The Influence of Servant Leadership on Athletic Unit Performance: A Self-Determination Theory Perspective

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Introduction

- Call for an alternate leadership theory in intercollegiate athletics (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013)
- **Servant Leadership in Sport** – follower empowerment and development of values (Burton et al., 2017)
- Servant Leadership could lead to greater well-being/satisfaction and self-motivation of followers and greater performance.
  - (Alcaraz et al., 2014; Deci & Ryan, 2017; O'Boyle, 2015)

Design & Purpose

- This study utilized a two-sample structure that consisted of coaches' and administrative staff perceptions of their leader's servant leadership to better understand its influence on sport organizational performance.

- The purpose of this study was to assess the relationship between servant leader and needs satisfaction perceptions among followers and performance outcomes in intercollegiate athletics.

Sport Organizational Performance

- Means and Ends perspective (Winand et al., 2012)
  - Need to justify scarce resources with superior performance (O'Boyle, 2015)

- Reliance on expert human capital to attain objectives (e.g., Directors' Cup rankings)

Servant Leadership (SL)

- "The servant leader is governed by creating opportunities for followers to help them grow…places the leader in the role of a steward who holds the organization in trust" (Van Dierendonck & Nuitjien, 2011, p. 250).
- Research shows that SL results in character and prosocial behaviors (Hunter et al., 2013) and work performance (Schaubroek et al., 2011)
  - **How about in sport?**

Self-determination Theory

- SDT employs the satisfaction of the **three (3)** psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2017)
  - Autonomy
  - Competency
  - Relatedness

- Assuming the point-of-view of a follower as a leader (like in SL) leads to autonomy-supportive behaviors.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership has a positive relationship with athletic unit performance.

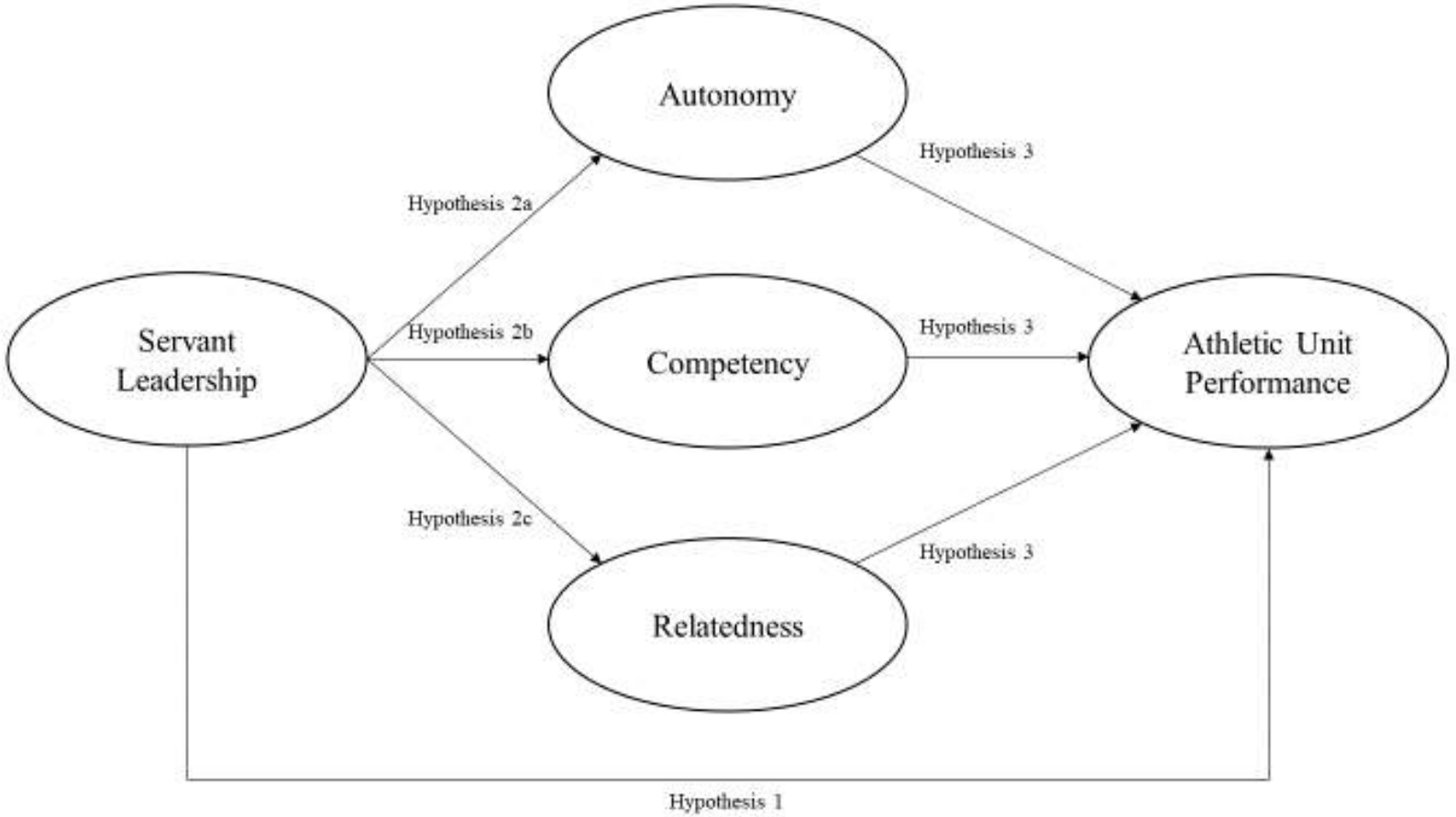
Hypothesis 2a: Servant leadership has a positive relationship with follower autonomy.

