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## **The Perception of Importance of Leadership Behaviors Between Athletic Trainers with Advanced Degrees in Athletic Training and Those With Advanced Degrees in Another Discipline**

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**Context:** Leadership is critical for the advancement and sustainability of athletic training. There is currently no research on the perception of leadership between those with advanced degrees in athletic training compared with athletic trainers who have advanced degrees in another discipline.

**Objective:** To determine if there is variance in the perceived importance of leadership between athletic trainers with different advanced degrees.

**Methods & Procedures:** Non-experimental, exploratory and descriptive research design.

**Intervention:** The 48 item Leadership Development in Athletic Training Scale (LDATS) was used. Participants responded to questions rating the overall importance of leadership behaviors for clinical practice and for inclusion in the different levels of athletic training education (e.g., entry-level, post-certification, and doctoral). The scale range replicated the BOC's Role Delineation Study/Practice Analysis (0=little importance to 3=extremely important)

**Participants:** 107 certified athletic trainers with advanced degrees participated in the study. Seventy-one (66%) of the respondents were clinical practitioners and 35 (33%) were faculty. A majority of practitioners (61%, N=65) had advanced degrees (or majors) in a non-athletic training discipline and 39% (N=42) had an advanced degree in athletic training. All ten NATA districts were represented with the most (18.7%, N=20) coming from District 4 and the fewest (2.8%, N=3) coming from District 8. A majority of respondents (54%, N=58) were male and 46% (N=49) were females. The most frequently reported job setting was college/university (55%, N=59); the most frequently reported job title was Head Athletic Trainer (32%, N= 34). A majority (51%, N=55) of respondents reported having 11 or more years of experience, of those 22% reported having 21 or more years of experience.

**Data Analysis:** Internal consistency of the LDATS was measured using Cronbach's coefficient alpha and item analysis. Descriptive statistics and central tendency were calculated using SPSS 17.0. Statistical significance was determined a priori at  $p < 0.05$ . Independent-sample t-test were used to measure the differences between the two respondent groups. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to identify athletic training leadership constructs.

**Results:** Cronbach's coefficient alpha for LDATS was  $\alpha = 0.96$ . EFA organized 48 leadership behaviors into four constructs: 1) Personality Characteristics (M=1.88;  $\alpha = 0.93$ , 15 items), 2) Contextual Intelligence (M=2.34,  $\alpha = 0.91$ , 16 items), 3) Initiates Communication (M=2.19,  $\alpha = 0.88$ , 11 items), and 4) Strategic Thinking (M=2.07,  $\alpha = 0.83$ , 6 items). Each of the factors was deemed significantly more important for clinical practice by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in AT compared to those AT's with advanced degrees in another discipline,  $t(70-88) = 2.64$  to  $4.00$ ,  $p = .000$  to  $.014$ . Personality characteristics (M= 21.08 $\pm$ 9.08 to M=13.22 $\pm$ 9.21,  $p = .000$ ), Contextual Intelligence (M= 36.35  $\pm$  10.07 to M= 29.74  $\pm$  13.61,  $p = .014$ ), Initiates Communication (M=36.51 $\pm$ 9.64 to M=28.30 $\pm$ 12.22,  $p = .001$ ), Strategic Thinking (M=12.76 $\pm$ 4.34 to M= 8.77 $\pm$ 5.48,  $p = .000$ ). Each of the four leadership constructs were also deemed significantly more important for inclusion in entry-level education by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training compared to those with advanced degrees in another discipline,  $t(70-88) = 2.64$  to  $3.10$ ,  $p = .003$  to  $.010$ . When comparing individual leadership behaviors, 12 (25%) were considered more important for clinical practice by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training compared to those with advanced degrees in another discipline;  $t(68-88) = -2.05$  to  $-2.83$ ,  $p = .006$  to  $.044$ ; those were ethical behavior (M=2.76 $\pm$ 0.44 to M=2.43 $\pm$ 0.61,  $p = .007$ ),

generates knowledge ( $M=2.30 \pm 0.74$  to  $M=1.91 \pm 0.82$ ,  $p=.22$ ), is responsible ( $M=2.71 \pm 0.57$  to  $M=2.41 \pm 0.69$ ,  $p=.42$ ), ambitious ( $M=1.74 \pm 1.12$  to  $M=1.19 \pm 1.00$ ,  $p=.030$ ), nurtures professional relationships ( $M=1.71 \pm 1.15$  to  $M=1.03 \pm 1.19$ ,  $p=.015$ ), emotional stability ( $M=2.51 \pm 0.66$  to  $M=2.05 \pm 0.74$ ,  $p=.007$ ), controls risk ( $M=2.26 \pm 1.01$  to  $M=1.76 \pm 0.90$ ,  $p=.029$ ), knowledgeable ( $M=2.21 \pm 0.77$  to  $M=1.69 \pm 1.11$ ,  $p=.030$ ), mission minded ( $M=2.21 \pm 0.81$  to  $M=1.78 \pm 0.93$ ,  $p=.044$ ), influencer ( $M=2.09 \pm 0.79$  to  $M=1.64 \pm 0.87$ ,  $p=.027$ ), improves morale ( $M=2.15 \pm 0.93$  to  $M=1.44 \pm 1.13$ ,  $p=.006$ ), advocate for others ( $M=2.35 \pm 0.85$  to  $M=1.81 \pm 1.04$ ,  $p=.019$ ). Finally, several individual leadership behaviors were considered significantly more important for inclusion in athletic training education by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training compared to those with degrees in another discipline,  $t(68-88)=1.93$  to  $3.07$ ,  $p=.003$  to  $.050$ . The leadership behaviors written communication, identifies leaders, empathy, generates new knowledge, uses appropriate leadership styles, is responsible, delegates, improves morale, advocate, and diagnoses context were all deemed more important by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training for inclusion in only entry-level education; whereas ethical behavior, ambitious, nurtures professional relationships, emotionally

stable, and controls risk were all considered more important for inclusion in education by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training at all educational levels.

**Conclusions:** Leadership behaviors are considered generally important for athletic training practice and for inclusion in athletic training education by athletic trainers regardless of advanced degree type. However, athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training considered several leadership behaviors more important for practice and for inclusion in education than athletic trainers with advanced degrees in another discipline. Most significant was that each (100%) of the four leadership constructs identified as important in AT were deemed significantly more important by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training for both clinical practice and inclusion in education. Furthermore, as athletic trainers' progress beyond baccalaureate-level education there appears to be additional leadership behaviors deemed more important, an importance which is recognized by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in athletic training, but may not be by athletic trainers with advanced degrees in another discipline. Therefore, advanced degrees in athletic training may be more significant for the advancement and sustainability of the profession and future athletic trainer.

**Key Words:** *leadership, competencies, advanced education, and entry-level education.*