

Athletic director's leadership traits and job satisfaction



This chapter will provide a review of the literature and research related to the purpose of the study. Because research identifying specific leadership traits of high school athletic directors is almost nonexistent, this literature review begins with a summary of: (a) leadership defined (b) general educational leadership traits and theories, (c) roles and responsibilities, (d) job satisfaction and finish with the (e) summary.

Leadership Defined

Leadership is a term that can be found throughout all workplaces. The meaning of leadership can be defined in a variety of ways. According to Fiedler (1967), leadership is defined by managing group work with appropriate control and organization. According to Dr. Jamie Williams (Sugarman, 1999), leadership is like gravity. You know it's there, you know it exists, but how do you define it? Nahavandi (2008) explained that researchers disagree with leadership definitions because of the fact that leadership is a complicated phenomenon mixed with the leader, the follower, and the situation. For example, Coach John Wooden's ability to motivate his men's basketball program at UCLA to win 11 national championships during his coaching tenure provides evidence of Wooden's transformational leadership. Wooden inspired his players to play to the best of their ability and to never accept losing. He was also instrumental in making sure that his players stayed very humble in the process.

Hughes et al. (2008) explained that some researchers have paid attention to the leader's personal traits while others have focused on the relationship

between leaders and followers or situational factors that influence leadership behavior.

Roach and Behling (1984) defined leadership as the procedure of guiding an organized team toward achieving its objectives. This definition is accepted by any sports team that wins a championship or achieves their team goals.

Rost (1993) defined leadership as influence dynamics among leaders and followers who attempt to bring true organizational changes that reflect their common goals. Daft (1999) stated that in the new era represented by a dramatic change, an old philosophy of control-oriented leadership is not effective anymore, and that leaders should make effort to retain soft elements of leadership qualities in addition to hard management skills.

Watkins and Rikard (1991) defined leadership as the process of influencing the activities of an organized group toward goal achievement. There are many categories, given the different ways the influencing process is played out. Three such categories are transactional leadership transformational leadership, and situational leadership.

Leadership Traits and Theories

Theories of leadership have evolved and debate over the act of leadership, and what is required, continues. This study will explore the leadership traits of high school athletic directors and if they correlate with job satisfaction.

According to Young, et al (2010), the documentation of educational leadership traits for high school athletic directors is scarce. However, the traits of organization, roles and responsibilities and job satisfaction of high school athletic directors are prevalent in previous research. Since the

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twentieth century there have been many researching leadership and creating theories to go with their findings (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003; Grint, 2000; Higgs, 2002; Kets de Vries, 1993). Leadership theories can be grouped into one of eight theory categories. These eight theories are the “ Great Man” theory, trait theories, contingency theory, situational theories, behavioral theories, participative theories, management theories and relationship theories. This research will look into the details of the trait theory, behavioral theories, situational theories, and transformational and transactional leadership. Trait theories will identify which characteristics are shared by leaders. According to Shad (2010) since certain traits are associated with proficient leadership, it assumes that if you could identify people with the correct traits, you will be able to identify leaders and people with leadership potential. Trait theory takes on the assumption that leaders are born with leadership traits or not. This idea appears to be incorrect. Shad (2010) states that it is possible for someone to change their character traits for the worse and that someone who is known for being honest can learn to become deceitful. In addition, someone who is deceitful can learn to become honest. Often times we look for honesty, drive, goal oriented, competent and intelligent people to become our leaders. Between 1940 and into the late 1990’s, researchers (e. g., Dulewicz & Higgs, 2003; Partington, 2003) categorized approaches to leadership theory improvements into several schools, according to time order. Trait school, behavioral school, contingency school, and visionary school were considered the four major trait schools.

The trait school leadership theories were largely popular in the 1940's.

