**Toward a Sport-Specific Model of Leadership: Initial Evidence of What is Credible and Prototypical in Sport**

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Questions surrounding the distinctiveness of the sport context have provoked sport management scholars to acknowledge the importance of establishing distinct areas of our discipline (Chalip, 2006; Slack, 1998). While it has been suggested that some aspects of managing sport are indeed different, it is primarily in the domain of consumer behavior that the most convincing evidence has been demonstrated (Todd & Kent, 2009). Phenomena such as elevated consumer expertise (Funk, 2008) and decreased sensitivity to price and performance (Sutton, McDonald, & Milne, 1997) are examples of some of the distinguishing processes present in the context of sport. While the field has established a research paradigm for the attitudes and perceptions of fans and consumers, there is a need to better understand how sport-specific phenomena might impact those individuals inside the organization. As Todd and Kent (2009) have provided a convincing argument that sport employees perceive themselves in a domain-specific manner, such distinctions may also translate to their perceptions of leaders.

Whether managers are seen as leaders depends upon implicit theories about leadership (Shondrick, Dinh, & Lord, 2010), and the perceptual needs of followers (Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985). From these perspectives, leadership can be seen as a perceptual phenomenon where what matters most is what people see in the leader, regardless of the precision of such depictions (e.g., Meindl et al., 1985). It follows that perceived leader attributes are not actually possessed by leaders, but are instead dependent upon the views and social realities of the followers (Mitchell, Larson, & Green, 1977).

Two areas where follower perceptions play an integral role are in the attributions of credibility (Kouzes & Posner, 2011) and characteristics relevant to leader prototypes (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984). Perceived attributes such as these serve as an enabling force in the leadership process (Hogg, 2010; Yukl, 2010), and are therefore desirable qualities for managers. Perceived knowledge and expertise play significant roles within this process, yet both have been left as comprehensive constructs irrespective of specific knowledge domains. Drawing from the education literature (e.g., Alexander, Shallert, & Hare, 1991), the current research seeks to disentangle the knowledge concept used by these perspectives. While managers will be expected to be competent within their functional area (i.e., accounting, marketing), it is proposed that sport-specific expertise is a separate and significant factor in being deemed credible and prototypical in this context. Furthermore, it is also proposed that specific components of sport domain expertise will play significant and distinct roles in these perceptions.

In addition to domain-specific aspects of expertise, the current research also proposes that follower conceptions of a prototypical leader may incorporate components which are distinct to the sport context. Implicit leadership theory suggests that perceptions of leadership depend upon numerous factors and that prototypes are likely to vary across individuals as a function of the specific context (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Lord & Shondrick, 2011). It is therefore conceivable that a leader prototype in this setting might also consist of ideal attributes directly related to sport. As leader prototypicality dimensions have yet to be explored in this context, the current research also seeks to provide initial evidence of prototypical components specific to the sport domain.

In order to address the research hypotheses, three separate studies were conducted. The first study addressed the discriminant validity of functional area and sport domain concepts using a sample of interns and employees of professional sports teams (N=63). Constructed measures of expertise and perceived knowledge were obtained through an online survey and analyzed via the method outlined by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The second study addressed the relative importance of leadership attributes in the perceptions of credibility and prototypicality using a student sample (N=267) via an online survey. As the importance of both aspects of these constructs could be assessed at similar levels, conjoint analysis was utilized to explore the trade-offs people make when assessing leaders (Green & Srinivasan, 1990). As common in the marketing literature, this approach is consistent with the idea that individuals do not evaluate attributes singularly, but instead do so while simultaneously assessing other...
attributes relevant to the leader (Beall & Pertula, 1991). The final study addressed the dimensionality of leader prototypicality in the context of sport and also utilized a student sample (N=101). Per Offermann et al. (1994), an exploratory principle component analysis was performed to determine the prototypical dimensions of leaders in sport organizations.

The collective results of the three studies support the notion that distinct psychological processes do exist within sport organizations. While a conceptual distinction can be made between a functional area and the sport domain, the results of the first study provide strong empirical support for the discriminant validity of these two different spheres of expertise and knowledge. Findings from the second study lend additional support for the idea that sport domain factors play an important role in assessing the credibility and prototypicality of leaders in the context of sport. Finally, results from the third study suggest that sport-specific components are taken into consideration when envisioning the ideal leader prototype. The present research makes contributions to the literature by indicating that credibility is attributed to leaders in the sport industry in a more complex manner than previously understood. The findings suggest the existence of sport-specific factors which warrant consideration when recruiting, hiring, evaluating, and training managers in the sport industry.