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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF CHANGE: SUCCESS THROUGH VALUING RELATIONSHIPS

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Introduction

- Organizational change is quite prevalent in the sport industry, as organizations are constantly reorganizing, attempting to change their culture, rethinking strategic priorities, revamping policies or procedures, or replacing key leaders or other personnel (Slack & Parent, 2006).
- Organizational change is any planned or unplanned response to external or internal forces and pressures that can be developmental, transitional or transformational in nature (Jick & Peiperl, 2003).



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Introduction

- However, in many organizational change scenarios, employees will resist change. Oreg (2006) defines resistance as a tridimensional negative attitude towards change which includes affective, behavioral and cognitive components.
- Recent scholarship suggests that ambivalence may actually be the most prevalent initial response to change (Piderit, 2000).



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Introduction

- Three of the most prevalent variables influencing responses to change include organizational culture, participation in the change process, and communication (Elving, 2005; Horwitz & Neville, 1996; Lines, 2004; Poole, 2000; Proctor & Dukakis, 2003).
- Slack and Parent (2006), echoing a call in the business management literature (Eisenback & Pillai, 1999), have suggested that there is a critical need within sport management to merge the leadership and organizational change literatures .
- To date, however, within the intercollegiate context, there has been a dearth of research examining factors contributing to employee responses to change.



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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of change agent leadership style, organizational culture and change process on employee and student-athlete responses to change in a Football Championship Subdivision (FCS) athletic department.



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Theoretical Framework

- Pettigrew's (1987) contextual model of organizational change served as the theoretical backdrop.
- 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.



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Transformational & Transactional Leadership

- Transformational leadership is best suited for guiding change in non-routine, revolutionary change situations (Eisenback & Pillai, 1999).
- Transactional leadership is a better fit when the goal is increased efficiency, maintaining the status quo and achieving specific goals, or when change is more incremental in nature.



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Transformational & Transactional Leadership

- Researchers have found that transformational leadership as an important ingredient in overcoming employee resistance during change (Amis et al., 2004; Phelan, 2005; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Wallace & Weese, 1995).
- Transformational leaders enable change by creating a vision that is attractive to employees, and they serve as cheerleaders to motivate and inspire followers (Ott, 1996).



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Organizational Culture

- Competing Values Framework (CVF) (Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005; Quinn, 1988) – group, developmental, hierarchal and competitive cultures.
- Employees who perceived their workplace dominant in either a group or developmental culture were less resistant to change than employees in either a hierarchal or competitive culture (Jones et al., 2005).
- Participative, supportive, innovative cultures led to greater change success and less resistance (Amis et al., 2004; Burnes & James, 1995; Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000; Harper & Utley, 2001).



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Change Process – Participation & Communication

- Employees who are active participants in the change process will generally resist change less than employees who do not actively participate in the process (Lines, 2004; Piderit, 2000).
- Effective communication strategies mitigate employee resistance (Elving, 2005; Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008; Proctor & Dukakis, 2003)



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Method

- Conducted an exploratory, qualitative, single case study.
- Case studies are tapped as the preferred methodology for studying change within a single organization, as concepts may be sensitive to context and time, and difficult to assess quantitatively, such as issues of leadership, power and interests (Cunningham, 2002; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).



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Research Setting

- FCS athletic department at a large, private university in the Northeast with 19 varsity sports, 520 student-athletes, 90 full-time and 30 part-time employees, plus 120 student workers.
- Study took place between October, 2008 and April, 2009.



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Nature of Change

- Many large-scale changes – new athletic director, new athletic conference, new organizational culture, new core philosophy, new personnel.



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Data Collection

- Two, semi-structured personal interviews with 25 employees and student-athletes, direct observations of athletic competitions and department meetings, and a review of physical artifacts and archival records of the department (Yin, 1989).
- Adopted participant journaling as recommended by Denzin and Lincoln (2005).



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Personal Interviews

- Used purposeful sampling to select 25 employees and student-athletes from all levels of the department, incorporating managerial and non-managerial voices (Oreg, 2006).
- Interview questions revolved around change agent leadership style, organizational culture, participation, communication, and responses to change (Pettigrew, 1987).



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Data Analysis

- Followed Creswell's (1998) open, axial and selective coding process.
- Some codes assigned before data collection based on the contextual model of change (Pettigrew, 1987) and the CVF (Jones, 2005), while others emerged during the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).



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Dependability and Credibility

- Employed triangulation of measures and investigators (Scandura & Williams, 2000).
- Tapped peer debriefer with intercollegiate athletics administration experience (Bruening, 2004).
- Conducted member checks (Janesick, 2004).
- Provided rich contextual description to enhance transferability (Bruening, 2004).



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Results – Transformational Leadership

- Transformational leadership of the AD led to better acceptance of change across the board.



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Transformational Leadership

“We compared him [Mark] to the new President. He came out very strong, says we're going to make changes, and this is why we're moving the country in the right direction. And that's how Mark does it. This is what we're going to do and this is why” (Nate, head equipment manager).



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Transformational Leadership

“Mark is very eloquent. He has a good vision and he can describe that vision and there is nobody better, any politician included, in front of a microphone talking to two people or to two thousand people. I admire him. I wouldn't have come to join him if I thought otherwise” (Thomas, associate AD for external relations).



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Complimentary Leadership

- As a leader who was more transformational by nature, Mark complimented his approach with the transactional leadership of his senior associate athletic director (Cheryl) to effectively guide change.



