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An Investigation of Division I Sport Employees' Perceptions of Leadership Interactions and Organizational Creativity

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Organizational success depends on the workplace competencies of their leaders, who can stimulate an organization's creative performance. Scholars have examined organizational creativity on organizations outside of the sport context. The current study further advanced the theoretical perspectives of workplace creativity by investigating which leadership interactions influence organizational creativity within intercollegiate athletics departments. This study also assessed the impact organizational creativity has on employees' job engagement. To evaluate these factors, Division I intercollegiate athletics department employees (n=741) were asked to evaluate leadership and employee perceptions of organizational creativity based on their perceptions of their direct supervisor. This study found that transformational leadership has the highest impact on generating organizational creativity. Following transformational leadership was transactional and then leader-member exchange. Perceived organizational creativity by sport employees promoted their engagement within the sport industry. The practical applications of the findings indicate intercollegiate sport administrators’ leadership characteristics can be conducive to higher engagement and improve perceptions of organizational creativity in the workplace. Intercollegiate athletics departments that encourage organizational creativity can create innovative ideas to strengthen the organization's success. The theoretical contribution of this study communicates the development of organizational creativity to increase intercollegiate athletics departments' economic and social development.

*Keywords: leadership, organizational creativity, job engagement*
Scholars have postulated that creativity is a valued concept within sport organizations (Paek et al., 2020). Sport employees' perceptions of a work environment that provides a clear vision and streamlined processes will enhance organizational creativity (Smith & Green, 2020). Thus, the effectiveness of a sport organization is based on the relationship between organizational leaders and employees. Further, organizational creativity can help to improve employee job engagement (Moneta, 2010), subsequently alleviating turnover rates (Schuetz et al., 2021). However, intercollegiate athletics has been suggested to be an area where innovation can become problematic due to the existing institutional strongholds (Nite & Washington, 2017). Given the importance of organizational outcomes in intercollegiate sport, there is a need to further understand the role that leadership plays in organizational creativity and how perceived innovation impacts intercollegiate sport employees’ engagement.

Sport managers can generate a workplace environment that enhances their employees' perceptions of organizational creativity (Çimen et al., 2017). However, Smith and Green (2020) found no relation between an individual’s relationships (i.e., workplace environment, employee creativity) and their perceptions of organizational creativity. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Çimen et al. (2017) and Smith and Green (2020) both found generally positive levels of insights into organizational creativity. Thus, based on these contradicting scholarly assumptions, additional research into the perceptions of leadership and organizational creativity is warranted, specifically in the intercollegiate athletics space.

Within sport, scholars have focused on ways in which leadership (Wells et al., 2014), employee creativity (Paek et al., 2020), and job engagement (Schuetz et al., 2021) can be augmented. Although these advances help further our understanding of sport leadership and behavior research, additional perceptions regarding leadership interactions, organizational creativity, and job engagement within the sport industry can be evaluated. The purpose of this study was to further develop the leadership theory related to the study of organizational creativity within the sport industry by examining leader-member exchange, transformational, and transactional leadership interactions that influence intercollegiate athletics departments' creativity, and how organizational creativity affects job engagement. Through cooperation, communication, exchange, and reward systems, leaders can create a perception of creativity on an organizational level.

By determining the leadership interactions that influence intercollegiate athletics departments’ creativity, department administrators can make the best possible hiring decisions for their managerial or administrative roles. Sport organizational creativity is a competitive advantage because it creates more compelling customer experiences and higher employee performance (Hazzaa et al., 2021). Thus, this provides intercollegiate sport managers with job traits conducive to higher workplace engagement. Overall, this study's innovative and theoretical contributions can encourage intercollegiate athletics departments to further develop organizational creativity, increasing their economic and social development in the intercollegiate sport industry.
Literature Review