Stogdill (1974) referred to the Great Man Theory, which stated that leaders are different from followers due to common leader traits. Additionally, Turner (1999) supported Stogdill's (1974) claim about leaders being different from followers by explaining that leaders are born into being great leaders and not made into great leaders. Hogan (1991) explained that traits refer to repetitive patterns in a person's behavior and the trait approach attempts to explain people's behavioral trends in terms of certain strengths of traits that they retain. Stogdill (1974) also stated that leaders' traits are shown through hardwork, friendliness, conscientiousness, and willingness to take on responsibility rather than personality, ambition and physical makeup such as height. Turner's (1999) research supports Stogdill (1974) by showing that effective managers have traits such as energy and drive, self-confidence, and highly effective communication skills.

The behavioral approach to leadership was well studied between the 1940's and 1960's. During this time period, researchers from the University of Michigan and The Ohio State University posited that leaders behaviors can be explained within two independent factors called consideration and initiating structure (Fleishman, 1973; Halpin & Winer, 1957). According to the Ohio State researchers, the term consideration applies to the degree in which leaders show support and friendship towards followers, while the phrase initiating structure applies to the manner in which leaders stress the importance of achieving goals and tasks. According to Bower & Seashore (1966), the behavioral studies conducted by the University of Michigan researchers posited that effective group performance shows a relationship

with four dimensions of leadership behaviors: support, interaction facilitation, goal emphasis, and work facilitation. The leader support behavior's shows a relationship with concern for subordinates, while interaction facilitation shows a relationship with reconciling relational conflicts among group members. Bower and Seashore (1966) explained that in sum, goal emphasis and work facilitation are job-centered dimensions, but leaders support and interaction facilitation are employee-centered dimensions. Recent studies by (e. g., Curphy, 2003; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003) have claimed that considering certain leadership behaviors are adopted for effective leadership, leadership can be developed. The behavioral school states that, leaders can change their behavior via reflection, organizational development systems, and 360-degree feedback amongst others (McCauley, Ruderman, Ohlott, & Morrow, 1994). According to Bass (1985), these two categories are points on a continuum of leadership behavior. Athletic directors are going to fall into one of the two leadership categories. Bass (1998) described transformational leadership as behavior that transcends the need for rewards and appeals to the followers' higher order needs, inspiring them to act in the best interest of the organization rather than their own self-interest. Thus, leaders must possess high ethical and moral standards in order to provide the highest reward to the organization. One might infer that even the most ethically and morally charged athletic director cannot possibly provide the highest rewards each and every year to the organization that he/she represents. However, ethics and morals are two very important characteristics in an individual when determining the type of leader one might become. Leadership styles are known to change, and thus a transformational leader could dip into the realm of transactional leadership

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and vice versa. Generally, personality and character traits can provide us with the determination as to whether or not you are a transformational or transactional leader.

According to Bass (1998) transformational leadership is universally applicable. He proposed that regardless of culture, transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization. Followers become motivated to expend greater effort than would usually be expected. If an AD exemplified Bass's transformational leadership model, coaches in the school would offer up all that they have to support the athletic director and school that they work for. For example, the athletic director buys-in to the complete offerings of his/her current employer as we continue to transform the area of athletics.

According to Sugarman (1999), excellence in leadership is acquired by people who have a strong sense of vision, have passion and are able to get people to commit 100% and take the necessary action to see that vision becomes a reality. Great leaders excel in the art of communication and motivation, mutual respect, instilling confidence and enthusiasm, and showing credibility and integrity on a consistent basis. Various high school athletic directors and coaches all across the United States create programs teaching their student athletes leadership styles and how they can be applied. One popular program that was used to establish athletic leadership for Wheeler High School's football team in Valparaiso, Indiana is based off the acronym for L. E. A. D. E. R. S. H. I. P. Coach Snodgrass of Wheeler High School utilized the L. E. A. D. E. R. S. H. I. P. program that he learned while attending the Indiana Football Coaches Association Annual Clinic in 2003. <https://assignbuster.com/athletic-directors-leadership-traits-and-job-satisfaction/>

