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Leadership Styles in NCAA Division I Athletic Administration and Their Relationships to Job Satisfaction

Valerie Gomez
valerie.gomez@shu.edu

Leadership Styles in NCAA Division I Athletic Administration

and Their Relationships to Job Satisfaction

by

Valerie H. Gomez

Dissertation Committee

Paul Garton, PhD, Mentor

Hillary Morgan, PhD

Courtney Gay, PhD

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DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Dr. Paul Garton

Mentor	Date

Dr. Hillary Morgan

Committee Member	Date

Dr. Courtney Gay

Committee Member	Date

Abstract

As an industry, college athletics has become a focal point of much attention and scrutiny as a result of increasing moral and ethical scandals, as well as lucrative media and personnel contracts. Scandals such as admissions fraud, academic cheating, and financial crimes are a cause for concern regarding the leadership within Division I athletic departments. Organizational and individual outcomes have been associated with leadership. While extant research has focused on the leadership of coaches and the athletic director, the leadership of the senior-level leadership team has been largely neglected. Given the structure of many Division I athletic departments, the senior-level leadership team has significant supervisory responsibilities and is therefore worth examination. This dissertation explores the leadership styles of senior-level athletic administrators by surveying their mid-level followers. Utilizing three leadership scales for servant leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership, descriptive statistics reveal which leadership behaviors were observed by followers and to what extent. Further, a job satisfaction scale was used to assess followers' job satisfaction. Correlational tests were conducted to explore the relationships between three leadership styles—transactional, transformational, and servant—and followers' job satisfaction. Additionally, multiple regression analyses were conducted to discover the relationships between leadership styles and job satisfaction while controlling for race and gender. The data produced by this study revealed that the three leadership styles were observed to a similar extent. Moreover, all three leadership styles were moderately correlated with job satisfaction, with servant leadership having the strongest relationship. For the covariates of race and gender, the data revealed that White respondents and male respondents reported the highest job satisfaction in association with transformational leadership. Servant leadership was associated with the highest job satisfaction for Black

respondents and female respondents, and transactional leadership saw the highest job satisfaction for Asian respondents. This study fills gaps in the extant literature by focusing on the leadership of the senior-level leadership team, and the results can inform the leadership development of senior-level administrators to improve job satisfaction among followers.

Keywords: leadership, college athletic administration, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, job satisfaction

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It's been said the doctoral journey can be both defeating and inspiring, isolating and collaborative, exhausting and energizing—and most of all, rewarding. For me, all the above is true.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

College athletics, especially at the top-tier National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I level, have become big business in America. Due to public awareness of large personnel contracts and lucrative television deals, extensive media attention and scrutiny is focused on this sector of higher education, with periodic scandals often leading to calls for reform. Despite the NCAA's annual revenues exceeding one billion dollars, most athletic departments at the institutional level struggle to maintain a balanced budget for their necessary annual sports operations, let alone keep up with lucrative contracts and personnel expenses (Lawrence, 2013; Martinez et al., 2011). Research has demonstrated that organizations incur significant expenses as a result of employee turnover, with some accounts indicating that the full cost of replacing an employee can be upwards of two-and-a-half times that of that position's annual salary (Cascio, 2006). Wells and Welty Peachey (2011) found that the industry of intercollegiate athletics sees higher rates of turnover than other industries. Prior research has broadly linked leadership with employee turnover and related factors, including employee satisfaction, but research specific to how leadership within intercollegiate athletics is associated with turnover is lacking (Hartnell et al., 2011; MacIntosh & Walker, 2012; Wallace & Weese, 1995; Weltey Peachey et al., 2011). Further examination of leadership and organizational outcomes within intercollegiate athletics is required.

While research on leadership in athletics does exist, the available literature is largely produced by external leadership theorists rather than from within the sector itself. According to Powers et al. (2016), most research studies focus on athletic directors' leadership behaviors and characteristics while ignoring organizational context and overlooking mid-level athletic administrators who have senior-level administrators (other than the athletic director) as their

direct supervisors. From a policy and pragmatic perspective, institutional leaders would do well to oversee departmental leadership on their campuses. As Burton and Peachey (2014) contended, poor leadership can lead to increased turnover, which can be costly in terms of recruiting, training, and hiring new employees. Institutional leaders, stakeholders, staff members, and student–athletes are all affected by the leadership within their athletic department, including not only the athletic director but also the senior-level administrators who supervise mid-level administrators, as well as coaches, on a day-to-day basis. This was supported by Burton and Peachey (2014), who described the influence of higher-level administrators on the leadership perceptions of mid-level administrators as more important than that of the athletic director. Additionally, some of these mid-level administrators may strive to be senior-level administrators who will oversee mid-level administrators at some point in their careers, so it would be beneficial for them to experience and learn effective leadership behaviors from their current supervisors.

