

Transformational leadership of change: Success through valuing relationships

Jon Welty Peachey
Texas A&M University

Within intercollegiate athletics, change is quite prevalent (Slack & Parent, 2006). Many scholars have called for an examination of how context, change agent leadership, and change process interact to influence change and employee responses to change (Elving, 2005; Lines, 2004; Proctor & Dukakis, 2003; Poole, 2000; Horwitz & Neville, 1996). However, within the intercollegiate athletics environment, there has been little empirical investigation of change, change process, and employee responses to change. The purpose of the current case study of a single Football Championship Subdivision athletics department, then, was to investigate the influence of change agent leadership style, in particular transformational and transactional leadership (Bass, 1985), organizational culture and change process on employee responses to change. Pettigrew's (1987) contextual model of organizational change served as the theoretical backdrop for this study. The contextual model recognizes the complex intermixing of environmental and organizational factors with change content and process to advance a multi-level analysis of change over long periods of time. Slack and Parent (2006) have called upon sport management researchers to utilize Pettigrew's contextual approach in investigations of organizational change in the sport industry, but to date, few studies have tapped the contextual model as an underpinning framework. The setting for this qualitative case study was a Football Championship Subdivision athletics department in the Northeast that had experienced major transformational change. As recommended by Yin (1989), data collection methods consisted of conducting two, personal interviews with 25 athletics department employees and student athletes; directly observing department meetings and home athletics contests; analyzing physical artifacts; reviewing department archival records; and inviting participants to submit short journal entries (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Open, axial and selective coding was employed in data analysis to identify common themes (Cresswell, 1998; Neuman, 2006). Results demonstrated that the transformational leadership style of the athletics director, a relational organizational culture, strong communication, and employee participation in the change process mitigated resistance to change over time. The findings were consistent with previous research on the effects of transformational leadership in guiding change (Phelan, 2005; Slack & Hinings, 1992), effectiveness of relational cultures in the change process (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004), and on the importance of good communication (Elving, 2005) and employee participation (Lines, 2004; Piderit, 2000) in mitigating resistance. The discussion frames the findings in the broader intercollegiate context, as well as provides practical implications and suggestions for future research.