increasingly) high ethical standards to maintain a successful program over time. Given this certainty of turnover, and its subsequent impact on success and development, leadership is critical to the preservation of a team culture.

A recent review of leadership theory suggests that it is increasingly relevant to dissect multiple foci (i.e., the leader, the follower, the context) when examining the nature of leadership across contexts (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011). Further, Hernandez et al. (2011) suggest that the ability of leaders to aid followers through change and development has been the central element to much of leadership theory. Regarding change specifically, shifts in team culture have been defined by three phases: unfreezing, cognitive restructure, and refreezing (Schein, 2004). However, Schroeder (2010) points out that exploration of the role of leadership within the phases of changing team culture is relatively absent from sport management literature. Moreover, examination of shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) in the sport context has focused on tension and power struggles between one foci of leadership: the leaders (e.g., Auld & Godbey, 1998; Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005, 2009; Inglis, 1994, 1997). As such, a gap remains in our theoretical understanding regarding the influence of shared leadership and multiple leadership foci (e.g., leaders and followers) on the stages within the cultural change process. Thus, the purpose of this study was to use the multi-foci perspective of leadership to explore the values and shared leadership qualities associated with proactively shaping the cognitive restructure of team culture. To this end, a case study of one NCAA Division I women's sport team was examined. The case study methodology delivers holistic understanding of phenomena, whilst allowing for distinct characteristics of participants and context to be considered (Stake, 2005). Given the context specific nature of shifts in team culture (Schein, 2004), this methodology was deemed appropriate here.

Twenty-seven players (eight leaders and 19 "followers"), as well as four coaches and an athletic trainer (N = 32) were interviewed to develop an understanding of: (a) how values and assumptions were defined within the team, (b) how values and assumptions were reinforced within the team, (c) the nature of shared leadership, (d) how shared leadership was perceived, and (e) the perceived influence of shared leadership on the cognitive restructure of team culture. Trustworthiness and credibility were enhanced through the use of multiple coders and a member check process with the coaching staff, respectively. Analysis of formal interviews and informal meeting notes took place using NVivo 9.0 software program where a priori codes were identified based on previous literature and emergent themes were allowed to surface from the data. As a result, two key themes were identified: 1) the collective definition and dissemination of team values required during cognitive restructure, and 2) the importance of shared leadership within the cognitive restructure of team culture.

The data revealed that the definition and dissemination of team values is completed collectively in order to achieve buy-in from the team during change. Specifically, when asked to discuss the core team values, 19 participants (both leaders and followers) indicated that they supported what the values represent and that the values accurately reflect the culture of their team. Further, a number of players indicated actively promoting the values to other members of their team. This extends Schroeder's (2010) cultural change model by emphasizing the need for leader and follower buy-in during the crucial cognitive restructure phase of change.

The coaches recognized that the culture (i.e., values) and leadership within their team had to be aligned. As such, a culture of shared leadership was created where the values of the team were actively tied to a leadership committee, essentially promoting three levels of shared leadership. The first is the coaches who are considered the ultimate leaders on the team and control the values and goals that the team possesses. The second are the leaders in the leadership program who embody the qualities that the coaches feel represent the cognitive restructure they are looking to engage in within the team, and thus provide direct guidance to the players on the team. The remainder of

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the team has been asked to follow the team values, follow their leader, and actively “live” the values on the team. As such, these “followers” are the third level of leadership and active members of shared leadership through their roles as followers. This process provides insight into how shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003) is conceptualized specifically in the sport context, which was described by participants as being directly linked to adopting and maintaining team culture.

Further, leaders and followers discussed potential negative components of shared leadership on their team. Specifically, division between those players who were formally defined as leaders and those who are not was discussed by six players, as well as the coaching staff. This emphasized the need to manage the perceptions of followers within shared leadership, a concept that extends previous sport management literature (see Ferkins et al., 2005, 2009).

The findings suggest that teams or groups with high turnover may be able to rely on shared leadership to promote values and ensure commitment to shifts in team culture over time. By implementing shared leadership practices, sport managers may be able to strategically create buy-in with a desired organizational/team culture that is continuously developed and managed. The findings will be discussed further in terms of specific contributions to theoretical understanding regarding cognitive restructure within the cultural change process.