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Complimentary Leadership

“I've really seen the partnership that they have and how their roles together make things work...with Mark being a visionary and having an idea of the values and the ideals of the program...and Cheryl taking those and really being able to operate in the real world with them...to get things done” (Barry, head women's rowing coach).



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Relational Culture

- All staff and student-athletes spoke about the value Mark placed on relationships and accountability.



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Relational Culture

“He’s very open. He’s seen as a mentor, a very nurturing person....He cares about the student-athletes....People really respect that he’s listening to them...it’s a very positive atmosphere” (Helen, athletics department office manager).



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Developmental Culture

- Mark established a developmental culture centered upon opportunities for the future, attempting to distance the department from the negative discourse of the past. This gave staff and student-athletes a sense of purpose and hope, creating a positive environment that led to greater change acceptance on the whole.



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Developmental Culture

“The typical way of doing that is, some former football player, someone that’s been around men’s sports for a long time oversees football. I get why you might want a default there, but to suggest that that’s the only way to do it, is to suggest that someone who hasn’t played football, or isn’t a male, is not capable of...overseeing a program....I’m just not buying into that” (Mark, athletics director).



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Transparent Communication

- A central process theme was that Mark's honest and consistent communication led to greater change acceptance. All staff and student-athletes spoke about Mark's transparent communication style, of how this helped them make sense of change, and of how much better communication was now than under the previous administration.



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Transparent Communication

“He [Mark] was there...and he shared what he talked about with the Board of Trustees. He’s really open with what’s going on....He wants us to all know where he’s coming from, what he’s doing outside of athletics. He tells us enough to keep us abreast of what’s going on” (Laura, assistant director of compliance).



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Value of Participation

- Those staff and student-athletes who felt involved in the change process and who believed that their opinions were solicited by change agents were less ambivalent or resistant than those who did not feel as involved.



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Value of Participation

“I feel very involved. I can confidently say I can be as involved as I want to be.....I feel that if I asked that I would like to be involved or understand a bit more, the sky’s the limit. It would be welcomed...it inspires me and encourages me to do it 150 percent” (Laura, assistant director of compliance).



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Value of Participation

“If I want to get involved with something, I have to volunteer....I get micro-managed the whole time I'm doing it, so it's... frustrating. I don't really feel involved with the department” (Kathryn, administrative assistant, football)



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Discussion

- Main storyline was that transformational leadership, coupled with a relational, forward-thinking organizational culture, and good communication and participation during the change process, mitigated both ambivalence and resistance to change.
- Pettigrew's (1987) contextual model proved salient in addressing the research questions, as context, content and process all influenced change and shaped responses to change.



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Discussion

- Consistent with previous work on the effectiveness of transformational leadership in guiding change (Amis et al., 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Wallace & Weese, 1995), Mark's transformational style ultimately led to less resistance across the board.
- Transformational leadership was a fit with the type of change. Previous researchers have found that transformational leadership is more effective in guiding change when the goal is revolutionary as opposed to evolutionary change or efficiency improvements (Eisenback & Pillai, 1999).



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Discussion

- Mark complimented his transformational leadership with Cheryl's transactional approach. This is in line with Nadler and Tushman's (1990) research which suggests that transformational leaders are needed to guide change from the top through vision creation and alignment, but that more transactional leaders are important when carrying out this vision.



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Discussion

- Results showed that the group and developmental culture Mark established led to less resistance. These findings are consistent with previous research utilizing the CVF, which has found that group and developmental cultures engendered less resistance than hierarchal or competitive cultures (Jones et al., 2005).



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Discussion

- Transparent communication increased the likelihood of not only change recipient acceptance and participation in the change process, but also the speed and extent of their acceptance (Amenakis et al., 1993; Green, 2004; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1999).
- Results are also in line with prior work in participation, where researchers have found that employees who are active participants in the change process will typically resist change less than employees who do not actively participate (Caroll & Hatakenaka, 2001; Eisenback & Pillai, 1999; Jick & Peiperl, 2003; Lines, 2004; Piderit, 2000).



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Discussion

- During the six months of the study, several of the athletic teams were experiencing their best years competitively since joining the new conference, and excitement and momentum were building because of this.
- Given that transformational leadership has been found to be more effective than transactional leadership in achieving positive organizational outcomes across a number of studies (Eisenback & Pillai, 1999; Stewart, 2006), it stands to reason that Mark's transformational approach to leadership could indeed be the undergirding factor behind competitive success.



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Limitations

- Six-month study timeframe may have been too short to capture all of the factors influencing responses to change.
- Presence of lead investigator may have influenced proceedings.
- Researcher bias.



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Future Directions

- Replicate study in other FCS, FBS, and Division II and III programs, as well as in other sport industry sectors.
- Examine subcultures within an athletic department, and the leadership styles of head coaches and other functional area directors, to see how these variables may impact employee responses to change.
- Outer environmental context should be added into the equation, to ascertain to what degree the external environment may shape leadership, process and culture, and subsequent responses to change.



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Significance and Implications

- This study addressed a gap in the literature by combining context, content and process in investigating factors influencing employee responses to change in the intercollegiate setting.
- Other intercollegiate athletic departments considering instituting major revolutionary change should consider embracing transformational leadership as a pathway for vision alignment, and focus on building relationships and trust to lessen resistance.



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Thank you!

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