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Are transformational leaders a double-edged sword?

Impact of transformational leadership on sport employee commitment and job satisfaction

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### Abstract

Few areas have received more frequent scholarly attention in the business literature than leadership. However, insufficient attention had been paid to the study of leadership in a sport context. Therefore, this study examined the direct effects of transformational leadership on sport employee job satisfaction and levels of commitment (to the athletic department and athletic director). Also examined were the mediated effects of *both* commitment foci on the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction. Participants included 325 athletic department employees in a NCAA BCS football conference. Through CFA and SEM, the direct and mediated effects of transformational leadership on sport employee commitment and job satisfaction were explored. Limited support was found for a direct effect of transformational leadership on job satisfaction. However, the results indicated support for transformational leadership directly influencing organizational- and individual-level commitment. Commitment to the athletic department also mediated the transformational leadership-job satisfaction relationship.

## INTRODUCTION

While a myriad of leadership theories exist, one approach attracting significant attention over the past several decades is transformational leadership (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Chelladurai & Kent, 2001; Walumbawa, Avolio, & Zhu, 2008). Transformational leadership describes a leader who identifies change, develops a vision and plan of action for achieving the desired change, and executes the change with the help and commitment of group members/followers (Burns, 1978). Yin, Leong, and Fischer (2011) even went so far as to describe this style of leadership as “universally the most desired” and “most effective” (p. 164). However, as more becomes known about transformational leaders, precisely when and to what extent this type of leadership is actually beneficial to business organizations becomes less clear (Klenke, 1994). To use the familiar analogy, transformational leadership may represent a double-edged sword because it has the power to be both a productive and counterproductive organizational tool.

On the one hand, transformational leadership has been reported to improve individual employee (Walumbwa et al., 2008; Wang et al., 2011), work team (Wang et al., 2011), and overall organizational performance (Yammarino, Dionne, Chun, & Dansereau, 2005). At the same time, transformational leadership also may be counterproductive to long-term organizational success because it is principally concerned with leaders and their visions. This focus can be problematic for several reasons, including followers becoming more concerned with transformational principles than with formal job tasks and followers developing stronger levels of connection to the leader than to the leader’s organization (Clements & Washburn, 1999; Khoo & Burch, 2008; Parry & Proctor-Thomson, 2002; Yukl, 2010). Because transformational leadership can function as a double-edged sword, it is important to move beyond a surface level

understanding of this concept and truly understand the mechanisms through which this style of leadership can positively impact organizational personnel and outcomes.

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Transformational leaders are perceived as very effective at motivating and inspiring a variety of individuals, including work colleagues, subordinates, and followers, to have an increased desire to achieve a specified vision (Bass, 1985). This requires a leader with “vision, self confidence, and inner strength to argue successfully for what is popular or is acceptable according to established wisdom of the time” (Bass, 1985, p.17). Bass (1985) categorized transformational leadership into four components: (a) individualized consideration, (b) intellectual stimulation, (c) inspirational leadership, and (d) idealized influence. *Individualized consideration* refers to leaders treating all followers as individuals and treating each individual according to their particular needs and talents. *Intellectual stimulation* can be understood as the ability of leaders to successfully motivate and stretch the limits of what followers think they can accomplish in a specified set of circumstances. *Inspirational leadership* describes the ability of leaders to improve follower self-worth and create a sense common purpose. The fourth component, *idealized influence*, refers to the extent followers truly believe in and are inspired by the charisma, faculties, and vision of their leader.

One concern about the four components put forth by Bass (1985) pertains to multicollinearity, a term that refers to a statistical condition occurring when two or more variables are found to be highly correlated (i.e., measuring the same concept). Specifically, there is insufficient empirical evidence that the components of *inspirational leadership* and *idealized influence* are truly distinct concepts (Avolio, Bass, & Jung, 1999; Choi, Sagas, Park, & Cunningham, 2007; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). As a result, these two dimensions are

increasingly being combined by researchers to form a single *charismatic leadership* dimension (Choi et al., 2007; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Leaders who are viewed by their followers as charismatic are perceived to be remarkable individuals endowed with extraordinary qualities (Weber, 1947). This revised concept of transformational leadership is adhered to in this study.

### **TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN SPORT SCIENCE RESEARCH**

Despite the continued emphasis on the importance of transformational leadership to sport organizations (Chelladurai, 2005; Wallace & Weese, 1995), insufficient attention has been paid to this style of leadership in a sport context. Indeed, only a handful of sport-based studies have examined subordinates' perceptions of leader characteristics and the impact of leadership style on organizational outcomes (e.g., Andrew, Kim, Stoll, & Todd, 2011; Chelladurai & Kent, 2001; Doherty & Danylchuck, 1995; Yusof, 1998). The study by Andrew et al. (2011), for example, provides a particularly interesting backdrop for future sport-based research because their results highlight the aforementioned double-edged sword analogy.