According to Snodgrass (2004), the acronym is as follows: Influence, Integrity, Communication, Attitude, Courage, Sacrifice, Goals, Servant-Hood, Vision, and Perseverance. Each one of these terms forms a strong resilient leadership program for any athletic program. The athletic director must decide how important it is for him or her to provide this type of leadership program to his or her student athletes, school administration, and school community. With the proper education comes an ability to manage, facilitate, and guide. A true leader, however, does not simply read books or study what leadership should be. Rather, a true leader is someone who shows transformational or transactional traits naturally. Providing a program like the one that Wheeling High School provided for its football players shows that the leadership is transformational at this school. Giving the students an opportunity to understand what leadership is all about and how leadership is applied in everyday life allowed those football players at Wheeling High School in Valparaiso, IN to become stronger individuals in the classroom, community, and field. The football coach for this team showed his athletic director a true meaning of transformational leadership.

Bolman and Deal (2003) stated that “ leadership is universally offered as a panacea for almost any social problem” (p. 336). Within the athletic arena, leadership is a term used to describe any event which coaches, staff members, administrators, and ADs go above and beyond their normal work day.

Bolman and Deal (2003) noted further that if leaders lose their legitimacy then they lose the capacity to lead. For example, a high school athletic director has authority but not necessarily leadership. Additionally, a leader is <https://assignbuster.com/athletic-directors-leadership-traits-and-job-satisfaction/>

also not necessarily a manager. Many managers do not know how to lead. Bennis and Nanus (1985) asserted that managers do things right, and leaders do the right thing. It is very important for high school athletic directors to understand the distinction between the terms leader and manager because high school athletic directors will not produce a successful leadership style if they cannot distinguish differences in leading and managing.

Leadership and management can be situational. According to Hersey and Blanchard (2001) the situational leadership model combines task and people into a two-by-two chart, which shows four possible leadership styles: telling, selling, participating, and delegating. Bolman and Deal (2003) stated this model distinguishes four levels of subordinate readiness and argues that the appropriate leadership style depends on the situation. The four styles are as follows:

Leadership through participation involves having a high relationship with one's subordinates with low tasks involved. This style is used when followers are able but unwilling or insecure to accomplish the task at hand. According to Sugarmann (1999), Vince Lombardi says, " Leaders are made, they are not born; and they are made just like anything else has ever been made in this country - by hard work." Additionally, Sugarmann (1999) stated that leading by example is paramount to becoming known as a great leader.

Leadership through selling is exemplified when there is a high relationship value with followers and the tasks level is high. This style is used when

followers are unable, but willing or motivated to accomplish the tasks at hand.

The third style is leadership through delegation, and this is used with there is minimal relationship with followers and a low task requirement. The style is used when followers are able and willing or motivated to accomplish the tasks at hand.

The four possible leadership styles explained by Hersey and Blanchard's (2001) situational leadership model are significant in the maturation process of a high school athletic director. Each one of these leadership styles could be used during varying circumstances within the athletic director's position. Hersey and Blanchard's (2001) situational leadership concept provides supporting information that in order to become an effective leader one must consider all four styles within the situational leadership model.

Situational Leadership

Situational leadership is another theory that focuses on the development of the follower and styles of each leader being exhibited. Hersey and Blanchard (2001) stated that there are four leadership styles (S1 to S4) that match the development levels (D1 to D4) of the followers. The four styles suggest that leaders should put greater or less focus on the task in question and/or the relationship between the leader and the follower, depending on the development level of the follower. The four leadership styles are named, S1 telling and directing, S2 selling and coaching, S3 participating and supporting and S4 delegating and observing.

