The Importance of Transformational Leadership in the Quest for Group Cohesion: The Case of a University Level Varsity Football Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to systematically analyze and describe the behaviors (coach athlete interactions) of university level football coaches, to compare these findings to other studies and to analyze these results in light of transformational leadership. The Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI), a systematic observation instrument consisting of 14 behavior categories, was used to compile data on the interactions of seven members of the coaching staff. Event recording was used to collect the data of each coach being observed during practice sessions, these sessions were videotaped to determine the interactions between the athletes and the coaches. Segments of the practices were classified as warm-up, group and team. Analysis of the data revealed that the warm-up segment differed significantly from the group and team segments. Instruction was the behavior with the highest percentage in both the group and team segments of practice. Looking at the entire practice, instruction was also the highest occurring behavior - it had the greatest percentage and rpm than any other behavior category. Praise and hustle were also two of the highest occurring behaviors. There was a strong correlation between this study and other studies using the ASUOI and the Coaching Behavior Recording Form (CBRF) in regards to instruction being the highest occurring behavior category. It was concluded that a systematic effort was made by members of the coaching staff to adhere to transformational leadership strategies.

Keywords: leadership, behavior, football, coaching

The importance of leisure when living with a life threatening disease:

From on a serious leisure perspective

Introduction

The word leadership has been part of the English language for more than 1000 years. Through the years the term leadership, from the Anglo-Saxon root *laedere* meaning "people on a journey", has maintained much of its original sense (Bolman and Deal, 1991 in Klenke, 1996). As the general sense of leadership has been maintained over time, the overall applications of leadership underwent significant evolutions since its beginning.

Over the past centuries, leadership has evolved through different forms and paradigms. For the purpose of this study, the attention will be placed on transformational leadership. Yukl (2006), refers to transformational leadership as being closely related to charismatic leadership, where followers are assisted in acquiring skills and confidence empowering them to assume more responsibility in a dynamic organization.

Klenke (1996), established a link between transformational leadership and interaction between leaders and followers. In the view of this author, through interaction both leaders and followers can formulate and communicate shared visions of their common future that could become the foundation of partnerships leading to dynamic exchanges and mutual ownership of the challenge on hand.

According to Zamarripa and *Krueger* (1983), interactions among individuals will contribute to the evolution of group culture. They also point to the importance of interaction in developing group cohesion namely where members will learn to better conform to group standards. Along the same line, Winter, Waner and Neal-Mansfield in 2008 support the fact that the quality of interpersonal communication among team members constitutes strong determinants of the effectiveness of the team.

Arrien (2001), referring to a report from the Carnegie Institute of Technology, suggests that people skills count for 85% of the success of a team leader, therefore reinforcing the importance of the quality of interaction between leaders and participants. Cantwel (2003), also confirms the existence of a significant relationship between the quality of leadership, interpersonal interactions, program climate and team achievement.

In light of this rich tradition of leadership or people in motion towards a joint enterprise, this paper will concentrate on the importance of leader/followers interaction in

a context of transformational leadership within a varsity university level competitive sport program.

Transformational leadership closely relates to the aim of a varsity sport program, which is to empower members to become accountable for their decisions and actions. Furthermore Rosener (1990), refers to transformational leaders as those who will aid in the shift of self-interest, individual values and beliefs of followers into the vision and best interest of the group. Transformational leaders, according to the same author, will also rely on charisma, self-confidence and personal conviction to direct followers towards what they believe are morally right and in the best interest of both individuals and the organization.

For Lainey (2008), the transformational leader potentially encourages, empowers and influences individuals, groups and ultimately organizational culture. He points to four major impacts of the transformational leader, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual considerations. Idealized influence refers to the fact that the leader becomes a model for followers while sharing an attractive vision. Inspirational motivation is achieved by communicating high expectations, while motivating athletes to surpass themselves as they align with organizational vision. Intellectual stimulation aims at helping followers take ownership for their own learning and training, to be creative and innovative as they are developing confidence in finding new ways to solve issues and meet challenges. Individual considerations are about developing a culture and a climate in which followers are able to express and improve themselves through a variety of challenges.

For the purpose of this paper, leaders will be referred to as coaches and the followers will be the athletes. The exploration of transformational leadership in the context of a varsity university level football program will be pursued through a coaches' athletes' interaction systematic observation study.