Andrew et al. (2011) employed a case study approach to examine the effect of transformational leadership on athletic department employees' levels of commitment and job satisfaction. Although transformational leadership improved organizational as well as athletic director commitment, leadership style had a stronger impact on the latter. Thus, "an unintended side effect of hiring a highly transformational leader could be that followers become more committed to the leader than to the organization" (Andrew et al., 2011, p. 198), a point which could be especially problematic for athletic departments whose athletic directors or coaches leave to take positions at rival institutions. Therefore, the impact of transformational leadership on sport employee job satisfaction and commitment to the athletic department and/or athletic director is an area worthy of continued research attention.

### **RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

The proposed transformational leadership research model is illustrated in Figure 1. This research model consists of three constructs: (a) athletic director transformational leadership (individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, charismatic leadership), (b) employee commitment levels (commitment toward athletic department and commitment toward athletic director), and (c) employee job satisfaction. Serving as the conceptual basis for the proposed research model are transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and the multiple-constituency framework proposed by Reichers (1985).

The aim of this study is to provide sport researchers and practitioners with a more nuanced understanding of how transformational leadership impacts sport organization employees' levels of commitment and job satisfaction. Accordingly, a two-fold purpose is developed: (1) explore the direct effects of transformational leadership characteristics (i.e., individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and charismatic leadership) on sport employee job satisfaction and commitment (i.e., to the athletic department and athletic director) and (2) explore how both commitment foci mediate the relationship between transformational leadership characteristics and sport employee job satisfaction.

Reichers (1985) argued that employee commitment levels should be considered via the organizational entity, such as a supervisor or executive, who significantly contributes to the development of employee commitment. He also argued the directionality of employee commitment, whether it is to the organization or to an individual, warrants clarification. Several studies (e.g., Becker, Billing, Eveleth, and Gilbert, 1996; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002) have reinforced Reichers's (1985) observations.

Provided in the following sections are theory and research evidence about the direct and mediated effects of transformational leadership on sport employee job satisfaction when framed in a commitment-mediating framework. Because employees are capable of differentiating their commitment levels to an organization (as a whole) and to a supervisor/leader (Andrew et al., 2011; Becker et al., 1996), both types of commitment warrant consideration. Therefore, in accordance with transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985) and the arguments put forth by Reichers (1985), athletic department and athletic director commitment levels are included in this study as potential mediators of the transformational leadership-job satisfaction relationship.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

### **Transformational Leadership and Employee Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction refers to “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Locke, 1976, p. 1304). By this definition, job satisfaction represents an attitude because it serves as an evaluative judgment of the incongruity between what an employee expects and actual elements of an employee’s job. Job satisfaction is an important outcome for researchers to explore because it has been associated repeatedly with increased organizational productivity, enhanced employee loyalty, and decreased employee absenteeism and turnover (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Yee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2008).

Several studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between a transformational leadership style and employee job satisfaction (e.g., Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Dubinsky, Yammarino, Jolson, & Spangler, 1995). Of particular relevance to the context of the current study, Yusof (1998) found a positive relationship between athletic director transformational leadership and sport employees’ (athletic coaches) job satisfaction levels. Thus,



Hypothesis 1: Transformational leadership (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, charismatic leadership) is believed to directly affect sport employee job satisfaction levels.

### **Transformational Leadership and Employee Commitment**

Commitment can be understood as “a volitional psychological bond reflecting dedication to and responsibility for a particular target” (Klein, Molloy, & Brinsfield, 2012, p. 137). More precisely, organizational commitment refers to the “strength of the individual’s identification with and involvement in an organization” (Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974, p. 604). This type of commitment is important to the study of leadership and personnel management for several reasons. Notably, organizational commitment has been shown to have a positive relationship with job satisfaction and a negative relationship with absenteeism and turnover intentions among organizational members (Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Although leadership style in general is viewed as an important predictor of organizational commitment (Mowday, Porter, and Steers, 1982), the research evidence about transformational leaders is mixed. Doherty and Danylchuk (1996), for example, reported an insignificant relationship between athletic directors’ transformational leadership and organizational commitment levels among athletic coaches’ in Canadian sport organizations. In contrast, Andrew et al. (2011) reported a significant relationship between all three dimensions of transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Overall, despite these conflicting results, numerous studies have demonstrated a significant relationship between this style of leadership and organizational commitment (e.g., Avolio, Zhu, Koh, & Bhatia, 2004; Bass, 1985; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Therefore,

Hypothesis 2: Transformational leadership is believed to directly affect sport employee organizational commitment levels.