Organizational Creativity

The Interactional Model of Organizational Creativity refers to individual and/or group creativity characterized by the contextual and social influences that either facilitate or inhibit creative accomplishments (Woodman et al., 1993). Woodman et al. (1993) established the term organizational creativity (group creativity) as “a valuable, useful new product, service, idea, procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system” (p. 1). The complexity of these network interactions (i.e., complex top-down, bottom-up, and peer-to-peer relationships) can stimulate and support organizational creativity (Sosa, 2011), which focuses on the generation of creative ideas to move an organization toward organizational innovation (Smith & Green, 2020). Previous scholars have suggested that creativity is an essential outcome variable in successful organizations (Özaralli, 2015; Serrat, 2017). Therefore, organizational creativity is the anchor of innovation processes: idea initiation, idea adoption, and idea implementation (Armstrong & Qi, 2020). Organizational climate, or an employee’s perception of their work environment, plays a vital role in organizational creativity (Anderson et al., 2014; Anderson & West, 1998), particularly when there is a creative work environment.

Organizational climate can enhance creativity by strengthening the relationship between team creativity and innovation implementation (Somech & Drach-Zahavy, 2013). Organizational climates for creativity are characterized by flexible influence, open communication, and conducive generation and maintenance of constructive, creative responses oriented toward the organization's goals (Cummings, 1965). Within sport, organizational creativity is practiced when employees perceive operative organizational support (Çimen et al., 2017). For example, sport managers' high level of organizational creativity (Çimen et al., 2017) may create a supportive environment for others to also have organizational creativity. The relationship with the leader is, therefore, one of the critical factors that defines the context in which creativity influences organizational effectiveness. Sport management researchers have examined employees’ perceptions of support from their leaders for innovation in their organization (Ratten, 2017; Winand et al., 2013). For example, sport organizational leaders who encouraged the involvement of employees and positive attitudes toward change were found to be more innovative (Winand et al., 2013).

Further, the vision and support for innovation are employed to compete and collaborate with other sport teams in the league (Troilo et al., 2016). Within a sport organization, creative work environments consist of a shared vision and a non-threatening space to participate in creating new and valuable ideas (Smith & Green, 2020). Thus, employees who experience these factors are more likely to engage in creative behaviors (i.e., Paek et al., 2020). Therefore, the current study chose to examine how leader-member exchange, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership influence employees' perceptions of organizational creativity at NCAA Division I Institutions.

Leader-Member Exchange

Leader-member exchange (LMX) theory relates to the relationship between leaders and their subordinates (Graen et al., 1973). Leader-member exchange theory suggests supervisors give their employees additional time, resources, and freedom at work, allowing time for consideration and experimentation of innovative ideas to improve existing products and processes (Kanter, 1988). Therefore, LMX will create more confidence in employees' innovative
behavior, resulting in positive performance and efficacy outcomes (Liao et al., 2010; Yuan & Woodman, 2010).

Within the sport sector, high-quality LMX can increase productivity and creativity within the workplace (Bang, 2011; Qu et al., 2017). Employees who enjoy good relationships with their leaders will gain access to more knowledge and resources, such as the leader’s time and advice, which will influence creativity within their work (Qu et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2010). Graen and Scandura (1987) also found that through high-quality LMX, employees are most likely “given more autonomy in managing their time,” which positively impacts creativity. Highly creative employees can learn from leaders’ feedback and time to develop better ideas to help a company function more efficiently (Wilson et al., 2010). Conversely, creative employees who receive low-quality LMX will negatively impact creativity within their work (Jiang & Yang, 2015). In totality, research has found that high-quality LMX is positively related to outcomes of an employee within the workplace and has also led to higher innovative behavior within the workplace (Yuan & Woodman, 2010). Thus, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Leader-member exchange is positively related to the perceptions of organizational creativity.