The study of coaches' interactions with their athletes is quite well documented and researched. There are a number of different models, scales, and instruments to use for observing interactions between athlete and coach. Systematic observation of coaches has been utilized as a method of identifying different coaches' behaviors during both training sessions and competition: a group of successful high school tennis coaches (Claxton, 1988), a group of winning high school football coaches (Lacy & Darst, 1985), a group of high school girls basketball coaches (Lacy & Goldston, 1990), a group of expert gymnastic coaches (Côté, Samela, Trudel, & Russell, 1995) a university

hockey coach (Gilbert & Trudel, 2000), little league baseball (Smith, Smoll, & Curtis, 1979), Pop Warner football coach (Segrave, & Ciancio, 1990). However, there is very little research done on football at the University level in relation to coach-athlete interaction.

Darst, Langsdorf, Richardson and Krahenbuhl stated in 1981 that "systematic observation of specific coaching or teaching behaviors may provide valuable information regarding methods that affect student or athlete learning and performance" (Darst et al., 1981). In other words, with the continual research going on in this area, we hope to contribute to the existing knowledge of coach athlete interactions, the intent being to extend these results to the field of leadership and business. It is imperative that similar instrumentation be used in order to obtain a meaningful database of coaching behaviors in a variety of sport settings (Lacy & Goldston, 1990). If different instrumentation were used to collect data, behavioral categories and coding techniques would most likely be too dissimilar, and thus make meaningful comparisons and valid conclusions unlikely (Lacy & Goldston, 1990). Systematic observation instruments were first used back in the late 1940's and early 1950's, namely in teacher education programs.

Previous research published using the ASUOI point to the solidity of the instrument providing clear results of the interaction between coach and athletes in a number of different sports. Behaviors of 10 winning high school football coaches which formed the basis of the ASUOI (Lacy & Darst, 1985), successful high school tennis coaches (Claxton, 1985), and high school girls' basketball coaches (Lacy & Goldston) to name a few. As well, the ASUOI has put a significant focus on the instruction component of coaching behaviors, which is important. By using this instrument and focusing solely on football it was determined how coaches and athletes interact with one another at the university level. As stated by Lacy and Goldston (1990), coaching behaviors database is starting to take-off due to the behavior categories of the ASUOI, however more studies must be completed in order for a framework to be formulated.

Very important criterion for a coach is how he/she interacts with his/her athletes. As a coach and leader, your overall goal is the development and empowerment of your athletes (Bloom, Stevens & Wickwire, 2003). Having a good relationship with your coach is often of utmost importance. You could have amazing techniques and abilities, but if your athletes do not respect you, then they will not work as hard as they can. There is no question as to the fact that an athlete's experience with his/her sport is tailored around the coaching they receive. According to Ralston, White and Wilson (1971), a good coach

motivates you to work through pain, push hard, dream big, and bounce back from setbacks or injuries. It is very important for a coach to institute the belief and attitude in his athletes that they want to learn and become the best athletes they can be (Ralston et al., 1971). Interaction amongst coach (es) and athlete(s) heavily relies on communication. The coach must communicate with his or her athletes on many levels in order to achieve effective coach-athlete interactions. Therefore, coaches should strive to create an environment for their athletes that encourage them to communicate freely (Yukelson, 1998). Communication is indispensable, it is very important to continually communicate with one another.

Football is a good domain for research because of the culture the sport encompasses; the important number of athletes and team work. Coaches and athletes have to work together to attain their goals. Through examining a men's college football team, the relationship between coach and athlete will be assessed. Football is such a unique sport, as a great number of people believe that football is the last vicinity in our culture where discipline is firmly enforced (Capozzoli, 1981). Therefore football embraces many of the qualities sought by a number of business and corporations.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field of transformational leadership, through a study of the interaction between coaches and athletes within football at the university level and to gain a better understanding of the relationship between coach and athlete as it could be applicable to the field of business and sports management. It is important to evaluate how coaches and athletes correspond and interact with one another, as it gives a better understanding of the connection and cohesion between them. The goal of this study is to depict the experiences and perceptions of the athletes and coaches accurately. Ralston once said, "Now, more than ever, we coaches must re-evaluate ourselves and our programs. We must take another look at our goals, our general and specific philosophies, our ethics, and our relationships with our players" (Ralston et al., 1971).

Methodology

Sample

This research was designed to be a single case study of a university level varsity football program. The intent of such a research is not to generalize results but to gain insight of coach and athlete's interaction within the context of practices on the playing field.

