Organizational change is a complex process, as settings, situations, stakeholders, and industry pressures are unique within each change event. These factors impact an organization's ability to adapt to change and to maximize effectiveness as a result of change. Additionally, internal factors such as capacity, leadership, and existing infrastructure can have ample influence on change processes (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004). Given the volatility of the sport industry, organizational change and its resulting intricacies are exceptionally ubiquitous.

While change has been examined within sport organizations (Frontiera, 2010; Welty Peachey & Bruening, 2011), earlier research has not fully considered the internal dynamics occurring within the change process. Prior work has found that culture is the catalyst toward the effectiveness of the change process (Choi, Seo, Scott, & Martin, 2010). Schein (2010) defined culture as the shared assumptions in a given organization. Culture is vital, as it often has the power to influence organizational norms, values, and traditional employment practices. It can also guide behavior during times of organizational change. However, individuals in organizations that undergo change may perceive the action as a threat on an existing, dominant culture, which can promulgate transformation resistance (Pettigrew, 1985). Therefore, it is necessary to understand leadership’s ability to address the change process and possible resistance to its efforts. Furthermore, leadership’s task of reinforcing a culture change throughout an organization may be complicated when a change in leadership is a component of the change process.

Throughout the change process, it is essential that clear communication tactics be demonstrated by leaders (Elving, 2005). Research has shown that successful change campaigns are often a product of consistent communication from those in leadership positions (Frontiera, 2010). During times of change, alignment issues often occur because leaders do not convey timely and accurate information appropriately (Smeltzer, 1991). While the necessity of clear communication in an organization is evident, it is unclear how changes in leadership alter the communication process, especially considering the unique influence of institutional and organizational factors within a major collegiate athletic setting. In addition to understanding culture and communication strategies surrounding organizational transformation, the analysis of stakeholders and their change behaviors may provide a better understanding of the effectiveness of the adjustment process (Lines, 2004). Within college athletics, stakeholder alliances have the capacity to influence the assessment and allocation of resources, direction, and organizational conduct. Thus, determining how and why stakeholders earmark such capital and roles can provide a more thorough understanding of this unique setting in a change process.

As a result, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the influence of a change process on organizational culture, organizational communication, and stakeholders within an FBS intercollegiate sport entity. Furthermore, it seeks to examine how athletic department employees respond to changes in culture introduced by new leadership, and understand how the effect of the dissemination of information on the organizational change process. Finally, this study also aims to ascertain how stakeholders have operationalized roles and responsibilities as a product of change.

The research setting was a large east coast FBS University. This particular institution was selected because of its recent changes in both athletic and institutional leadership, in addition to its transition to a new athletic conference. Because of these significant changes and the corresponding effects from both inside and outside the organization, this provided an ideal setting for assessing how organizational change and culture influence the operations of a major intercollegiate athletics department. This study employed a mixed methods approach, utilizing a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures. In this case, initial data collection activities...
involved document analysis and observations of departmental events and meetings. An interview guide was developed and adapted from earlier studies of change in a sport context (Welty Peachey & Bruening, 2011). Interviews were conducted with staff members at several levels within the department and other university administrators (n=13). Additionally, a focus group was conducted with six members of the university’s student-athlete advisory committee. In analyzing the qualitative data, analyst triangulation was utilized, as members of the research team conducted independent coding sessions.

A survey instrument was also created and distributed to the athletics staff (n=200). The survey consisted of seven previously established scales, including job satisfaction (Spector, 1994), organizational justice (Price & Mueller, 1986; Niehoff & Moorman, 1993), affective commitment to the department (Lee, Allen, Meyer, & Rhee, 2001), openness to change (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994), affective commitment to change (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002), value congruence following organizational change (Lamm, Gordon, & Purser, 2010), and empowerment climate (Seibert, Silver, & Randolph, 2004; Blanchard, Carlos, & Randolph, 1995). These scales were combined to create a 43-item survey designed to uncover the influences of leadership and organizational change on athletic department culture. In addition, four open-ended questions were included to allow staff members to express their perceptions of department. The response rate was 56.5 percent, as 113 of 200 staff members responded to the survey.

Four themes materialized, based on the results of the employee survey and interviews with staff members and the student-athlete advisory committee. They included: sense of community, attitude toward change, perception of equity, and communication. Within each theme, multiple categories emerged in describing the organizational culture of the athletic department. Specifically, the results indicated contradictory views of sense of community in the department, showing positive progress with shared values, yet also negative through the citation of fragmentation. Attitude toward change was categorized as positive, negative, and ambivalent. Perceptions of equity varied within the department by pay, workload, and also amongst sports. Within communication, results indicated there were visible improvements with the new regime but that several challenges remained.

This research is significant, as change within a collegiate athletic department offers an opportunity to examine the process and its cascading influence at each organizational level. Understanding the process is essential in effectively initiating change for future institutions charged with such a task. Successfully enacting change may be especially important for athletic departments affected by a scandal, as leaders work to reform earlier culture and organizational structures to be better aligned with the mission of their institutions. Therefore, it is essential to understand how change affects entities within athletic departments and how, in turn, these entities may influence the effectiveness of implementing change (Welty Peachey & Bruening, 2012). Doing so can assist athletic department leadership in overcoming negative events, establishing a new productive culture within the department, and placing the department on the path toward increased performance.