Transformational Leadership

Bass (1985) defined transformational leadership as those who value cooperation among employees’ performance of collective tasks. Transformational leadership provides an opportunity for the employees to learn from shared experiences and for the leader to delegate authoritative action to employees (Bass, 1985). A transformational leadership can help improve work performance by creating group cohesiveness within an organization where employees with different ideas and knowledge can produce creative solutions to problems (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Transformational leaders who idealize influence and inspire motivation in their employees, by encouraging them to achieve more than they imagined possible (Bass & Avolio, 1994), represent the notion of charisma (Avolio et al., 1999). Leaders can use the notion of charisma to gain the respect and trust of others. For example, leaders would intellectually
stimulate followers to be creative and innovative and to challenge their own beliefs and values as well as those of the leader and the organization (Bass, 1985; Wells et al., 2014). Further, transformational leaders practice individual consideration to ensure each individual within the workplace feels special, encouraged, and motivated (Bass, 1985; Wells et al., 2014). Athletics administration transformational leadership styles have been conducive to perceived leader effectiveness (Kim et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2014), by supporting new ways of thinking (Bosselut et al., 2020). Strong transformational leadership can inspire, motivate, and improve employee cognition and performance (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Kim et al., 2019; You, 2021). Motivation and cognition are two aspects of transformational leadership that are positively related to organizational creativity (Gao et al., 2021). For example, employees may feel supported to express novel and creative ideas to enhance the innovativeness of organizational outcomes (Amabile & Pratt, 2016; Bednall et al., 2018; Shin & Zhou, 2003). Thus, transformational leaders can support a creative work environment that can increase organizational effectiveness by stimulating positive social and emotional interactions (Bednall et al., 2018; Hunt et al., 2004; Shin & Zhou, 2003). This leadership style can also improve organizational effectiveness by supporting individual value–individualized development opportunities and enhancing achievement expectations—which can encourage confidence and collaboration (Bednall et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2015). Organizational creativity is managed by leaders and requires collaborative efforts (Wen et al., 2017). Therefore, our hypothesis states:

Hypothesis 2 (H₂): Transformational leadership is positively related to the perceptions of organizational creativity.

**Transactional Leadership**

Employees may experience a transactional leadership style in the sport industry (Brymer & Gray, 2006; Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996). Transactional leadership is described as a leadership style that reinforces the status quo through mutual self-interests of the leader and employees (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transactional leadership refers to rewarding employees for accomplishing specific performances (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership occurs when employees agree with or accept the leader in exchange for a contingent reward that can be tangible or emotional (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Rewards and recognition are contingent upon an employee's completion of roles and tasks (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The goals and objectives should result in employees achieving higher performance levels (Bass, 1985).

The positive relationship may be due to transactional leaders' influence on employees' motivation by setting performance expectations and creating reward distributions, which influence creativity processes and outcomes (Bian et al., 2019; Ma & Jiang, 2018). Therefore, transactional leadership stimulates creativity and creative expectations (Bian et al., 2019; Ma & Jiang, 2018; Rasulzada & Dackert, 2009). Transactional leadership also encourages communication and exchange processes within an organization based on the role and task structures/expectations set by the leader (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2019; Ma & Jiang, 2018). In this case, transactional leadership stimulates organizational effectiveness (Hussain et al., 2017) through efficient knowledge-sharing within organizations, which improves organizational creativity (Shah & Hamid, 2015) and creates a competitive advantage in a highly competitive environment (Rasulzada & Dackert, 2009). Finally, transactional leaders use exception management to modify organizational behaviors (Hussain et al., 2017) and can encourage the development of new products (Sarin & McDermott, 2003). Accordingly, the hypothesis states:
Hypothesis 3 (H₃): Transactional leadership is positively related to the perceptions of organizational creativity.

**Job Engagement**

Job engagement has been defined as “a multi-dimensional motivational concept reflecting the simultaneous investment of an individual’s physical, cognitive, and emotional energy in active, full work performance” (Rich et al., 2010, p. 619). A growing number of sport organizations, including intercollegiate sport, consider the engagement levels of their employees to be a leading factor for achieving a competitive advantage and, thus, have recognized the ability of engagement to address demanding organizational tribulations such as how to increase workplace performance, creativity, and effectiveness (Paek et al., 2020; Svensson et al., 2021; Wollard & Shuck, 2011). When one is highly engaged and vigorous in their job activity, they are easily accessible to coworkers, more creative in their job tasks, and bring their complete and best self to perform the responsibilities of the position (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010). Notably, organizations that experience higher levels of organizational creativity and job engagement in the workplace also see increases in employee performance (Moneta, 2010). When employees are engaged and more creative in their job tasks, they bring the best of themselves to the responsibilities of the position (Kahn, 1990; Rich et al., 2010).