Subjects for this study were members of the coaching staff of a men's university level varsity football program. There were 11 coaches as part of the program, all male. Subjects were chosen based on being a member of the coaching staff on the team and their willingness to participate.

Questionnaire

The Arizona State University Observation Instrument (ASUOI) was the systematic observation instrument used for this study (Table 1). This was due to previous research done with the instrument that showed its reliability. Lacy and Darst (1984), first published the ASU Observation Instrument in 1984 with 14 categories and their definitions (Table 1 taken from Lacy and Darst's 1984 article).

Table 1. Behavior Categories of the ASUOI and their Definitions.

Pre-Instruction:	Initial information given to player(s) preceding the desired action to be executed. It explains how to execute a skill, play, strategy, etc., associated with the sport.
Concurrent Instruction:	Cues or reminders given during the actual execution of the skill or play.
Post Instruction:	Correction, re-explanation, or instructional feedback given after the actual execution of the skill or play.
Questioning:	Any question to player(s) concerning strategies, techniques, assignments, etc. associated with the sport.
Manual Manipulation:	Physically moving the player's body to the proper position or through the correct range of motion of a skill.
Positive Modeling:	A demonstration of a correct performance of a skill or playing technique.
Negative Modeling:	A demonstration of incorrect performance of a skill or playing technique.

Use of First Name:	Using the first name or nickname when speaking directly to a player.
Hustle:	Verbal statements intended to intensify the efforts of the athletes.
Praise:	Verbal or nonverbal compliments, statements or signs of acceptance.
Scold:	Verbal or nonverbal behaviors of displeasure.
Management:	Verbal statements related to organizational details or practice sessions not referring to strategies or fundamentals of the sport.
Silence:	Periods of time when the subject is not talking, athletes are running sprints, player is talking, etc (used only with interval recording).
Other:	Any behavior that cannot be seen or heard, or that does not fit into the above categories.

Observations took place only during regular team practice sessions. Attending games would be more intrusive and could possibly affect the team's performance. Data was collected from all three segments of the practice; warm-up, group and team. The practices were videotaped and analyzed at a later date.

The procedure used for data collection in this study was event recording. Event recording is a systematic observation method for collecting data from a study by producing an account of the number of times a behavior occurs during an established period of time (Siedentop, 1991). This coding of behaviors must obtain reliability. When using the ASUOI, observers must obtain at least an 85% agreement on what is observed and recorded (Lacy & Darst, 1984). The percentage of inter-observer agreement for this research was 88.9%, in excess of the required 85%.

Process

For purposes of data collection and analysis, the football practice was broken down into different sections; this was to accomplish the most diverse teaching and learning possible. When separating the team into different practice segments, the coaches get the athletes working on different skills at different interaction levels within the group. Each segment within a football practice has a different purpose for the

athletes. In order to observe the practices and analyze the presented behaviors, it is necessary to know the different parts of the practice (Lacy & Darst, 1985).

1. Warm- Up: "Typically this was the first segment of a practice session designed to prepare the athletes for strenuous activity. It could include stretching, calisthenics, isometric exercises designed to strengthen the musculature of the neck, and footwork/agility drills" (Lacy & Darst, 1985).

2. Group: "This segment involved separating the team into combinations of positions to work on specific skills or strategies" (Lacy & Darst, 1985).

3. Team: "This segment incorporated a game-like situation in which all 11 members of the offensive, defensive, or kicking teams worked together. Usually this portion of practice involved the starters (first team) working against non-starting teammates to simulate game conditions" (Lacy & Darst, 1985).

Data Analysis

In order to best report the coaching behaviors of members of the coaching staff, each behavior category was calculated into the percentages of the behaviors occurring and the rate per minute (RPM) for each of the practice segments and the entire practice. The percentages of behaviors occurring for each category were calculated by dividing the total number of behaviors that occurred by the total number of behaviors in that specific category. The RPM for each behavior category was obtained by dividing each specific behavior category by the total number of minutes for that practice session. By definition, the behavior category "use of first name" must accompany another behavior category. Therefore the percentage of behaviors that are accompanied by the "use of first name" should be looked at separately from the rest of the behavior categories. The total number of behaviors was itemized for each of the relevant 13 behavior categories. This was done to determine the percentage of the occurrence of behaviors in each behavior category during the practice sessions. It was determined which categories have the highest percentages of occurrence, and which have the lowest. Once this data was obtained from the tables, the results were matched against previous research to see the similarities and differences to the study.

