

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

2012), three primary categories of de-escalation behavior within Division I athletics were established and included a) reclassification, b) removal of the football program, and c) restructure of the athletic department. Based on the established criteria, the following institutions were included in this investigation: Centenary College of Louisiana, Birmingham-Southern College, Northeastern University, La Salle University, East Tennessee State University, University of the Pacific, Long Beach State University, and Vanderbilt University.

Participants (N = 33) included decision makers involved in the development and implementation of institutional redirection initiatives, including such titles as President, Chief Operating Officer, Chief Financial Officer, Provost, Associate V.P., V.P. for Finance, V.P. for Enrollment, V.P. for Administration, V.P. for Public Affairs, Faculty Athletic Representative, Athletic Director, Senior Associate Athletic Director, and Associate Athletic Director. Data were collected via phone interviews and subsequently analyzed using NVivo 9. In order to facilitate analysis of the collected data and establish trustworthiness, audio-taping, transcription, peer debriefing, and member checking were applied. Further, a three-step coding process was implemented by two coders. Two measures of intercoder reliability (Guetzkow's U = 0.04; Cohen's kappa = 0.81) were implemented, both indicating a high degree of agreement between coders.

Findings revealed an absence of negative feedback concerning existing athletics commitment. Contrary to former de-escalation research, a theoretical implication pertains to the expectation of limited negative feedback amidst palpable conditions for de-escalation. More simply, the absence of negative feedback from organizational stakeholders should not be a determinant in relinquishing redirection initiatives. An additional finding identified sustained commitment to a given course of action as attributable to general lack of understanding concerning not only the magnitude of a problem, but the actual problem itself. Upon accurate clarification and redefinition, institutional decision makers subsequently considered alternative approaches to the existing formula in place for athletics management.

Further, several decision makers conveyed the difficulty in implementation due to lengthy institutional deliberation, providing ample time and impetus for highly committed stakeholders to marshal forces in opposition of redirection efforts. Limited stakeholder consultation provides a new perspective on triggering activities within de-escalation initiatives, positing a less candid approach to successful redirection implementation. Finally, findings revealed no empirical evidence of decision maker impression management strategies in order to 'save face,' with administrators noting ownership of the decision comprising the nature of education and athletic administration. Perhaps a theoretical justification for ownership of the decision regarding impression management strategies is linked to university leadership. Additional theoretical and practical implications will be discussed.