Sport employees' creativity stems from engagement in creativity-related processes (Barnhill et al., 2021). Employees' greater levels of job engagement fuel an increase in productivity (Glavas, 2016), which can be a product of a more meaningful and creative workplace environment. Despite these initial advances on the job engagement paradigm in sport, there remains a dearth of information pertaining to the relationship that exists between the perceptions of organizational creativity and one’s own job engagement. As such, a focus on job engagement and the perception of organizational creativity in collegiate athletics departments provides for an opportunity to empower the workplace environments provided by these sport organizations. Therefore, our hypothesis states:

Hypothesis 4 (H₄): Perceptions of organizational creativity is positively related to job engagement.

**Methods**

**Participants and Procedures**

To determine the impacts of intercollegiate athletics departments’ leadership interactions on the perceptions of organizational creativity, a sample of full-time managerial, non-coaching (e.g., Assistant Director of Ticketing, Director of Equipment, Associate Director of Marketing) Division I intercollegiate athletics department employees (FBS and FCS) in 249 institutions were surveyed (n=741; 13.5% response rate). Due to organizational structure differences between NCAA divisions and the large collegiate athletic population, our study chose to focus on employees at the NCAA Division I level in the United States. Moreover, our decision was to concentrate specifically on Division I staff since these institutions could be considered significant enterprises, and the leaders within these organizations need to collect and analyze information to make the most informed decision possible (Hodge & Tanlu, 2009).

Employee emails were gathered using the online staff directories. The Qualtrics survey was distributed via email directly to the employee. During the survey, participants were...
instructed to evaluate leadership and employee perceptions of organizational creativity based on their perceptions of their direct supervisor. Moreover, participants were surveyed about how leadership impacts their job engagement within the organization. Purposive sampling was utilized to gather participants who were employees of Division I intercollegiate athletics departments and were 18 years of age or older.

Seven departments were categorized based on the participant’s response to their job title: Marketing, Athletic Academic Support, Athletic Administration, Communications, Compliance, Operations and Events, and Ticket Office. The sample for the study included 47% male, 53% female, 0.004% non-binary, and 0.002% preferred not to say. The participants ranged from 21-87 years of age (M = 37.45, SD 11.66). Of the 741 respondents, 622 identified as Caucasian, 55 identified as African American, 28 identified as Latino or Hispanic, nine identified as Asian, three identified as Native American, one identified as North African, 13 identified as two or more, and 10 preferred not to say.

**Instruments**

There were five instruments used to measure the constructs. The constructs were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Leader-member exchange was measured using an eleven-item scale (Liden & Maslyn, 1998). Example LMX items were “My supervisor is a lot of fun to work with” and “I admire my supervisor's professional skills”. Furthermore, the nine-item transformational and sixteen-item transactional leadership scales were adopted from Avolio and Bass’s (1997) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (Form 5X). Example transformational items were “I have complete faith in my supervisor” and “My supervisor enables me to think about old problems in new ways”. Transactional item examples were “My supervisor gives me positive feedback when I perform well” and “My supervisor commends me when I do a better-than-average job”.

The scale for perceptions of organizational creativity was developed by Shin and Zhou (2003) and was adopted by Smith and Green (2020). The perceptions organizational creativity scale consisted of four items. Example items for the perceptions of organizational creativity were “Overall, this organization tries out new ideas and approaches to problems” and “Overall, this organization identifies opportunities for new products/processes”. Finally, the job engagement scale was measured using Saks’ (2006) five-item scale. Example job engagement items were “I really ‘throw’ myself into my job” and “Sometimes I am so into my job that I lose track of time”.