Along with being committed to an organization, employees also can be committed to a specific entity within a focal organization (Becker et al., 1996). This distinction is important. The reason it is important to differentiate organizational commitment from commitment to a supervisor/leader is because the latter type of commitment may be the stronger predictor of employee attitudes and behaviors (Becker et al., 1996; Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002; Lavelle, Knovsky, & Brockner, 2005).

A transformational leadership style should inspire commitment to a leader because this individual is the organizational entity primarily responsible for the development and achievement of a vision (Reichers, 1985). Several studies lend weight to this position (e.g., Andrew et al., 2011; Yang, Wu, Chang, & Chien, 2011). For example, Andrew et al. (2011) found sport employees whose supervisor exhibited a transformational leadership style indicated they had a stronger level of connection to the supervisor rather than commitment to the sport organization as a whole. Thus,

Hypothesis 3: Transformational leadership is believed to directly affect sport employee athletic director commitment levels.

### **Mediating Effect of Commitment**

While numerous mediators in the relationship between transformational leadership and individual and/or organizational outcomes have been explored in the past (e.g., collective efficiency, psychological empowerment; Avolio et al., 2004), insufficient attention has been paid to the potential mediating effects of commitment. This relationship warrants attention for several

reasons. First, though several studies have reported a significant relationship between transformational leadership and employee job satisfaction (e.g., Dubinsky et al., 1995; Yusof, 1998), the strength of the correlation between these variables has occasionally been reported as weak (e.g., Andrew et al., 2011). This means the effects of transformational leaders may not be solely explained by perceptions of the leaders, but rather, also explained by an additional factor such as employees' bonds and biases to the focal organizations and/or leaders.

Second, transformational leadership has been linked to commitment to both an organization and individual (Avolio et al., 2004; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001). Third, employees who are committed to their organization and/or supervisor may experience greater job satisfaction because they are less likely to engage in absenteeism and develop turnover intentions (Landry, Panaccio, & Vandenberghe, 2010; Meyer et al., 2002), and are more likely to receive high job performance ratings (Meyer et al., 2002). Accordingly,

Hypothesis 4: Athletic department commitment is believed to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and sport employee job satisfaction levels.

Hypothesis 5: Athletic director commitment is believed to mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and sport employee job satisfaction levels.

## **METHODS**

### **Participants and Procedures**

The population for the current study included all athletic department employees in a focal National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) conference. The entire population of 2,086 staff members of each athletic department in the conference was asked to complete a secure, anonymous internet survey. Among the 2,086 distributed questionnaires, 325 athletic department staff participated in the study. This resulted in a 15.58%

response rate, which is comparable to response rates in other published studies surveying athletic department employees (Choi et al., 2007). The majority of the respondents were males ( $n = 202$ ; 62.2%) and low-level (non-managerial) employees ( $n = 211$ ; 64.9%). The average age of participants was 38.21 years old. The average job tenure of participants was 7.69 years.

### **Instrumentation**

The survey for the current study consisted of 30 items, including questions about demographic information and the following three constructs: (a) transformational leadership (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, charismatic leadership), (b) commitment toward the athletic department and athletic director, and (c) job satisfaction. Responses were recorded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). All Cronbach's alpha coefficients ( $\alpha$ ) were greater than the recommended cutoff point .70 (Nunnally & Berstein, 1994).

**Transformational leadership.** The *Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)* by Bass (1985) was used to measure athletic directors' perceived leadership behaviors. Three dimensions of transformational leadership (individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, and charismatic leadership) were examined with nine items from the *MLQ* (three items per dimension). Each dimension has been found to have sufficient internal consistency reliability (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001): individualized consideration ( $\alpha = .90$ ), intellectual stimulation ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and charismatic leadership ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

**Employee commitment.** According to a meta-analysis by Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky (2002), there are three different types of organizational commitment: affective, continuance, and normative. Affective commitment represents emotional attachment to a focal entity as well as identification and involvement with that entity (Meyer et al., 2002). Of the three

different types of commitment, affective commitment has demonstrated the strongest correlations with organization- and employee-relevant outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002). Therefore, in this study, affective commitment to the organization and individual was assessed.

Six items for affective commitment developed by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993) were modified for both commitment foci. Meyer et al.'s (1993) measure of affective commitment has demonstrated sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .85$ ).

**Job Satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured with the 3-item overall job satisfaction scale developed by Judge, Locke, Durham, and Kluger (1998). Judge et al.'s (1998) measure has demonstrated sufficient reliability ( $\alpha = .89$ ).

