Examining the Role of Emotional Intelligence in NCAA Division-I Athletic Director-Employee Relationships and its Impact on the Job Satisfaction of Employees

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Over the years, NCAA Division I college sports have become increasingly pressure-filled and commercialized. As a consequence of the pressure to produce winning programs coming from fans, alumni, and top administration, as well as the responsibility to manage budgets, fundraise, update facilities, and comply with federal and university policies, the role of NCAA Division I athletic directors has become more complex, challenging, and stressful. With such demands, athletic directors must be effective communicators. An important contributor of success in this role is being able to manage one’s emotions and interact well with others. Several scholars acknowledge there is a need for effective leadership in sport organizations and that emotions play a critical role in the leadership process, which highlights the importance of emotional intelligence. This leads to the following questions: What role does emotional intelligence have in athletic directors establishing positive relationships with their subordinates? Do employee perceptions of athletic directors’ emotional intelligence impact their job satisfaction?

Bar-On (2006) defined emotional intelligence relative to one’s ability to effectively understand oneself and others, relate effectively to others, and adapt to and cope with one’s immediate surroundings. Goleman (1995) suggested there are five key elements to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Research indicates people with high levels of emotional intelligence have greater career success, foster stronger personal relations, have effective leadership skills and are healthier than those with low emotional intelligence (Cooper, 1997). The concept of emotional intelligence has been studied across multiple domains and contexts. Recent studies on various professions indicate a correlation between emotional intelligence and both job performance and satisfaction (O’Boyle, Humphrey, Pollack, & Story, 2011; Dhani, 2016; Pekaar, 2017). In a study conducted on educators to determine whether emotional intelligence is related to job satisfaction, the results demonstrated convincingly that emotional intelligence is an important personality-level predictor of work affectivity and job satisfaction (Katetsios & Zampetakis, 2008). In the high school sports coaching context, Lee and Chelladurai (2017) found emotional intelligence to be positively associated with job satisfaction. However, there is little research on emotional intelligence in Division I athletics. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the role of emotional intelligence in athletic director-employee relationships and its impact on the job satisfaction of employees.

This study will be guided by previous models on emotional intelligence (Greenspan, 1989; Salovey and Mayer, 1990; Goleman, 1995). The data will be collected from athletic department employees of five NCAA Division I universities, including mid-major conference and Power-5 conference schools. A survey instrument will be distributed to staff, coaches, and administrators. The questionnaire will adapt Wong and Law’s Emotional Intelligence Scale (2002) and follows guidelines of scale development (DeVellis, 2017). Multiple Likert items will be used to measure the perceived level of emotional intelligence and job satisfaction. The findings herein have the potential to elucidate leadership theory in a variety of different fields and help current and aspiring Division I athletic directors understand the importance of possessing high emotional intelligence in their respective positions.