**Data Analysis**

The proposed model suggests that (a) each leadership interaction has a direct impact on the perception of organizational creativity and (b) the perception of organizational creativity has a direct impact on Division I intercollegiate athletics departments' sport employees' job engagement, see Figure 1. For the proposed model, Cronbach's alpha, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were analyzed using the statistical software program R (version 4.0.4). The item’s constructs and construct validity (i.e., unidimensionality) were assessed using confirmatory factor analysis. The latent variables (i.e., transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and the perception of organizational creativity) were observed as reflexive items representing the overall construct. Poorly performing indicators (i.e., <.5 factor loading) were assessed to determine if removal was necessary (Hair et al., 2010). Composite reliability (CR; Bagozzi et al., 1998), average variance extracted (AVE; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and latent variable correlations were examined to determine the
reliability and construct validity metrics, see Table 1. After determining an acceptable measurement model, a structural model was employed to assess the relationships between latent variables. The goodness-of-fit indices for the models were examined using the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Results

Measurement Model

The measurement model was constructed to evaluate the performance of all the indicators. The measurement model had acceptable model fit ($\chi^2 = 1224.239$, df = 461, $p < .001$, CFI = .962, TLI = .948, RMSEA = .048 [.045-.051], SRMR = .039; Browne & Cudeck, 1993). No item-level errors were correlated and there were no signs of multicollinearity. Two leader-member exchange and six transactional leadership indicators were deemed appropriate to remove based on poor statistical performance and issues commonly arising with reverse-coded items (Hair et al., 2010). Overall, the constructs indicated acceptable reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity thresholds (Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constructs</th>
<th>AVE</th>
<th>CR</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Leader-member Exchange (9)</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transformational Leadership</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Transactional Leadership (10)</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Organizational Creativity</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Job Engagement</td>
<td>.53</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis Testing

Once the acceptability of the measurement model was confirmed, a structural model was created. The structural model retained acceptable model fit statistics ($\chi^2 = 1235.002$, df = 464, $p < .001$, CFI = .961, TLI = .948, RMSEA = .048 [.045-.051], SRMR = .040). Figure 2 illustrates the results of each hypothesis tested. Leader-member exchange showed a significantly positive relationship on the perceptions of organizational creativity ($b = .422$, $SE = .046$, $t = 9.088$, $p < .001$); thus, $H_1$ is supported. Additionally, transformational and transactional leadership did show a significantly positive relationship to the perceptions of organizational creativity. Transformational leadership yielded the highest positive impact on the perceptions of organizational creativity ($b = .663$, $SE = 0.059$, $t = 11.301$, $p < .001$), followed by transactional leadership ($b = .490$, $SE = 0.049$, $t = 9.974$, $p < .001$). Therefore, $H_2$ and $H_3$ are supported. Finally, the perceptions of organizational creativity showed a positive relationship on job engagement ($b = .130$, $SE = 0.038$, $t = 3.416$, $p < .001$), supporting $H_4$.  

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Discussion

This study aimed to provide a better understanding of how intercollegiate athletics departments can develop the perceptions of organizational creativity in the effort to enhance the job engagement of intercollegiate sport employees. Intercollegiate athletics departments have long encountered a high number of serious concerns in regards to their workforce (i.e., elevated turnover rates, burnout, stress; Taylor et al., 2019). The results of this study emphasize the dynamic possibilities that LMX, transformational, and transactional leadership have in optimizing a more engaged and creative intercollegiate employee workforce. First, a general inference from this study was the interpretation that the three leadership interactions played a vital role in generating a perception of organizational creativity. As previously mentioned, intercollegiate athletics leaders strive to positively influence job employees’ behavior (Kim et al., 2019). Therefore, this study accentuates that intercollegiate athletics department leaders with these three leadership interactions can positively influence organizational creativity.

