

2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)

Examining Negative Leadership Through the Presentation of a One-Way Continuum

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Management/leadership

Friday, May 31, 2013

**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

Abstract 2013-147

1:40 PM

(Room 415)

Research on the potential and existence of negative leadership began roughly 30 years ago when the Centre for Creative Leadership started to examine the issue of 'leader derailment/failure.' Specifically, McCall and Lombardo (1983) argued the source for negative leadership emerged through a combination of personal faults and the unrealized organizational and personal goals/agendas. Highlighted in their work, McCall and Lombardo (1983) identified several causal factors for negative leadership which included: a) insensitivity; b) arrogance; c) untrustworthiness; d) aggressive ambition; and e) overall skill deficiencies or unpreparedness. Since then, other works on negative or 'bad' leadership have refined the concept to include: a) the abuse of formal or legitimate power (Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Hoel & Salin, 2003); b) an overemphasis on leader contribution toward achievement and overall potency (Kellerman, 2004; Kets de Vries, 1993; Lipman-Blumen, 2005); c) the coercion and poor treatment of subordinates (Aasland, Skogstad, Einarsen, 2008; Tepper, 2000); and d) rule breaking toward the satisfaction of personal needs or agendas (Benson & Hogan, 2008; Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994; Kellerman, 2004; Lipman-Blumen, 2005).

Hall et al. (2004) conceptually refined the idea of leadership style as including "an amalgam of the personal characteristics an individual possesses, and thus is reflective of one's intelligence, personality, social, and political skill" (p. 521). Within this statement, General Mental Ability (GMA) or cognitive ability/intelligence was highlighted as one component of the variables that make up the leadership style cocktail (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998). Personality was identified as a second critical category or quality impacting leadership style and job performance because it is generally recognized as including factors such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, extraversion, and openness to experience (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hall, et al., 2004; Mount & Barrick, 1995). Hall et al. (2004) advanced this by suggesting "personality characteristics represent a propensity or comfort zone for a particular leader style" (p. 522).

A third component of leadership style, social effectiveness, was identified as another cause for leader 'derailment' (Van Velsor & Leslie, 1995). Within the concept of social effectiveness, political skill has been presented as a subfield because it involves the ability to manage the thoughts of others in order to conceal self-serving ambitions and mental limitations (Ferris, et al., 2002; Hall, et al., 2004). Jackall (1998) showed the use of some political tactics (e.g., self-adaptation to public situations and self-control of emotions) present opportunities to differentiate one leadership style from another. Hall et al. (2004) further highlighted social effectiveness, when interacting with personality and GMA, is capable of significantly influencing the emergence of a particular leadership style and the accumulation of social capital.

Finally, Hofstede (1991) and Padilla et al. (2007) offered cultural context as having a significant impact on the emergence of some leadership styles. More specifically, Hofstede (1991) and Luthans, Peterson, and Ibrayeva (1998) suggested dark (i.e., highly negative) leaders surface through cultures scared of the unknown and in doubt about their future. Padilla et al. (2007) added susceptible or passive followers/subordinates also contribute to the rise of such leaders as part of their description of the toxic triangle. These types of societies collectively look for leaders to help curtail individualism which they believe is at the root of their uncertainty. Included in the strategies, some highly negative leaders seek out commitment to their autocratic rule through the creation of grandiose rituals and monuments which may position them for immortality (Lipman-Blumen, 2005; Luthans, et al., 1998). Collectively, leadership style should be thus looked at as the "manner in which the behavior is expressed rather than the behavior itself" (Hall et al. 2004, p. 521). Moreover, outcomes appear to help differentiate between leadership styles beyond the recognition of simple characteristics (Padilla, et al., 2007).

Considering similar information, Kellerman (2004), Hall et al. (2004), and Shaw et al. (2011) presented the opportunity to view negative leadership styles as capable of being positioned on a continuum. Specifically, the works of Kellerman (2004), Hall et al. (2004), and Shaw et al. (2011) suggest the continuum ranges from the mild,

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incompetent, and unintentional non-toxic leader to the destructive, unethical, and evil leader who embraces the ideas of criminal behavior, corruption, cruelty, manipulation, and other forms of unethical conduct and misuse of power. Kellerman (2004) further highlighted the opportunity to view negative leadership categories as possibly characterized by the following descriptors: 1) Incompetence; 2) Rigidity; 3) Intemperance; 4) Callousness; 5) Corruptive; 6) Insular, and 7) Evil. Padilla et al.'s (2007) work also supported this position and the presentation of such labels as they argued negative leadership is seldom "absolutely or entirely destructive" because subordinates and context/environment "contribute to outcomes distributed across a destructive-constructive continuum" (p. 179).

This conceptual research endeavor aims to develop the limited negative leadership literature by introducing and discussing a possible one-way continuum. Within, the concepts of dysfunctional leadership, narcissism, megalomania, and evil leadership will be analyzed and refined for sport management scholars. Collectively, these negative leadership styles have been labeled as 'malignant' approaches but very little information has been assembled by general management scholars to discuss the connections and difference between each of these styles (Aasland, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2008; Benson & Hogan, 2008; Higgs, 2009; Hogan & Kaiser, 2005; Kellerman, 2004; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Yukl, 1999). In particular, the concept of megalomania has enjoyed little formal examination as a distinct leadership style. This review will highlight megalomania as distinct and collectively advance a more informed perspective about the concept of negative leadership by differentiating megalomania with narcissism, evil leadership, and dysfunctional leadership which have received slightly more attention. By studying the components of highly negative leaders, this work attempts to provide some recommendation on how to reduce their occurrence and high stigmatizing and deteriorating outcome potential within the sport industry which services individuals of all ages and abilities.

The weight of this opportunity is notable because existing research on negative leadership shows it can negatively affect employee productivity (Keelan, 2000), morale (Olafsson & Johannsdottir, 2004), and overall organizational function (Kellerman, 2004; Lubit, 2004; Fox & Spector, 2005). With regard to organizational function, most negative leadership studies highlight concerns related to workplace bullying, employee absenteeism, declined productivity, and reduced product quality as undesirable outcomes (Higgs, 2009; Shaw, Erikson, & Harvey, 2011; Soyulu, 2011). In extreme cases, highly negative leadership can also produce post-traumatic stress syndrome with incredible and debilitating organizational, regional, and personal effects (Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996). The gap in negative leadership behaviors often associated with demagoguery is also critical to review because negative leadership is often misdiagnosed and/or mismanaged (Reed, 2004). Furthermore, the gap in understanding compels a systematic inquiry into studying the components of highly negative leaders because of their high stigmatizing and deteriorating outcome potential (Benson & Hogan, 2008; Hall, et al., 2004; Higgs, 1990; Tepper, 2000). Overall, the identification of negative leaders is as a moral imperative to "stop them from going forward" because the "higher they are in the system, the more damage they do" (Reed, 2004, p. 68).