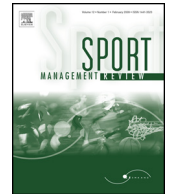




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Exploring cognitive restructuring: A multi-foci leadership perspective



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ABSTRACT

Athletics teams operate in contexts where team culture fluctuates with constant change (i.e., player turnover). In such dynamic sport environments, a strong leadership core needs to be in place to effectively navigate changes in team culture. The purpose of this study was to use the multi-foci perspective of leadership to explore the values and shared leadership qualities associated with proactively managing cognitive restructuring. A case study approach was used to examine a female sport team that recently encountered a shift in team culture. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with players and coaches ($N = 31$) who represented both leaders and followers from a shared leadership perspective. The findings contribute to sport management theory by defining the complexity of cognitive restructuring and establishing the necessity of shared leadership (i.e., leaders and followers) during this stage of the change process.

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1. Introduction

When shifting team culture in sport clubs, the importance of role modeling and training has been acknowledged (Schroeder, 2010a). Moreover, Schroeder (2010a) acknowledged the level of role modeling and training in sport far exceeds similar behaviors outlined in the corporate literature (cf., Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Muratbekova-Touron, 2005; Wren & Dulewicz, 2005). Specifically in the sport context, coaches and managers are able to use a number of visible examples of desired values to help their followers (i.e., athletes, employees) understand the intangible elements of their new culture (Frontiera, 2010; Schroeder, 2010a, 2010b). In the sport domain, it is common place to use posters, messages, and visual aids in the locker/board room to consistently push group goals and objectives. These have become artifacts that are useful in the cultural shaping process. Coaches also have access to shared leadership environments where athletes have a say in team values and are forced to learn cultural values, thus creating buy-in for those values (Chelladurai & Trail, 2001; Murray & Mann, 2001). As such, giving team members a stake in the new culture makes them more apt to believe in and role model the new assumptions. However, scant knowledge exists regarding the role of followers in cognitive restructuring and more specifically the process of learning through trial-and-error.

The role of both leaders and followers in the change process may be particularly relevant in sport for several reasons. First, given the relatively high turnover of personnel among coaching staffs (Scott, 1997), the need to create knowledge and buy-in surrounding new or shifting culture becomes complex. For followers to embrace and be part of the change, it seems they may need to be an active component of the change process. Second, the dynamic relationship between multiple stakeholders in a

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sport team or organization (i.e., coaches and players, paid and board members) provides an environment where leader and follower roles may blur, which suggests that sport is a context where shared leadership is predominant. For instance, it has been suggested the very nature of sport fosters leadership qualities within individuals (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005) and thus the sport context potentially possesses multiple leaders (both formal and informal) working side by side. Finally, scandals and unethical behavior by athletes, coaches, and employees are not an uncommon occurrence in the sport industry (Rechner & Smart, 2012). The state of ethical conduct in sport may suggest shared leadership is appropriate to assist in addressing the needs of the leader, the follower, and the context when making decisions and taking action (Hernandez, Eberly, Avolio, & Johnson, 2011).

When discussing cultural change, the important role leaders play in managing the unfreezing, cognitive restructuring and refreezing of team culture through the operationalization of core values has been acknowledged (e.g., Schein, 2004; Schroeder, 2010a). Further, Schroeder (2010b) posited a model for assessing cultures of athletic departments where leadership and power are at the forefront. These previous findings highlight the important role of leaders within cultural change; however, the isolated contribution of followers within each phase of the change process remains relatively unknown.

Sport teams operate within open environments where the constant turnover of athletes results in continuously changing team cultures (Schroeder, 2010a, 2010b). This may be particularly relevant in Division I of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), where student athletes are limited to no “more than four seasons of intercollegiate competition in any one sport” (NCAA, 2011, p. 143). Given the certainty of turnover in this and other dynamic team environments (i.e., club and professional sport), it is suggested that leadership is critical to cognitive restructuring (Schroeder, 2010a). What’s more, the mentorship role that is built into sport team culture through the distinction of coaches, captains and experienced players emphasizes the central function of both leaders and followers in this context. Thus, understanding how multi-foci (leaders, followers, and context) of leadership influence cognitive restructuring of team culture is increasingly relevant in dynamic sport environments. The purpose of this study was to use the multi-foci perspective of leadership to explore the values and shared leadership qualities associated with proactively managing cognitive restructuring of team culture. In order to serve the purpose, four research questions are presented:

- 1) How are values and assumptions defined by leaders and followers during cognitive restructuring?
- 2) How are values and assumptions reinforced by leaders and followers during cognitive restructuring?
- 3) What is the nature of shared leadership within a sport team culture?
- 4) How does shared leadership influence the cognitive restructuring of team culture?

2. Conceptual framework

Martin (2002) suggested the integrative model of organizational culture is leader driven and must be examined as such. Furthermore, Schein (1992) emphasized that “neither leadership nor culture can be understood by itself. In fact one could argue that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and . . . change cultures” (p. 5). To address this leadership focus and serve each research question regarding cultural change, shared leadership (leaders, followers, and context) will be defined and the potential influence of shared leadership on cognitive restructuring of team culture acknowledged. Further to this, the concepts of cognitive restructuring, values, and assumptions will be discussed.

Hernandez et al. (2011) suggested that certain contexts are privy to the development of shared leadership (cf., Yukl, 2006). Shared leadership may be particularly relevant when examining cognitive restructuring of sport team culture, as sport teams are defined by collective goal setting, peer-evaluation, and common objectives (Lussier & Kimball, 2009). Thus, each member of a team should theoretically be actively involved in establishing the culture of their team. More specifically, the “collective” focus that is prevalent within sport teams is intuitively connected to the concepts of integrated, leadership-centered team culture (Schein, 2004), which indirectly provides the foundation for shared leadership development.

2.1. Shared leadership

As noted by Hernandez et al. (2011), major contributions to leadership theory must consider multiple leader foci (leader, follower, and context), and more specifically, the attitudes and behaviors of various stakeholders within the leadership process. This may be especially relevant in assessing the culture of sport teams that are in a constant state of change (i.e., turnover of athletes) and rely on shared values associated with winning, high-level performance, and (increasingly) high ethical standards.

Pearce and Conger (2003) define the shared leadership process as “a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both” (p. 1). Further, shared leadership involves collective decision making as well as initiating actions, taking responsibility for actions and collectively taking responsibility for outcomes (Hoch, 2007). Moreover, leadership is “conceived as a group quality, as a set of functions which must be carried out by the group” (Gibb, 1954, p. 884). This definition highlights the importance of the collective when exploring the facets of team functioning.

Hernandez et al. (2011) suggest a gap in our understanding of leadership theory that is central to the purpose of the current study. They note although there has been a diverse set of foci when examining leadership, the majority of literature

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