### **Data Analysis**

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using AMOS 17.0 in order to validate the posited relations of the observed variables and the underlying constructs in the measurement model. In examining the measurement model, chi-square, the Steiger-Lind Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA; Steiger, 1990), Standardized Root Mean Squared Residual (SRMR), and the Bentler Comparative Fit Index (CFI; Bentler, 1990) were employed. According to Carmines and McIver (1981), a chi-square per degree of freedom ratio in the range of 2 to 3 is indicative of reasonable fit. In terms of RMSEA and SRMR, the values of .08 indicate reasonable fit and values less than .06 indicate close fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). CFI values higher than .9 indicate reasonable fit whereas close to 1 indicates very good fit (Bentler, 1990).

Descriptive statistics (means and standardized deviations) and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of each construct in the study were calculated and reported using SPSS version 17.0 (SPSS, 2008). This was done to verify the internal consistency of each measurement scale. Next,

SEM using AMOS 17.0 was again employed to examine the direct and mediated relationships between the three dimensions of transformational leadership, both commitment foci, and job satisfaction. For data analysis, the same fit indices used for CFA ( $\chi^2/df$ , RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI) were utilized to assess the proposed research model.

## RESULTS

### Model Testing and Modification

The overall fit indices for the CFA demonstrated the measurement model had a modest fit with the data [ $\chi^2 (df) = 870.18 (284)$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.06$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .08; SRMR = .046]. For the job satisfaction subscale, one item, “Each day at work seems like it will never end,” demonstrated a very low factor loading value (.389). Items negatively worded in the questionnaire and then reverse-coded for data analysis may contribute to low factor loadings due to respondent errors on negative statements (Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). Thus, the item was not included in further analysis.

In terms of employee commitment, correlations were made between two parallel items of commitment toward the athletic director and athletic department. The first set of items include: “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working with my athletic director” and “I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working with my athletic department.” The second set of items included: “I really feel as if my athletic director’s problems are my own” and “I really feel as if my athletic department’s problems are my own.” This approach was employed because parallel items can induce correlation errors. After the modification, the results of the revised measurement model indicated an enhanced fit model for all three categories.

Fit indices [ $\chi^2 (df) = 676.44(258)$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.62$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .95; RMSEA = .071; SRMR = .040] were all acceptable. Convergent validity was supported by all factor loadings being significant ( $p < .01$ ) and average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 2005). Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the constructs ranged from .858 to .955. Thus, all coefficients exceeded the recommended benchmark of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and factor loadings for each construct in the study. Table 2 reports the correlations among the constructs and the alpha coefficients.

[Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here]

### **Structural Model Testing**

After testing the measurement model via CFA, the results of the proposed structural model (incorporating the three aspects of transformational leadership, job satisfaction, commitment toward athletic department, and commitment toward athletic director) revealed the fit indices [ $\chi^2 (df) = 699.94 (259)$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 2.70$ ,  $p < .001$ ; CFI = .948; RMSEA = .072; SRMR = .049] were all acceptable. The results demonstrated intellectual stimulation ( $\gamma = -.145$ ; SE = .062;  $p < .05$ ) had a negative direct impact on the job satisfaction of athletic department employees. Charismatic leadership ( $\gamma = -.040$ ; SE = .071;  $p = .572$ ) and individualized consideration ( $\gamma = .185$ ; SE = .100;  $p = .065$ ) did not directly impact job satisfaction. Thus, only minimal support for H1 was found.

The path coefficients between intellectual stimulation ( $\gamma = .229$ ; SE = .088;  $p < .05$ ) and individualized consideration ( $\gamma = .362$ ; SE = .135;  $p < .01$ ) and athletic department commitment were significant. Thus, with the exception of the charismatic leadership dimension, H2 was

largely supported. All path coefficients between the three dimensions of transformational leadership [intellectual stimulation ( $\beta\gamma = .291$ ;  $SE = .063$ ;  $p < .01$ ), individualized consideration ( $\gamma = .441$ ;  $SE = .098$ ;  $p < .01$ ), charismatic leadership ( $\gamma = .211$ ;  $SE = .076$ ;  $p < .01$ )] and athletic director commitment were significant. Therefore, H3 was supported.

In terms of the relationship between each commitment foci and job satisfaction, the results indicated only athletic department commitment influenced job satisfaction ( $\gamma = .293$ ;  $SE = .044$ ;  $p < .01$ ). Thus, H4 was supported whereas H5 was not supported. The indirect (mediated) relationship between *intellectual stimulation* and *individualized consideration* of transformational leadership and job satisfaction via athletic department commitment was tested by using Sobel's formula (Sobel, 1982; Baron & Kenny, 1986). Sobel's formula is  $z = (a \times b) / \text{square of root of } (b^2s_a^2 + a^2s_b^2)$ . In this formula, a is an unstandardized regression coefficient between an independent variable and a mediator, b is an unstandardized regression coefficient between a mediator and a dependent variable,  $S_a$  is the standard error of a, and  $S_b$  is the standard error of b.

