Examining the Influence of Ethical and Authentic Leadership Behaviors of NCAA Division-I Athletic Directors

Ray Cotrufo, University of Connecticut
Laura Burton (Advisor), University of Connecticut

Management/leadership Friday, May 30, 2014 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (Conference Center C)
Abstract 2014-137 1:15 PM

Leaders have the most substantial and far-reaching impact on how organizations function (Hambrick, 2007). Leaders provide a guiding vision that communicates the organization's purpose, culture, structures, systems, and goals to the collective in ways that motivate subordinates to work toward organizational goals. In intercollegiate athletics, athletic directors (ADs) are charged with managing their departments in ways that satisfy their many stakeholders, including the student-athletes that comprise the institutions' athletic teams.

ADs are viewed as being responsible for motivating and supporting student-athletes' athletic development, which allows for the department's teams to garner more success, translating to additional financial and reputation benefits for the department and university. However, ADs are also responsible for creating systems and structures that enable student-athletes' academic development in ways that will prepare them for life after graduation. The academic performance of student-athletes is also important for both the student-athletes and their teams to maintain eligibility for competition by meeting established academic requirements. Consequently, ADs are responsible for leveraging their departments' available physical, human, and financial resources to bolster student-athletes' development on the field and in the classroom. Given this important dual role that ADs assume when leading their departments, the purpose of this research is to answer the following questions: (1) How do certain leadership behaviors exhibited by athletic directors influence the athletic and academic performance of an institution’s athletic programs? (2) To what degree does leadership affect performance when considering other factors such as the institution's academic reputation, athletic prestige, and athletic revenue? To answer these questions, a multilevel theoretical framework of leadership within intercollegiate athletics is advanced, allowing for the consideration of multiple organizational constructs within a single model regardless of the level at which they reside (Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, & Mathieu, 2007).

Research has identified ethical and authentic leadership as positively influencing the attitudes and behaviors of followers. Ethical leadership is known as "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement and decision-making" (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005, p. 120). Ethical leaders are people-oriented, seek to develop the capabilities of those around them, and are entrusted to refrain from making potentially harmful decisions (Brown, et al., 2005; Trevino, Brown, & Hartman, 2003). They are expected to be honest, open communicators and encourage ideas, feedback and criticism from underlings (De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008). This behavior increases employee effort on behalf of the organization, positively affecting performance (Piccolo, Greenbaum, Den Hartog, & Folger, 2010).

Authentic leadership, on the other hand, is the practice of exerting greater self-awareness and self-regulation to foster positive self-development among followers (Luthans & Avolio, 2003, p.243). Authentic leaders stay true to their own core beliefs and values and act upon these beliefs when making decisions, thus inspiring followers to exhibit similar behavior (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005). Authentic leaders are also able to develop relationships with followers characterized by transparency, openness, trust, and increasing the efficacy of the follower (Gardner, et al., 2005). As a result, followers of authentic leaders tend to be more satisfied with their roles and exhibit behaviors geared toward self-development and positive organizational outcomes (Yammarino, Dionne, Schriesheim, & Dansereau, 2008). These actions, which are designed to improve both individual and organizational level effectiveness, are referred to by Yammarino, et al. (2008) as positive organizational behavior (POB), which can in turn positively influence individual and group level performance. The positive effects that ethical and authentic leadership can produce for organizational employees, and employees' influence on their organizations' ability perform toward organizational goals, led to the development of the following hypotheses:
H1/H2: Ethical Leadership (1) and Authentic Leadership (2) exhibited by university athletic directors will positively influence athletic staff members' Positive Organizational Behaviors (POB).

H3/H4: Staff members' Positive Organizational Behaviors (POB) will positively influence athletic departments' overall athletic and academic performance.

In addition to the positive effect that ethical and authentic leadership can have on followers' POB, the implementation of high performance work systems (HPWS) has been connected to organizational performance (Arthur, 1994; Huselid, 1995; MacDuffie, 1995). HPWS affects organizational performance through strategies created to optimize the selection, development, retention, and motivation of employees (Way, 2002; MacDuffie, 1995). Although researchers have yet to investigate the connections between leadership and the presence of HPWS within organizations, it is hypothesized here that HPWS will exist in organizations directed by ethical and authentic leaders, given the concern that these leaders exhibit toward the welfare of employees (Brown, Trevino, & Harrison, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Furthermore, organizational practices such as HPWS that focus on the development of employees are hypothesized to positively affect their behavior in support of organizational goals.

H5/H6: Ethical Leadership (1) and Authentic Leadership (2) behaviors practiced by the athletic director will positively affect athletic departments' implementation of HPWS.

H7/H8: HPWS will partially mediate the relationship between Ethical leadership (1) and Authentic Leadership (2) practiced by the athletic director and athletics staff members' Positive Organizational Behaviors (POB).

The research sample for this study will consist of athletics staff members from approximately 20-30 NCAA D-I institutions (FBS), who will be asked to evaluate their athletic director's ethical and authentic leadership practices and their own organizational behaviors. Institutions' academic reputation, as well as their athletic department's prestige and revenue, will be considered as performance drivers alongside leadership and will be measured using established data sources. Athletic performance will be operationalized using the institution's standing in the NACDA Learfield Director's Cup Points (DCP) over the three-year period from 2010-2012. Academic performance will be obtained from the NCAA's Academic Progress Rate (APR) statistic for the participating institutions over the same three-year period. Data will be analyzed using stepwise linear regression to evaluate single-level relationships within the model, while the influence on the proposed department-level outcomes will be assessed using hierarchical linear modeling since cross-level relationships are involved. This study should lead to the discovery of additional information that will help to enhance our collective understanding of how athletic director leadership affects the performance of athletic departments on the field and in the classroom. Further, the use of a multilevel framework that more closely reflects the multitude of factors affecting athletic departments may lead to the adoption of similar designs in future sport management research.