Results

The number of behaviors observed, percentage, and RPM for each behavior category of the ASUOI for the warm-up, group and team segments can be found in Tables 2, 3 and 4. As well, the data for the entire practice can be found in Table 5.

First Segment of Practice

The four most widely used behavior categories for the warm-up segment of practice were "other" (44.7%), "management" (23.7%), "pre-instruction" (13.2%), and "questioning" (7.9%).

Table 2. Total Number, Percentage, and RPM of Behaviors. First Segment of Practice (Warm-Up).

Categories	Number	Percentage	RPM
Other	17	44.7	.36
Management	9	23.7	.19
Pre-Instruction	5	13.2	.11
Questioning	3	7.9	.06
Praise	2	5.3	.04
Hustle	1	2.6	.02
Post-Instruction	1	2.6	.02
Total	38		.80
First Name	20	52.6*	.42

* These figures represent the percentage of behaviors that are accompanied by the first name behavior category. "By definition the Use of First Name" must accompany another behavior. Accordingly, the "Use of First Name" is considered a dependent behavior, while all other categories are independent behaviors" (Lacy & Goldston, 1989).

Second Segment of Practice

The four most widely used behavior categories for the group segment of practice were "pre-instruction" (35.3%), "praise: (19.6%), "post-instruction" (13.7%), and "hustle" (7.7%). This segment of practice differed a great deal from the first segment of practice. "Other" is not even in the top four behavior categories.

Table 3. Total Number, Percentage, and RPM of Behaviors. Second Segment of practice (Group).

Categories	Number	Percentage	RPM
Pre-Instruction	253	35.3	.61
Praise	140	19.6	.34
Post-Instruction	98	13.7	.24
Hustle	55	7.7	.13
Concurrent Instruction	33	4.6	.08
Questioning	35	4.9	.08
Other	32	4.5	.08

Management	29	4.1	.07
Positive Modeling	30	4.2	.07
Negative Modeling	4	.6	.009
Scold	4	.6	.009
Manual Manipulation	3	.4	.007
Total	716		1.725
First Name	141	19.7	.34

Third Segment of Practice

The four most widely used behavior categories for the team segment of practice were "pre-instruction" (38.0%), "praise" (18.6%), "hustle" (13.2%), and "post-instruction" (11.8%). This segment of practice is very similar to the group segment. "Pre-instruction" was the most widely used behavior category, with "praise" in close second. "Post-instruction" and "hustle" change positions from third to fourth and vice versa but still remain in the top four occurring behaviors.

Table 4. Total Number, Percentage, and RPM of Behaviors. Third Segment of Practice (Team).

Categories	Number	Percentage	RPM
Pre-Instruction	311	38.0	.37
Praise	152	18.6	.18
Hustle	108	13.2	.13
Post-Instruction	97	11.8	.12
Questioning	43	5.3	.05
Other	45	5.5	.05
Management	25	3.1	.03
Positive Modeling	13	1.6	.02
Concurrent Instruction	17	2.1	.02
Scold	6	.7	.007
Negative Modeling	1	.1	.001
Manual Manipulation	1	.1	.001
Total	819		.979
First Name	220	26.9*	.26

Entire Practice

When looking over the data from the entire practice, the behavior category that was utilized the most was "pre-instruction" (36.2%). "Praise" (18.7%) was the second highest occurring behavior, followed by "post-instruction" (12.5%), and "hustle" (10.4%).

These four behavior categories are the same top four occurring behaviors as those in the group and team segments of practice.

Table 5. Total Number, Percentage, and RPM of Behaviors. Entire Practice.

Categories	Number	Percentage	RPM
Pre-Instruction	569	36.2	.44
Praise	294	18.7	.23
Post-Instruction	196	12.5	.15
Hustle	164	10.4	.13
Other	94	6.0	.07
Questioning	81	5.1	.06
Management	63	4.0	.05
Concurrent Instruction	50	3.2	.04
Positive Modeling	43	2.7	.03
Scold	10	.6	.008
Negative Modeling	5	.3	.004
Manual Manipulation	4	.2	.003
Total	1573		1.215
First Name	381	24.2*	.29

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to systematically analyze and describe the behaviors (coach athlete interactions) of university level football coaches and to compare these findings to other studies. Further applications of these results are expected to apply to better understand the importance of healthy, coach (leader)-athletes (followers) interaction as a mean to achieve greater group cohesion and overall program success.