First, the indirect link between intellectual stimulation and job satisfaction was significant ( $z = 2.42$ ;  $p < .05$ ) and the magnitude (.067) of the link was computed by multiplying the path coefficients from the intellectual stimulation  $\rightarrow$  athletic department commitment link ( $\gamma = .229$ ;  $SE = .088$ ) and the athletic department commitment  $\rightarrow$  job satisfaction link ( $\gamma = .293$ ;  $SE = .044$ ). Next, the indirect link between individualized consideration and job satisfaction via commitment toward athletic department was significant ( $z = 2.49$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The magnitude of the indirect link was .106 [i.e., individualized consideration  $\rightarrow$  commitment toward athletic department link ( $\gamma = .362$ ;  $SE = .135$ )  $\times$  the commitment toward athletic department  $\rightarrow$  job satisfaction link



( $\gamma = .293$ ;  $SE = .044$ ). Thus, with exception of the charismatic leadership dimension, H4 was supported. Figure 2 illustrates the final model based on the research results.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

## DISCUSSION

Following the previous research and theory development on transformational leadership, commitment, and job satisfaction, five hypotheses were generated. The results were relatively supportive of the research hypotheses. For instance, although athletic director commitment did not mediate the relationship between transformational leadership and job satisfaction (H5), athletic department commitment mediated the relationship between two of the three dimensions of transformational leadership (i.e., intellectual stimulation and individual consideration) and job satisfaction (H4). Overall, these results extend the the extant sport sciences and coaching literatures in several ways.

First, only one dimension of transformational leadership (i.e., intellectual stimulation) had a direct impact on the job satisfaction of athletic department staff members. Furthermore, this dimension had a negative impact on job satisfaction. An explanation for this negative relationship might rest with the type of sport employees surveyed in this study. Almost 65% percent of the participants were classified as low level, non-supervisor sport employees. An aspect of intellectual stimulation is stretching the limits of what employees believe they can accomplish. Thus, in the case of low level employees, intellectual stimulation could decrease job satisfaction if these individuals perceive it as encouraging more work productivity without corresponding levels of compensation.

Conceptually, a transformational leader should impact employee job satisfaction because this style of leadership is focused upon the motivation of employees as well as instilling them

with a sense of personal responsibility and purpose (Yukl, 2010). Thus, employees should perceive they have a significant role in organizational outcomes and experience a greater sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction in the completion of work-related tasks. In actuality, research findings about the direct effect of transformational leaders on job satisfaction are mixed.

There is sufficient evidence that transformational leadership can have a meaningful impact on job satisfaction (e.g., Barling et al., 1996; Yusof, 1998). There is also ample evidence that transformational leadership, by itself, may not have a powerful effect on job satisfaction (e.g., Andrew et al., 2011; Choi et al., 2007; Wallace & Weese, 1995). In the case of Wallace and Weese (1995), for example, sport employees experienced job satisfaction regardless of their perceptions of transformational leadership. Also, in a study by Choi et al. (2007), only the individualized consideration dimension of transformational leadership impacted NCAA Division 1 football coach job satisfaction levels. Ultimately, the results of this study point to the importance of investigating more immediate factors, such as work conditions, that may impact job satisfaction as well as investigating mechanisms, such as organizational commitment, that may improve the predictive ability of transformational leadership on employee job satisfaction.

Second, based on the multi-constitution framework (Reichers, 1985) and previous research evidence about leadership and commitment (e.g., Bass, 1985; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Yang et al., 2011), transformational leadership behaviors were expected to predict sport employee commitment to an organization (athletic department) and individual (athletic director). Further, of the two foci, leadership behaviors were expected to be even stronger predictors of athletic director commitment. These observations were confirmed by the research results.

The impact of transformational leadership on both athletic department and athletic director commitment was largely supported. All three dimensions of transformational leadership

had a significant effect on sport employees' commitment levels toward their athletic director. Also, with the exception of the charismatic leadership dimension, transformational leadership significantly influenced sport employees' commitment levels toward their athletic department.