Hersey and Blanchard (2001) situational theory is broken down as follows:

“ S1: Telling / Directing

Follower: R1: Low competence, low commitment / Unable and unwilling or insecure

Leader: High task focus, low relationship focus

When the follower cannot do the job and is unwilling or afraid to try, then the leader takes a highly directive role, telling them what to do but without a great deal of concern for the relationship. The leader may also provide a working structure, both for the job and in terms of how the person is controlled. The leader may first find out why the person is not motivated and if there are any limitations in ability. These two factors may be linked, for example where a person believes they are less capable than they should be may be in some form of denial or other coping. They follower may also lack self-confidence as a result. If the leader focused more on the relationship, the follower may become confused about what must be done and what is optional. The leader thus maintains a clear ‘ do this’ position to ensure all required actions are clear.

S2: Selling / Coaching

Follower: R2: Some competence, variable commitment / Unable but willing or motivated

Leader: High task focus, high relationship focus

When the follower can do the job, at least to some extent, and perhaps is over-confident about their ability in this, then ‘ telling’ them what to do may

demotivate them or lead to resistance. The leader thus needs to 'sell' another way of working, explaining and clarifying decisions.

The leader thus spends time listening and advising and, where appropriate, helping the follower to gain necessary skills through coaching methods.

Note: S1 and S2 are leader-driven.

S3: Participating / Supporting

Follower: R3: High competence, variable commitment / Able but unwilling or insecure

Leader: Low task focus, high relationship focus

When the follower can do the job, but is refusing to do it or otherwise showing insufficient commitment, the leader need not worry about showing them what to do, and instead is concerned with finding out why the person is refusing and thence persuading them to cooperate. There is less excuse here for followers to be reticent about their ability, and the key is very much around motivation. If the causes are found then they can be addressed by the leader. The leader thus spends time listening, praising and otherwise making the follower feel good when they show the necessary commitment.

S4: Delegating / Observing

Follower: R4: High competence, high commitment / Able and willing or motivated

Leader: Low task focus, low relationship focus

When the follower can do the job and is motivated to do it, then the leader can basically leave them to it, largely trusting them to get on with the job although they also may need to keep a relatively distant eye on things to ensure everything is going to plan. Followers at this level have less need for support or frequent praise, although as with anyone, occasional recognition is always welcome. Note: S3 and S4 are follower-led” (p. 259-261).

Roles and Responsibilities

The focus on the athletic director as an employee, leader, and representative of interscholastic athletics is needed to understand the gravity of where athletic directors come from and who they have become today. Today’s athletic directors have many difficult tasks. It is their job to ensure that interscholastic athletics perform at a very high level. In addition, it is imperative that athletic directors maintain the integrity of the student-athlete. Davis (2002) states that previously, leadership ability was assumed because of athletic success. Today, those in athletic director positions are getting more training and education in administrative leadership. The training and education allow the athletic director to begin providing leadership at the beginning of his/her job. Thus, the success of the interscholastic athletic program hinges on the type of leadership training and education received by the athletic director.

Athletic directors’ job descriptions will continue to evolve as the requirements to managing a successful program evolve. One sample written job description of an athletic director for a small private school in Florida shows that their athletic director will perform the following duties: direct the

athletic program, assure that the school complies with all policies and procedures of the Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA), supervise the scheduling of all athletic contests, identify and recommend the hiring and firing of coaches for each sport, ensure that all school policies and procedures are followed by the entire coaching staff (including, assistant coaches), in addition to many other duties as assigned by the headmaster of the school. After reviewing this job description one could see how little time there might be for an athletic director to provide direct leadership. With all of the tasks listed within the job description the athletic director must provide leadership more via example, rather than through direct communication with his/her student-athletes and coaching staff. Doing nothing more than following the specific tasks list of the job description above would associate the athletic director with transactional rather than transformational leadership. Simply following the task list of the job description would essentially provide the student-athletes with a basic and universal athletic program. The athletic director would also be performing his or her job duties for the sake of getting the most basic job done. This shows the community that the interest level of providing leadership on a much higher level to the community, student-athletes, and administration is obsolete. Most people are able to complete the tasks that are provided for them by a school administration. What exactly does this do for the advancement and recognition of the efforts put forth by the student-athletes, as well as teaching the student-athletes and coaches the value of having strong ethics and morals? The next sample job description is from a public school in Virginia:

Athletic Director Requirements and Responsibilities are to work with administration and the assistant athletic director to create and maintain a comprehensive program for student activities that emphasizes positive public relations, coaching performance, and student recognition, utilize a computerized software program for scheduling, prepares and distributes schedules for athletic and academic competitions, including contracts where required, supervise the preparation and distribution of eligibility lists, ensure that all students participating in athletic or academic competition are eligible, and have a Virginia High School License (VHSL) physical form and Stonewall Jackson High Schools Handbook (SJHS) sign off on file, oversee the athletic/academic activities budget, approve all athletic expenditures, follow school procedures for ordering, and determine allocations for athletic/academic program with the principal, obtain officials, ticket takers, clock operators, announcers, etc. for all home events, work with the transportation department to arrange transportation for away events and practices where necessary, attend district, regional, and state VHSL meetings, ensure that annual equipment and uniform inventories are conducted by head coaches, and assist head coaches in updating equipment/uniforms, assist principal in selection of coaching staff, complete evaluation form for each head coach with an endorsement by the principal at the end of the season, ensure that head coaches submit required documentation in a timely fashion at the end of each season, including evaluation form for assistant coaches, inventories, end of season reports, etc, work with the Booster Club in coordinating their activities, including presenting requests for funding for all programs to the Booster Club, submit news releases on awards, etc. to local media, supervise the maintenance of <https://assignbuster.com/athletic-directors-leadership-traits-and-job-satisfaction/>

the Sports Zone web page and ensure that it is up-to-date at all times, inform local media, officials, coaches, bus drivers and administrators immediately upon cancellation of an event and rescheduled dates as soon as available; post cancellations/rescheduled games on web site, prepare money for ticket takers, water for officials, scoreboard, PA system, etc. for home events, supervise events in conjunction with the building administrators, serve as a liaison between school clubs, departments and administration for scheduling events which do not conflict with VHSL athletic and academic events, work with custodial staff for proper maintenance of facilities and equipment.

When comparing the two job descriptions above, one can see how important the athletic director position is to interscholastic athletics. Each athletic director shares many of the same responsibilities regardless of the population within the school with which they are employed. As an employee, the Athletic Director is the second most important position next to the school's Principal.

High school athletic directors are vital to ensuring that the climate of the school which they direct will stay positive and energized. The athletic director as a leader is an integral part of the school system. Each year, the job description of athletic directors becomes more complex. Recently, responsibilities added to the athletic director's job description are (a) purchasing and distribution of equipment, supplies, and uniforms, (b) planning and scheduling for the use of facilities, (c) public relations, (d) fund-raising, (e) legal and medical protection for coaches and student-athletes, (f) compliance with national and state policies and procedures, (g) <https://assignbuster.com/athletic-directors-leadership-traits-and-job-satisfaction/>

administration of events, (h) completion of the goals and objectives of the school, and (i) implementation and management of media events (Smith, 1993). These responsibilities make it highly unlikely that just one individual can effectively manage a successful interscholastic athletic program, especially at a large school with a comprehensive athletic program. AD's must be willing to put the time and effort into getting the job done.

According to Barnhill, (1998) in order to do so, a high school athletic director must call on his/her support staff, such as coaches and other administrators at the school. Additionally, Barnhill (1998) stated the high school athletic director must be a leader with the ability to delegate and manage delegated tasks.

If the athletic director fails at delegating and managing the tasks necessary to lead a successful athletic program, his/her coaches will begin to lose faith in the athletic director's ability to lead. The many responsibilities that an athletic director assumes when taking a position within administration are largely dictated by the athletic director's fellow administrators. The athletic director's position is supported by many other administrators such as the director of development, dean of students, director of advising, director of admissions, and director of college recruitment to name a few. The director of development will help the athletic director with fundraising for athletics, the dean of students assists the athletic director with student-athlete disciplinary issues, the director of admissions assists the athletic director in qualifying the students for eligibility, and the director of college recruitment assists the athletic director in qualifying student athletes for college

recruitment. With all of these administrators working together the leadership within the school is strong and successful.

