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Exploratory Analysis of Athletic Trainers Self-Reported Leadership Identity

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to understand how athletic trainers view themselves as leaders.

BACKGROUND

Leadership literature often reports leadership as transactional and transformational.¹ Transactional leadership is task-oriented in nature while transformational leadership is viewed as future-minded and visionary.¹ Athletic training has examined leadership behaviors of athletic trainers² and frequency of leadership behaviors³. As research continues to progress, it is important to consider the way athletic trainers view their leadership self-identity and how athletic trainers view their everyday leadership responsibilities.

DESIGN AND SETTING

A mixed method online survey was administered for the data collection purposes.

PARTICIPANTS

A random sample of 1000 athletic trainers from the National Athletic Trainers' Association were contacted to participate. A total of 93 (9.3%) completed the electronic survey. A total of 63 individuals completed the survey in its entirety (n = 22 females, n = 39 males, and n = 2 other). From the 63 participants, 17 (27%) reported working in the secondary setting, 16 (25%) from the collegiate setting, and 29 (48%) reported "other" as their setting (hospital systems, industrial athletic training, and professional sports). The largest percentage of participants represented those between the ages of 20 and 29 years old (43%, n = 27).

INTERVENTION

Quantitative responses were collected through the use of The Leadership Self-Identity Scale⁵ and used as the main intervention of this study. Qualitative responses were also collected.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

Participants were asked to self-report four areas of Leadership Self-Identity; I am a leader, I see myself as a leader, if I had to describe myself to other, I would include the word leader, and I prefer being seen by others as a leader. Within each of these categories' participants were asked to assess the level of "description", level of "certainty", and how "important" each of the above statements were to them. All questions were reported on a Likert scale of 1-5 (1= not at all, 5= extremely).

RESULTS

55% (n=37) of individuals determined they serve in a recognized, formal leadership role and the designation of leader was "extremely accurate." 35% (n=24) of these individuals feel stating they are a leader is "extremely important," and 30% (n= 20) see themselves as leaders. When looking at "level of certainty" 47% (n= 30) of participants are "extremely certain" they prefer to be seen as a leader by others and 33% (n= 21) believe being seen as a leader to be "extremely important." Lastly when exploring gender differences in stating "I am a leader" revealed a significant difference between males and females (M=4.25, SD=.68) and females (M=4.09, SD=.53) conditions; $t(59) = -.98, p=.02$.

Qualitative data revealed two common leadership categories; transactional and transformational. When categorizing reported leadership obligations into each category, the majority of responses (65%) fell within the transactional category of leadership. Transactional leadership (i.e., high task-oriented) responses include examples such as: “I supervise the 9 athletic trainers doing contracted outreach to 9 high schools - coordinate the physician coverage, PPE's, the state concussion guideline laws and serve as a resource to my team of athletic trainers;” and “Budget; schedules; insurance claim filing; administrative paperwork.” Transformational leadership (i.e., visionary and/or future-minded) responses included statements: “Do not be afraid of change, work hard and lead by example;” and “Thinks Strategically, Drives Innovation, Demonstrates Integrity, Leads Talent, Communicates Effectively, Demonstrates Accountability,”

CONCLUSION

Our qualitative analysis revealed that athletic trainers report more transactional leadership behaviors than transformational. A majority of participants view their current role as serving in a formal leadership capacity. A smaller portion view this role as being important. Males are more inclined to describe themselves as a leader and view this role to be “extremely important,” while females prefer to be seen as a leader with

greater “certainty” but are not as confident in describing themselves as a leader.

Leadership research within athletic training has determined a need for individuals to display more transformational behaviors.⁶ Future research should utilize larger sample size and examine if the effects of leadership styles impact clinical practice and professional growth. It is important to appropriately prepare and educate athletic trainers to possess transformational leadership behaviors in order to truly elevate the profession.

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Key Words: Leadership Self Identity, Athletic Trainers Leadership, Leadership, Athletic Trainer