The lack of a significant correlation between the charismatic dimension of leadership and organizational commitment might be explained by a potential limitation of this transformational leadership dimension. Transformational leaders with a high degree of charismatic leadership may generate a strong sense of connectedness and purpose among their followers that is directed toward them but not directed toward the organization as whole (Yukl, 2010). Thus, in terms of recruiting and personnel selection in sport organizations, each dimension of transformational leadership should be considered in conjunction with and separate from the other dimensions because they may have distinct influences on employees' attitudes and behaviors. Specifically, if the charismatic dimension of transformational leadership is too pronounced, a transformational leader may foster dependency relationships with followers that are counterproductive to organizational performance because follower energy and effort is *not* primarily directed toward the organization and its goals (Barbuto, 1997).

Altogether, these results align with past findings that employees can differentiate between different commitment foci and that transformational leadership can have a significant effect on commitment to an individual and organization (e.g., Andrew et al., 2011; Avolio et al., 2004; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Yang et al., 2011). Additionally, the relationship between transformational leadership and commitment was stronger when the commitment focus was the athletic director instead of the athletic department. This finding supports the multi-constituency framework proposed by Reichers (1985) and further validates the case study results of Andrew et al. (2011).

Third, of the two types of commitment foci, only organizational commitment influenced sport employee job satisfaction levels. Organizational commitment also mediated the relationship between transformational leadership and sport employee job satisfaction levels. That is, athletic directors perceived by their employees as considerate and intellectually stimulating were able to enhance employee organizational commitment levels, which then enhanced employee job satisfaction levels. This finding is important for several reasons.

One reason this result is significant is because, much like the results of Andrew et al. (2011) and Choi et al. (2007), a limited direct effect of transformational leadership on sport employee job satisfaction was reported. In the absence of a powerful relationship between these variables, the findings of this study demonstrate an important mechanism through which a transformational leadership style may actually impact sport employees' perceptions of job satisfaction. A second reason this result is significant is because of the implications it holds for sport organizations. Despite the allure of transformational leaders, the extent to which these individuals influence sport employees' levels of commitment to themselves rather than to the organization warrants careful observation and future research attention because the former type of commitment may not sufficiently link leadership style with employee job satisfaction.

### **Practical Implications**

While the results of this study are not automatically generalizable to different sport contexts and sport employee populations, this limitation does not preclude contemplation by sport practitioners of how the interactions in the proposed research model might manifest themselves in their respective sport environments. In terms of personnel selection, for example, when it comes to the hiring of a new head coach or athletic director, the leadership style of the job candidate is an area worthy of considerable examination. Given the results of this study,

there are several questions whose answers may prove beneficial to a sport organization if they consider hiring a transformational leader, such as a new head coach to take over a struggling sport team. These questions may also prove to be useful preparation tools/points of contemplation for coaches who employ a transformational leadership style, and who are looking to put themselves on the job market in the near future.

First, transformational leadership is usually associated with the development of an exciting, if not grandiose vision that should bring about much needed change to a team or organization. With that being said, the following question needs to be asked during the job search process: can the head coach job applicant satisfactorily explain how his/her proposed vision can be attained? Transformational leaders tend to inspire awe among followers (e.g., administrative staff, assistant coaches, athletes), which can inhibit constructive criticism of a vision and cause followers to have unfounded and excessive confidence in the vision. Such blind acceptance of a vision that lacks a feasible plan of action can be harmful to a sport team and/or an entire sport organization. Followers develop a high level of optimism about the vision, expend a considerable amount of time and energy in the pursuit of the vision, and then may fail to achieve the vision because a clear link between the vision and a sound strategy for attaining it was never established. Such an outcome is likely to be costly to an organization due to the poor use of financial and human resources, and it also is likely to have a negative impact on follower morale, motivation, and productivity.

Second, is there evidence the transformational leader led by example in the past? It needs to be determined if the head coach job candidate is someone who “sells” a vision but expects others to execute it or is the type of individual who espouses a compelling vision and demonstrates how it can be achieved in his/her daily behavior. Transformational leaders who

practices what they preach are more likely to gain support for themselves and their visions while being less likely to create resentment and disunity among followers. Thus, during the job search process, it is important for members of the search committee to carefully evaluate the past behaviors of head coach job candidates so that they may have a more comprehensive understanding of what they can expect of these individuals if hired.

Third, is there an established system of checks-and-balances? Because transformational leaders may inspire greater commitment to themselves than to the sport organization, it is important to establish a system that can refocus the energy and effort of followers from leader-oriented goals to underlying organizational objectives. For instance, the goals of an intercollegiate athletic program may be academic and athletic excellence whereas the goals of a head coach may be centered primarily on winning a national championship. Thus, when seeking out a transformational leader to reshape a focal sport team, it is important for a sport organization to: (a) evaluate its current system of checks-and-balances and (b) evaluate the congruence between head coach job candidates' past behaviors and vision the underlying objectives (vision) of the sport organization.