The data clearly displayed that verbal instructions ("pre-instruction", "concurrent instruction", "post-instruction") are a key component of the coaching process. "Pre-instruction" being the most widely used behavior category overall, proved this. Verbal instructions accounted for 51.9% of the total behaviors in the practice sessions over the entire practice. This was consistent with several other studies done on coaching behaviors. Lacy & Goldston's study (1990), on high school girls' basketball coaches, Lacy & Darst's study (1985), on a group of winning high school football coaches and Claxton's study (1985), on successful high school tennis coaches all resulted with instruction as the most widely used behavior category.

The group and team segments of practice proved how important instruction is to the athletes. In practice, the athletes have to be given instruction before a certain play or skill in order to be able to complete that specified play or skill. Without this instruction, especially in football, the athletes would have no idea what play or skill to perform next.

The low RPM, during the warm-up segment of practices again shows that not all members of the coaching staff are actively involved in the warm-up. This is due to the fact that there are a large number of coaches in the program, and the warm-up only requires a few coaches to be working directly with the athletes.

The second most widely used behavior category was "praise", and "hustle" the fourth most occurring behavior. These two encouraging behavior categories made up 29.1 % of all behaviors. This showed that the coaches gave encouragement to their athletes. Making sure that the athletes were encouraged for their efforts made them maintain and intensify their work on the field and in practice.

This study was successful in showing a positive relationship between coaches and athletes. There is definitely a close connection between a coach and athletes. They have to work together as a team to attain goals at the individual as well as the team level. By studying coaches, it was learned how they actually interact with athletes during practice. From a leadership perspective, results do lead to interesting conclusions. Inspired by Lainey (2008), data reveal important conclusions related to transformational leadership.

"Idealized influence" of leaders would mostly be achieved through "pre-instruction" and "post-instruction" interactions. These behavior categories were most frequently observed during practice. During "pre-instruction", coaches would introduce and revisit a challenge during "post-instruction" in light of the program's joint enterprise. These behaviors would help in developing a shared and attractive vision among members of the program.

"Inspirational motivation", namely associated to «praise» and «hustle» categories of behaviors, was mostly observed during «group» and «team» segments of the practice. It is concluded that these segments of the practice are crucial in communicating high expectations and motivating athletes to surpass themselves. These segments of the practice are the closest segments to actual game situations.

"Intellectual stimulation" was namely associated to the «questioning» category. It has been observed that most of the «questioning» was done during the warm up segment of the practice. Based on this observation it is believed that coaches were aiming, from the beginning of the practice on, at encouraging athletes to take ownership

of their learning while being creative, innovative and confident in finding new ways to meet challenges.

"Individual considerations" could explicitly be achieved through using the first name or nickname of athletes when speaking directly to them and by taking time to engage into more informal type of conversations with athletes. These interactions would contribute to the development of a culture and a climate in which athletes are able to express and improve themselves as they take on challenges.

Clearly, results point to the fact that members of the coaching staff made a systematic effort to lead in a transformational fashion. Results point to the fact that coaches are aiming at helping athletes acquire skills and confidence empowering them to assume more responsibility within the football program Yukl (2006). According to Rosener (1990), by nurturing a culture of confidence and sharing mutual visions in an attractive fashion, personal dreams and objectives of athletes are being more easily shifted towards the vision of the football program in the best interest of the group.

Based on Lainey (2008), it is our recommendation that as members are empowered and feel more competent within the program, that coaches keep delegating part of their responsibilities in the practice to key members of the program, namely captains, quarter back, veterans. Studies such as this one can aid coaches in learning about how their practices are being run. They can see what percentage they are placing on certain behavior categories and can learn more about their coaching methods and practices. This cannot only help the athletes and the coaches, but the team as a whole. Learning where they focus their energy can help them determine if they want to keep coaching the same way, or whether they want to alter their methods.

Taking into account that the intent of this single case study is not to generalize results, we cannot avoid extrapolating present conclusions to other organizational realities. From a leadership perspective results point to the importance of sound interaction between leader and followers as being a significant factor in achieving mutual success within the organization. As it was argued earlier the culture of a varsity university level football program greatly resembles other performing and highly competitive organizations. Much of the observations made here could be directly applicable to the business world specifically as it applies to sports and leisure organizations.

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