From there, the current study searches for methods to enhance the job engagement of intercollegiate sport employees through organizational creativity. Greater intercollegiate sport employee job engagement (Schuetz et al., 2021) and organizational creativity (Smith & Green, 2020) highlight the need of having an improved workforce and better leaders (e.g., athletics directors, administrators, and managers); thus, creating a competitive benefit for intercollegiate athletics departments. The results of this study offer an opportunity for intercollegiate athletics departments and their leaders to improve their leadership abilities so that organizational creativity can prosper and intercollegiate sport can aim to reap the abundant advantages of having an innovative workplace environment (Ratten, 2017). Additionally, the results of the current study extend the relevant literature within the sport management domain by demonstrating that leadership interactions such as transactional, transformational, and LMX can increase organizational creativity in intercollegiate sports, which positively impacts employees’ job engagement.
Leader-Member Exchange

The results of this study showed that LMX (H1) is positively related to the perceptions of organizational creativity, indicating that there was a strong direct relationship from LMX to organizational creativity. In alignment with previous research (Wilson et al., 2010; Yuan & Woodman, 2010), this study also found a positive association between LMX and the perceptions of organizational creativity. In previous works within intercollegiate sport (Czekanski & Turner, 2015; Sagas & Cunningham, 2004), LMX has been primarily studied within the sector of college coaches and student-athletes. However, the results of this study extend the LMX literature by focusing on another important sector, the intercollegiate employee (e.g., Assistant Director of Ticketing, Director of Equipment, and Associate Director of Marketing). Leader-member exchange can lead to higher levels of creativity among intercollegiate athletics employees because having a positive relationship with athletics department leaders can support them in gaining access to more resources and time to develop new ideas (Wilson et al., 2010). The ability to connect with leaders and get quality feedback from athletics leaders who have a positive LMX with their employees can help them learn from their mistakes (Wilson et al., 2010). High LMX followers are more creative because they are given more opportunities and they are also more comfortable when taking risks as they gain a sense of trust from their supervisors (Tierney et al., 1999). Leader-member exchange is a vital leadership interaction in relation to the perceptions of organizational creativity. Being more creative, those with high-quality levels of LMX can create more effective solutions for organizations to grow and increase profits and organization visibility (Martinaityte & Sacramento, 2013). Overall, employees with higher levels of LMX are more creative and innovative than those who receive low levels of LMX (Wilson et al., 2010). The current finding on LMX and organizational creativity answer the call from previous researchers who asked for more research on LMX within intercollegiate sport (Czekanski & Turner, 2015).

Transformational Leadership

The results of the study signified that transformational leadership had the strongest relationship, between the three leadership styles, with perceptions of organizational creativity. Similar to a comparable study outside of intercollegiate sport (Azzam, 2018), this study found that there was a strong direct relationship between transformational leadership and organizational creativity (H2). Transformational leadership can benefit the athletics department’s employees and lead to a more effective and successful athletics department (Bednall et al., 2018). Transformational leadership positively influences the perceptions of organizational creativity through intercollegiate leaders’ qualities of encouraging and motivating employees, which can lead to workplace innovation. Through transformational leadership sport employees can re-examine their work and how to perform at higher levels. When leaders encourage “thinking outside of the box” (Jung et al., 2003, p. 19), employees challenge their intellectual curiosity to generate new ideas. Transformational leadership can support innovative behavior by instilling a shared commitment for innovation across the organization (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). Allowing employees to collaborate and having an innovative climate creates a positive relationship between transformational leadership and the perceptions of organizational creativity and innovation (Ratten, 2017). The current findings can be further emphasized by You (2021), who found that transformational leadership behaviors promote organizational effectiveness. The findings of this study support transformational leaders and their impact on a sport employee’s innovative behaviors.
Transactional Leadership

H₃, transactional leadership is positively related to the perceptions of organizational creativity, was supported as the study found that transactional leadership significantly increases organizations’ creativity of intercollegiate athletics departments' sport employees. However, previous research examining the relationship between transactional leadership and creativity in and outside the sector of sport has indicated contradictory evidence. The current findings are consistent with the findings of some researchers (Gao et al., 2021; Herrmann & Felfe, 2014; Hussain et al., 2017) while inconsistent with others (Afsar et al., 2017; Pieterse et al., 2010). This may explain why intercollegiate sport employees can possibly have such a volatile relationship with the transactional leadership style, reinforcing employees' interest and motivation to meet creative expectations for contingent rewards. The current results highlight that intercollegiate athletics departments would benefit from transactional leaders in their organizations. This can increase intercollegiate athletics departments' sport employees' involvement and positive attitudes, who can become more innovative, collaborate, or compete with team members. The end goal of innovation, collaboration, and competition within intercollegiate athletics departments is to improve the organization’s success. Thus, the influence of transactional leaders on sports organizations’ creativity is essential because it can create competitive advantages by innovating new products or services.