Hypothesis 2b: Servant leadership has a positive relationship with follower competency.

Hypothesis 2c: Servant leadership has a positive relationship with follower relatedness.

Hypothesis 3: Follower autonomy, competency and relatedness mediate the relationship between servant leadership and athletic unit performance.

Research Model



Methods

Sample 1

- NCAA Division I head or assistant coaches
- Participants were from institutions listed in the NACDA Director's Cup Rankings
- *N* = 223
- 37% female, 63% male
- Race/Ethnicity: White (88%), African American/Black (4.5%), Hispanic or Latino (2%), Multi-racial (2%), Asian/Pacific Islander (1%), 2% preferred not to answer
- Age: 25-34 yo (14%), 35-44 (33%), 45-54 (35%), 55-64 (16%), 65-plus (2%)
- Tenure: <10 yrs (60%), 10-25 yrs (28%), 20-plus (12%)
- Degree: Bachelor's (48%), Master's (51%), Doctorate/Professional (1%)

Methods

Sample 2

- NCAA Division I Athletic Administrators
- Participants were from institutions listed in the NACDA Director's Cup Rankings
- *N* = 176
- 31% female, 69% male
- Race/Ethnicity: White (87%), African American/Black (9%), Hispanic or Latino (2%), Multi-racial (1%), Asian/Pacific Islander (2%), 1% preferred not to answer
- Age: 25-34 yo (16%), 35-44 (34%), 45-54 (30%), 55-64 (16%), 65-plus (4%)
- Tenure: <10 yrs (50%), 10-25 yrs (40%), 20-plus (10%)
- Degree: Bachelor's (17%), Master's (70%), Doctorate/Professional (13%)

Measures

- Servant Leadership Instrument (Liden et al., 2008)
  - α = .97, .97
  - 28 items

- Autonomy (α = .68, .66), Competency (α = .64, .72), Relatedness (α = .80, .81) (Deci et al. 2001)
  - 21 items
  - Low alpha's but still acceptable given the nature of the study