Fourth, what processes are in place to help maximize the effectiveness of a transformational leader? As found in this study, a transformational leader may not automatically lead to employee job satisfaction. In addition to organizational commitment, it is important to identify other factors, such as leader-employee value congruence and goal clarity, which may enhance the effectiveness of a transformational leadership style and other leadership styles. Hence, when interviewing possible head coach job candidates, members of the search committee should seek to understand what candidates perceive they need (upon being hired) to maximize their effectiveness as a head coach so that sport organization can determine if it has the capacity

and desire to fulfill those needs. If the specified needs of a head coach job candidate cannot be met, then the individual should be removed from consideration for the job position regardless of his/her qualifications.

Lastly, is a system in place for the development of a successor in the event of a leadership crisis? One potential problem of a sport team with a transformational leader, especially a head coach possessing a high level of charismatic leadership, is the failure to adequately develop a back-up plan in case the leader becomes seriously ill or leaves for another job. Therefore, an area that needs to be explored and openly discussed during the search process is what can be done (by both the sport organization and the new head coach) to develop a sufficiently trained protégé who can provide a smooth transition of leadership that maintains follower motivation and productivity.

### CONCLUSION

Valuable progress has been made in the study of leadership in a sport context; however, there is still much to be known about the salience and potential doubled-edged nature of transformational leaders to the management of sport. This study advances the sport knowledge base through the examination of the direct and mediated effects of a transformational leadership style on sport employees' attitudes. Most notably, transformational leadership impacts employee commitment to *both* the athletic department and athletic director. However, only commitment to the athletic department mediated the transformational leadership-job satisfaction relationship. These results hopefully spark further exploration of transformational leadership and the mechanisms through which it positively impacts the attitudes and behaviors of sport personnel.

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Figure 1. Proposed research model of how transformational leadership impacts job satisfaction.

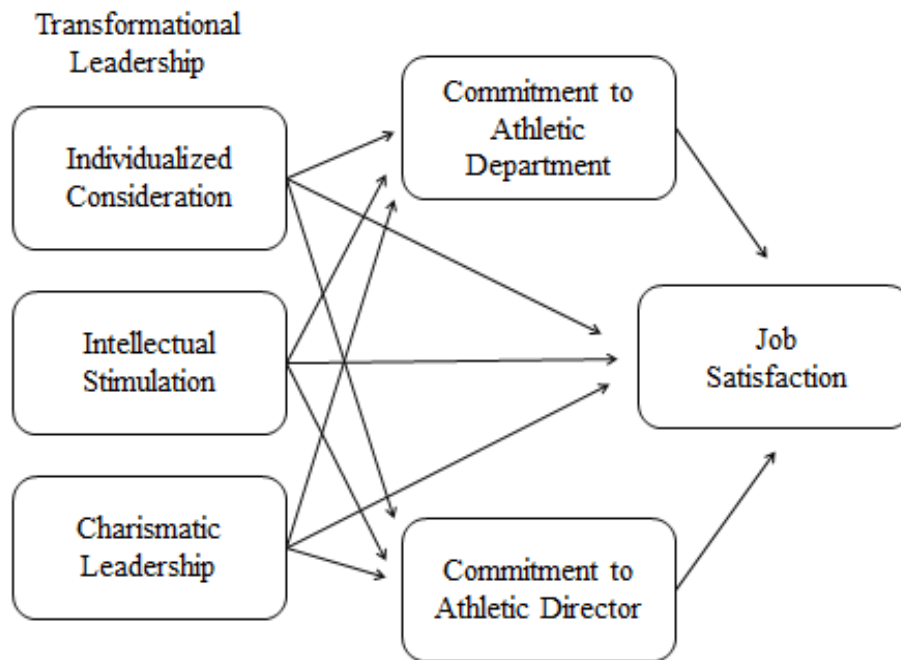
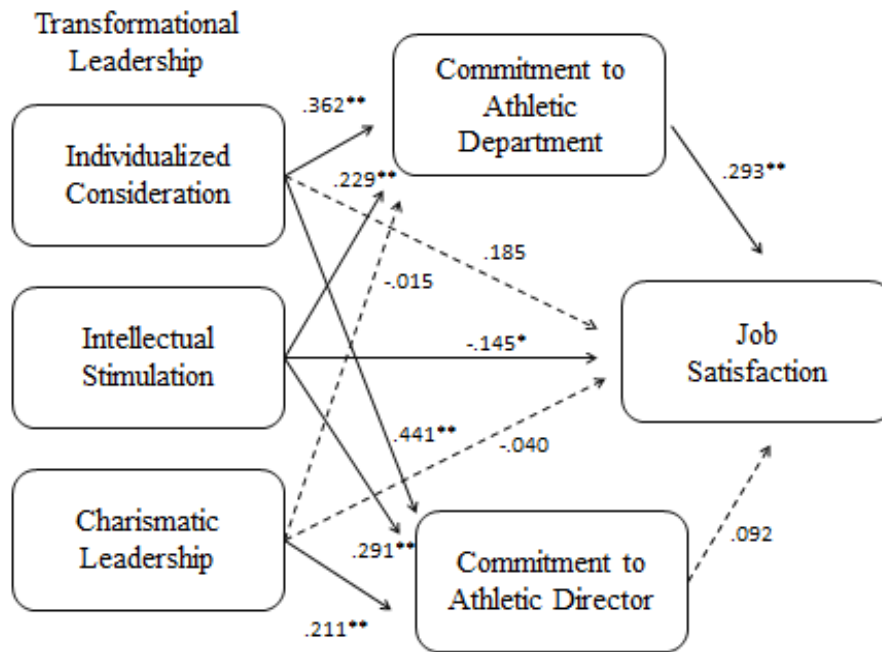


