Navigating the storm: A counterproductive work behavior and leadership case study in a Division I FBS School

Michelle Brimecombe [a,*], Marshall J. Magnusen [b], Kyle Bunds [c]

[a] Division of Management, Cazenovia College, United States
[b] Department of Health, Human Performance and Recreation, Baylor University, United States
[c] Department of Sport Management, The Florida State University, United States

A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The "Navigating the storm" case study is positioned in the context of a North American, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I FBS marketing department. The case study scenario revolves around Steve, an ambitious graduate assistant (GA) who was recently promoted to the Marketing and Promotions Game Day Director, as he interacts with his team of employees and prepares for the first home football game of the season. This personnel management case study is centered on the interaction of six important areas: transformational leadership and implementing a leadership vision, counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs), organizational justice perceptions, equity theory, leader–member exchange (LMX) theory, and hiring processes. In reading this case study, answering the provided questions, and engaging in the suggested teaching activities, sport management students should develop an applied understanding of how these six areas come together to impact human performance in a sport industry job setting.

© 2013 Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand.

Teaching notes

1. Counterproductive work behaviors (CWBs)

While there is not a uniformly accepted definition of CWBs in the extant management literature, Collins and Griffin (1998) noted that all existing definitions of CWBs affirm that counterproductive behaviors portray and describe a lack of attention to explicit and implicit organizational rules, policies, and values. A more precise way in which to understand CWBs is to view them as intentions and behaviors that break explicit and implied rules about appropriate behaviors within an organization, threaten the overall wellbeing of organizational members, and threaten the wellbeing of the organization as a whole (Baron & Richardson, 1994; Robinson & Bennett, 1995a). This definitional approach to CWBs is useful because it has a three-pronged focus: (1) individual intentions and behaviors, (2) how CWBs impact organizational members, and (3) how CWBs impact the organization itself.

Counterproductive work behaviors can range from less serious offenses (e.g., arriving five minutes late, leaving five minutes early, surfing the Internet) to serious offenses (e.g., verbal harassment, one employee physically harming another employee). Although CWBs have not received a significant amount of attention in the sport management literature, these

---

* Corresponding author at: Division of Management, Cazenovia College, 22 Sullivan Street, Cazenovia, NY 13035, United States. Tel.: +1 315 655 7992.
E-mail address: mjbrimecombe@cazenovia.edu (M. Brimecombe).

behaviors represent an area that warrants awareness and understanding. For instance, in the 2012 Challenger March Madness Report, conducted by the employment consulting firm of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, it was estimated that during the first two days of the NCAA Division I men's basketball tournament, private-sector businesses in the US will pay their distracted employees $175 million. Over the course of the entire tournament, employer productivity losses have been assessed at over a billion dollars (Challenger March Madness Report, 2012).

All told, CWBs are likely to exist within a variety of business organizations and at every level of employments (e.g., interns, salaried nonprofessionals and professionals, non-supervisory employees, supervisory employees, executives) (Robinson & Greenberg, 1998; Vardi & Weitz, 2004). In a study by Case (2000), for example, almost every single company (95%) he surveyed reported it had been or was a target of fraudulent employee behavior and theft, both of which are forms of CWBs. The prevalence is a cause of concern because the general consensus about CWBs is these types of behaviors are likely to have a negative impact on employee absenteeism, morale, turnover intentions, and work productivity (Hoel, Einarsen, & Cooper, 2003; Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). Therefore, even though CWBs can be difficult for researchers and business owners to define and quantify, it is still important for sport and leisure professionals to have a basic awareness and general understanding of this salient area of personnel management.

1.1. Application to the case

Counterproductive work behaviors are present in various forms in this case study.

In certain cases, such as texting or searching the internet on a phone, Steve's co-workers fail to fully recognize they are engaging in CWBs. Several instances of CWB found in the case study include the following examples. Garrick, the second-in-command, undercut Steve by telling Julie she could leave her station and join him at the hospitality tent. Also, instead of supervising the hospitality tent, Garrick lost focus and decided he was going to talk with football alumni and watch the football team warm up. Brian, the GA, was caught flirting with a cheerleader as well as checking his fantasy sport team on his iPhone. Julie, the intern, was especially problematic. After Steve put Brian in charge of the children's promotional activities, Julie became disheartened and less motivated to work hard and display positive emotions. She left her station to hang out with Garrick, talked with her friends instead of supervising her station, displayed negative body language, and left without helping the other crew members clean up the promotional activities. Although these CWBs were not serious, such as a fistfight between crew members, they were still negative and have the potential to decrease morale and work productivity amongst crew members in the future. Steve, as both a leader and manager, had to decide how to deal with each employee and his/her CWBs in a game day environment that was under the direct scrutiny of Steve's boss, Dr. Samuelsson, the AD of the Pirates. Also, once the day of work was completed, Steve was left with an opportunity to reflect on how his approach to leadership, though well-intentioned, may have inadvertently contributed to CWBs by his subordinates.

1.2. Questions

(1) Overall, how do you think Steve handled his employees' CWBs? What do you think he did well? What should he improve upon for next time?
(2) Steve's former boss took a passive approach to leadership; a style that Steve believed led to employee CWBs. In comparison, Steve attempted to enact a transformational leadership style once he was put in charge of the marketing and promotional activities. Interestingly, Steve's approach did not prevent CWBs despite the fact he developed a vision for his work team. Why might that be the case? What would you have done if you were in Steve's position?
(3) Do you think Julie was justified in her behaviors? Explain your position.
(4) What are the potential consequences of ignoring employee CWBs? Should Steve have corrected Garrick's CWBs in the presence of Dr. Samuelsson?

1.3. Activity

The CWB activity is created to challenge students to see how their actions and the actions of others may cost their sport organization. Asking students to reflect on their own experiences will assist them in being better prepared for their first management positions in sport. Accordingly, have each student come to class with a definition of CWBs. Along with a definition, have each student bring two examples of a minor CWB and two examples of a major (or very serious) CWB. From here, generate a class discussion on ways managers can combat CWBs from happening in a specified sport or recreational activity organization. Ask students to reflect on their personal experiences with CWBs and how their managers/supervisors dealt with these issues. In addition, ask students to examine how sport employee perceptions of CWBs may vary by sport context as well as by country. Are there behaviors that are universally viewed as counterproductive to organizational performance? What types of CWBs are likely to be context specific? Have students compare sport employee behaviors for a recreational sport context and a professional sport context.