Organizational Creativity and Job Engagement

Within the model, H₄, perceptions of organizational creativity is positively related to job engagement, examined the influence of organizational creativity within an intercollegiate athletics department and its sequential impact on their job engagement. The current study found a significant statistical relationship between the perceptions of organizational creativity and job engagement. The positive and significant relationship between the perceptions of creativity aligns with previous studies conducted in the general sport management environment (e.g., Paek et al., 2020). This understandable result, backed by similar creativity and engagement-based studies, was an outcome of intercollegiate athletics departments' elevated focus on their organizational environment and structure, which allowed them to be “in touch” with the needs of their employees in the sport workplace. When intercollegiate athletics departments place an emphasis on creating and sustaining a dynamic creative workplace environment, thus an environment where departmental leaders aim to inspire through their leadership style, it is likely that subordinate employees have strengthened mental and emotional connections towards the work they do. Highly engaged intercollegiate sport employees can provide quality work, citizenship at work, lower turnover rates, and an increase in the overall productivity of an organization. These results are similar to a previous study (Schuetz et al., 2021) focusing on job engagement within the intercollegiate sport sector. The results indicate that intercollegiate athletics employees can maintain their job engagement with their innovative workplace practices (Paek et al., 2020), such as organizational creativity. Through this analysis it can be perceived that leadership styles play a significant role in organizational creativity and can be a potential antecedent in job engagement.
Implications

**Theoretical**

A significant implication of this study is the additional leadership tools that intercollegiate athletic administrators can use to positively support their organization’s creativity and ensuing employee job engagement. Further, the findings of the study indicate that the three leadership interactions influence and support workplace innovation, with transformational leadership having the highest impact when compared to transactional and LMX. As previously stated, scholars have focused on employee creativity. The current study further advanced our theoretical understanding of workplace creativity by focusing on job engagement and the perception of organizational creativity. Through organizational creativity in collegiate athletics departments, this research advances how sport organization leaders can empower innovative workplace environments. These results further support the perceptions of organizational creativity theory based on the employees’ perception of leadership interactions, which can impact their attitude and productivity in sports organizations. The positive theoretical implications can ultimately create differentiation from their competitors. Thus, leadership interactions should be examined to support the perceptions of organizational creativity.

**Practical**

From a practical perspective, intercollegiate athletics departments should evaluate what leadership interactions their direct supervisors must maintain and improve in the workplace to increase the perceptions of organizational creativity. Concerning leadership interactions, the outcomes of the current study advise intercollegiate athletics administrators to lead within the transformational, transactional, or LMX techniques, whereby their employees are more likely to perceive their organization’s creativity positively, which will support their ability to be engaged in their job while in the workplace. Presently, each of the leadership interactions examined in this study are considered to be learnable and improved through training (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Bass et al., 2003; Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995). Individual learning and effective implementation of these leadership styles are completed through a three-stage process over time. The individual will first establish a series of behavioral management training, then move on to role-making and, finally, the implementation stage (Graen & Uhl Bien, 1995). With these noted benefits, administrators in intercollegiate athletic departments could decide to institute training sessions to demonstrate the techniques of these three specific leadership interactions to all in the athletic department with leadership roles. Additionally, athletic departments can cultivate management teams with leaders that specialize in one of the three areas.

Another, more tangible, implication arising from this study pertains to the hiring practices of athletic departments. The training required to develop effective leadership, as discussed earlier, consumes valuable organizational resources such as time, finances, and personnel. Therefore, selection committees in athletic departments should consider seeking candidates who exhibit a combination of all three leadership qualities. Furthermore, in cases where potential managers do not naturally possess all three leadership qualities, which could be quite rare, the department might consider investing in an individual with strong transformational leadership attributes and allocating resources for the development of transactional and LMX leadership interactions. Informed hiring practices within an athletic department, whether by selecting a candidate who has all three leadership styles or by hiring a transformational leader with a focus...
on enhancing other leadership styles, could directly lead to the cultivation of organizational creativity.