- NACDA Athletic Directors' Cup Rankings

Bivariate Correlations

	Mean (S.D.)	1.	2.	3.	4.
Coach Sample					
1. Servant Leadership	4.91 (1.11)	(.97)			
2. Autonomy	5.09 (.82)	.58**	(.68)		
3. Competency	5.58 (.82)	.48**	.58**	(.64)	
4. Relatedness	5.40 (.85)	.50**	.60**	.55**	(.80)
5. ADC Rank[a]	149.65 (76.13)	.15*	.19**	.18**	.21**
Admin Sample					
1. Servant Leadership	5.07 (1.11)	(.97)			
2. Autonomy	5.15 (.75)	.54**	(.66)		
3. Competency	5.75 (.80)	.48**	.51**	(.73)	
4. Relatedness	5.55 (.75)	.40**	.46**	.53**	(.81)
5. ADC Rank[a]	144.37 (72.07)	.20**	.20**	.29**	.14

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

Cronbach Reliabilities in the diagonals

[a] Athletic Director Cup is a ranking with 1 (lower number) being the highest performance. In order to facilitate interpretation of the data the results are inversely shown here and in text.

Regression Results- Sample 1

	R^2	ΔR^2	Standardized b Coefficient	Statistical Significance
Coach Sample				
Model 1	.08			
Gender			.15*	p < .05
Ethnicity			-.01	.85
Age			-.04	.71
Tenure			.28**	p < .01
Model 2	.11	.03**		
Gender			.15*	p < .05
Ethnicity			-.01	.88
Age			-.05	.59
Tenure			.29**	p < .01
Servant Leadership			.17**	p < .01
Model 3	.13	.02		
Gender			.14*	p < .05
Ethnicity			-.02	.74
Age			-.06	.52
Tenure			.28**	p < .01
Servant Leadership			.09	.25
Autonomy			.02	.80
Competency			.06	.46
Relatedness			.12	.17

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Regression Results- Sample 2

Admin Sample	R^2	ΔR^2	Standardized b Coefficient	Statistical Significance
Model 1	.01			
Gender			.001	.95
Ethnicity			-.06	.45
Age			.11	.35
Tenure			-.03	.82
Model 2	.05	.04**		
Gender			.004	.96
Ethnicity			-.07	.38
Age			.08	.49
Tenure			.03	.77
Servant Leadership			.21**	p < .01
Model 3	.10	.05*		
Gender			-.04	.60
Ethnicity			-.04	.61
Age			.05	.66
Tenure			.05	.65
Servant Leadership			.08	.41
Autonomy			.05	.75
Competency			.26**	p < .01
Relatedness			-.02	.80

* p < .05, ** p < .01

Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership has a positive relationship with athletic unit performance.

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Hypothesis 3: Follower autonomy, competency and relatedness mediate the relationship between servant leadership and athletic unit performance.

Discussion

- The results suggest a relationship between servant leadership and the psychological states of the participant coaches and administrators.
- Uniqueness to sport research, a study that shows a relationship between SL and organizational performance

- When coaches and administrators perceived that their director of athletics used a servant leadership style, the teams within the organization were more likely to succeed in competition.
- Competence mediated the relationship between servant leadership and organizational performance.

- Tenure was tied to performance for coaches

Implications

- Autonomy and Relatedness do not explain the positive relationship between servant leadership and sport organizational performance.
  - BUT, servant leader ADs help administration followers with confidence to complete work tasks (i.e., competence).
- It is worth testing and implementing a servant leadership style for athletics directors, which could potentially lead to their coaches' programs performing more effectively.

Limitations & Future Research

- Limitations
  - Data for SL and ARC were single-source and single-method
  - NACDA Athletic Directors' Cup rank order issue with variance
  - Non-response bias

- Future Research
  - Servant Leadership and organizational performance relationship
  - Different contexts within college athletics (DII, DIII)

Thank You! Questions or Comments?

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