The athletic director's ability to recruit co-workers to assist in leading the department of athletics as well as the institution itself would classify him/her as a transformational leader. As stated earlier according to, Bass (1997) transformational leadership is universally applicable. He proposed that regardless of culture, transformational leaders inspire followers to transcend their own self-interests for the good of the group or organization. In order for this to occur the transformational leader must possess certain characteristics to inspire followers. According to Parks and Quarterman (2003) stated, "those characteristics include: trusting his or her subordinates, meaning that a good leader will make use of employee's energy and talent. The key to productive relationship is mutual trust. Secondly, develop a vision for employees to follow a visionary leader. They want to know what they are working for. Thirdly, keeping his or her cool, explains that leaders demonstrate their mettle in crisis under fire. They inspire others to remain calm and to act intelligently. Fourth, they are experts at what they do, informing us that employees are much more likely to follow a leader that radiates confidence, is intuitive, and continues to master the profession. Fifth, they invite dissent, meaning a leader is willing to accept a variety of opinions and integrate them. Sixth, they simplify the position, so that leaders can focus on what is important and reach elegant, simple answers to complex problems by keeping the details to themselves. Lastly, they encourage risk. Risk encourages employees to take chances and readily

accept error” (p. 179-180). One who exudes all of these characteristics is often seen as a leader in sport that is few and far between.

While it is important that any leader become an effective manager, being an effective manager and an effective leader are two different matters.

According to Hersey and Blanchard (2001) the definition of management is the “ process of working with and through individuals and groups to accomplish organizational goals” (p. 9). In addition, they defined leadership as “ the process of influencing the activities of an individual or a group in effort toward goal achievement in a given situation” (p. 78). Some theorists suggest that both management and leadership are necessary to those who seek professional management in high school athletics and other sport careers. Parks and Quarterman (2003) stated that many athletic directors find themselves involved with management as a process approach. This approach sees managers using interactive activities such as planning, organizing, staffing, directing, coordinating, reporting, and budgeting in order to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization or institution. Conversely, the remaining athletic directors consider themselves as a leader in some capacity. As previously noted, two possible leadership styles of high school athletic directors nationwide are transformational and transactional. According to Bass (1985), transactional leaders are engulfed in the way of thinking that compliance is the key. The coach will get rewarded if he/she follows directions and orders. Additionally, Bass (1985) identified two factors as composing transactional leadership. Leaders can transact with followers by rewarding effort contractually, telling them what to do to gain rewards, punishing undesired action, and giving extra feedback and

promotions for good work. Such transactions are referred to as contingent reward (CR) leadership. Field and Herold (1997) described transactional leadership as a reward-driven behavior, where the follower behaves in such a manner as to elicit rewards or support from the leader. If a high school athletic director is primarily transactional in style, coaches who work for that high school athletic director will only pursue the notion of success if they know ahead of time that there is a reward for achieving that success. In some instances, a primarily transactional leadership style may actually derive from the athletic director's own quest for external, tangible rewards. So, the question arises with many transactional leaders as to why they are involved with coaching or administration if all they are looking for is an end reward? Some administrators in athletics have not had relevant sports management training and likely have developed expertise in other areas, such as business, physical education, or simply general education. A high school athletic director with a traditional business background might be brought in by the administration simply to raise funds for the athletic program, manage the program, and direct the program much like one would manage a corporate operation. Likewise, a high school athletic director who is brought in with a physical education background is traditionally done so because of his or her success with coaching the student-athlete and having the ability to get through to the student-athlete as needed to provide a successful interscholastic program. The umbrella that encompasses this can be very lucrative for the school if done correctly. In other words, an athletic director who has a physical education background starts out building r