Further, increasing the creativity of intercollegiate athletics departments can promote group collaboration to create innovative ideas to strengthen the organization's success. The creative environment will stimulate both individual and group creativity. The perceptions of organizational creativity in the field of sport management has been a noted antecedent to enhancing organizational innovation (Joachim et al., 2020). Thus, the increased levels of innovation in an intercollegiate athletics department can augment the athletics department's performance through the fulfillment of advanced organizational and employee-focused practices and services (Smith & Green, 2020). Therefore, with respect to implications, improvements to intercollegiate sport employees’ job engagement should cultivate a more focused and positively competitive workplace environment for employees (Taylor et al., 2019), with the positive influence on creativity provided by the organization, should result in advancements in numerous employee workplace behaviors (i.e., job satisfaction, flourishing, flow). Ultimately, with this recent focal point on intercollegiate athletics department’s perception of organizational creativity and the enhancement of intercollegiate sport employees’ job engagement through distinct leadership ideologies (i.e., transformational, transactional, leader-member exchange), the resulting effect could be lower levels of turnover rate in employees, which has anathematized the employment sector of intercollegiate athletics for numerous years (Huml et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2019; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011).

Limitations and Future Directions

In this study, we examined how leadership relationships influenced the perceptions of organizational creativity; however, a few limitations in this study can be addressed in future research. First, among various leadership interactions, this study focused on only three. Future studies could examine other leadership interactions and their impact on the perceptions of organizational creativity. Second, this study focused on the perceptions of organizational creativity of direct supervisors. Future studies should also investigate employee creativity with regard to individual consideration, examining intercollegiate athletics departments' sport employee’s perception of support for innovation at the individual level. Additionally, researchers could examine the moderating and mediating effect of time (the amount of time an individual has worked for their supervisor), tenure, and strength of the relationship (between the employee and their direct supervisor). These aspects could impact employees' perceptions of their direct supervisor’s leadership style and organizational creativity. In addition, it would be beneficial for future studies to examine how leadership styles compare to perceptions of the workplace environment in intercollegiate athletic departments. It is also recommended that outcomes be measured as an alternative to employee perceptions.

Additionally, the generalizability of the results is limited and may differ when examining intercollegiate sport employees outside of NCAA Division I (e.g., NCAA Division II, NCAA Division III) and outside the United States. Thus, future studies could examine the variables of this study within other sport contexts such as professional sport organizations, national governing bodies (NGB), NCAA Division II and III, as well as international non-profit sport organizations. Further, future studies could uncover differences within the numerous categories of international sport. Similarly, as the sport industry continues to endure challenging social developments, studying the creative abilities of the sport industry’s uppermost leaders (e.g., owners, general managers, commissioners, athletics directors) could be explored to determine if it is a valuable component at the highest levels of sport organizations. Further, this study only
examined Division I intercollegiate athletics departments’ sport employees. Future studies could examine Division I student-athletes perceptions of their coaches’ leadership interactions about team creativity or expand the study’s current survey to all NCAA administration sport employees.

Regarding future research, there should be an effort to continue studies to analyze the effects of sport organizational creativity on employees, as it would be valuable to expand the literature in sport management. Specifically, researchers could cross-examine turnover rates and workload related to innovative thinking. Future scholars could also investigate whether there are any differences between the various sport sectors (e.g., professional, recreation, and governing bodies) and the respective findings of this study. It is recommended that future scholars genuinely examine the employer-employee relationship in all levels of intercollegiate athletics departments with respect to creativity, job engagement, and leadership theories.

Lastly, future scholars could also qualitatively investigate the contradicting results between this study and previous studies as it pertains to leadership, and it’s influence on creativity and job engagement. The results of this study both support and contradict previous studies, and inquiry into the specifics of the college athletic environment and leadership could enhance the understanding of specific relationships in college athletics.

References


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