Figure 2. Final research model of how transformational leadership impact job satisfaction.



\*\* Correlations were significant at the .01 level. \* Correlations were significant at the .05 level.



Table 1  
*Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Coefficients ( $\beta$ ) for the Variables (N=325)*

Variable	Dimensions and Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\lambda$	AVE
<b>Transformational Leadership</b>	<b>Charismatic</b>	<b>5.27</b>	<b>1.62</b>		<b>.880</b>
	My athletic director is a model for me to follow.	5.31	1.65	.963	
	I have complete faith in my athletic director.	5.29	1.67	.941	
	My athletic director makes everyone around him/her enthusiastic about assignments.	5.20	1.75	.910	
	<b>Individualized Consideration</b>	<b>4.98</b>	<b>1.67</b>		<b>.787</b>
	My athletic director find outs what I want and tries to help me get it.	4.92	1.84	.912	
	I can count on my athletic director to express appreciation when I do a good job.	5.42	1.80	.869	
	My athletic director gives personal attention to members who seem neglected.	4.60	1.78	.879	
	<b>Intellectual Stimulation</b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>1.65</b>		<b>.839</b>
	My athletic director has provided me with new ways of looking at things which used to be a puzzle for me.	4.42	1.76	.925	
	My athletic director's ideas have forced me to rethink some of my own ideas which I have never questioned before.	4.48	1.76	.895	
	My athletic director enables me to think about old problems in new ways.	4.57	1.74	.928	
<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Toward Athletic Department</b>	<b>5.18</b>	<b>1.38</b>		<b>.662</b>
	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with my athletic department.	5.39	1.70	.695	

	I really feel as if my athletic department's problems are my own.	4.62	1.70	.556
	I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my athletic department.	5.25	1.58	.910
	I feel "emotionally attached" to my athletic department.	5.07	1.65	.885
	I feel like "part of the family" in my athletic department.	5.29	1.67	.884
	This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me	5.45	1.59	.886
<b>Commitment</b>	<b>Toward Athletic Director</b>	<b>4.23</b>	<b>1.68</b>	<b>.734</b>
	I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career working with my athletic director.	4.98	1.89	.848
	I really feel as if my athletic director's problems are my own.	3.80	1.73	.637
	I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my athletic director.	4.38	1.91	.920
	I feel "emotionally attached" to my athletic director.	3.70	1.93	.870
	I feel like "part of the family" with my athletic director.	4.51	1.99	.915
	My athletic director has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	4.03	1.97	.916
<b>Job Satisfaction</b>		<b>6.02</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>.620</b>
	Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	6.05	1.06	.828
	I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	5.77	1.30	.826
	I find real enjoyment in my work.	6.01	1.16	.839
	I consider my job rather unpleasant (Reported scores are appropriately reversed).	6.26	1.28	.638

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Table 2

*Correlations between transformational leadership and employees' attitudes and Cronbach Alphas ( $\alpha$ ) for the constructs*

	Charismatic Leadership	Intellectual Stimulation	Individualized Consideration	Athletic Department Commit.	Athletic Director Commit.	Job Satisfaction
Charismatic Leadership	( $\alpha=.955$ )					
Intellectual Stimulation	.744**	( $\alpha=.940$ )				
Individual Consideration	.837**	.773**	( $\alpha=.918$ )			
Athletic Department	.523**	.546**	.542**	( $\alpha=.916$ )		
Athletic Director	.787**	.780**	.797**	.635**	( $\alpha=.943$ )	
Job Satisfaction	.368**	.310**	.396**	.529**	.424**	( $\alpha=.858$ )

\*\* Correlations were significant at the .01 level.