The NCAA is the governing body of the large majority of intercollegiate athletics in the United States and consists of three distinct levels of competition—Division I, Division II, and Division III—with each level having sets of parameters that contribute to how leaders manage their respective athletic departments. Relevant literature spans all three divisions, and largely refers to resources, level of competition, media exposure, scholarships, and department budgets, as well as leadership styles. While research focusing on and analyzing leadership in intercollegiate athletics is limited, the number of researchers stating the importance of this topic has grown in recent years. Studies on this topic are varied in approach and type, and include surveys of collegiate student–athletes' perceptions of their coach's leadership style, questionnaires of head coaches' perceptions of their athletic directors' leadership styles, inquiries

into athletic directors' accounts about their own leadership styles, and scholars' perspectives of what leadership styles may benefit athletic departments the most. The literature addressing leadership in intercollegiate athletics, as well as the aforementioned topics, is reviewed in this section.

The topic of leadership is the focus of extensive research, but existing studies have failed to thoroughly explore the perceptions followers have of their leaders' behaviors, especially within the context of NCAA Division I athletic administration. Prior literature has repeatedly provided the perspectives of athletic directors in the form of self-assessments of their own leadership styles or the perceptions of head coaches regarding their respective athletic director's leadership behaviors. Missing from these studies are the perceptions of mid-level athletic administrators of their respective senior-level leaders (other than athletic directors) from whom they receive supervision and leadership on a day-to-day basis. Determining whether leaders are effectively managing their followers to achieve their intended results is important because institutions invest a great deal of money and trust in these administrators to lead the high-profile athletic departments of NCAA Division I athletics (Burton & Peachey, 2014). Thus, the perspectives of internal constituents—specifically mid-level athletic administrators—regarding their direct, senior-level supervisors' leadership need to be explored.

Definition of Terms and Contextual Information

In this section, definitions are provided for the terms and concepts used throughout this paper to allow for a full understanding of the content. I describe the structure of administration within college athletic departments and explain the various titles that exist in the different segments of athletic administration. The following contextual information regarding the composition of college athletic departments, as well as the realistic structure of day-to-day

management within these departments, will aid in understanding the literature reviewed in subsequent sections of this paper.

The terms "leadership style/s" and "leadership behavior/s" are often used throughout this paper. The term "leadership style" refers to the more formal, recognized leadership styles discussed in the relevant literature—that is, transactional leadership, transformational leadership, or servant leadership. Transactional leadership is perhaps the most straightforward in terms of definition, as it involves leaders who are not concerned with their followers' needs but focus on the job-related tasks that need to be completed and rewarding followers who complete their tasks (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Valldeneu et al., 2021). Transformational leadership involves leaders instilling trust and confidence in their followers to develop and motivate them to meet expectations and achieve organizational goals (Lisak & Harush, 2021; Malloy & Kavussanu, 2021). Servant leadership involves the leader's primary focus on supporting their followers beyond their roles within the organization; these leaders seek to identify their followers' individual needs and goals, and then aim to develop each one accordingly (Greenleaf, 1977; Robinson et al., 2021; Yu et al., 2021). Each of these leadership styles, as discussed further in later sections of this paper, is associated with a set of leader behaviors that are used to describe and identify the leadership style of the leader. Since leadership behaviors are associated with leadership styles, the term "leadership behavior" is used throughout this paper synonymously with "leadership styles." Both terms are concerned with the leader's behaviors, and in some cases motivation/s, and therefore drive at the same concepts.

Intercollegiate athletic departments in the US, specifically those that operate within the governance of the NCAA, are led by their respective department heads, known as the athletics director or director of athletics. For all intents and purposes, this leader, referred to as the "AD,"

is ultimately responsible for the management of all areas within the department—including but not limited to personnel management; compliance with NCAA rules and regulations; fundraising; facility management; supervision of the administration, support staff, and coaches; media/public relations; and student-athlete development. The areas that receive most of the athletics director's time and attention may vary from department to department. For example, if a particular athletic department's facilities are in poor condition or require renovation or replacement, the athletics director at that particular institution may need to devote more of their time and attention to fundraising and development as well as facility assessment and planning. If an athletic department has committed compliance violations and received penalties from the NCAA, then the athletics director at that institution may need to devote more time and attention to ensuring that their administration, staff, and coaches are informed of the rules and regulations through training and education. Depending on the size and makeup of the department (i.e., administration), the athletics director may be able to delegate day-to-day management of some areas of operations.

As with many departments on a college campus, the size of the athletic department's staff may be determined by institutional factors, such as resources, financial limitations, and institutional hiring practices. The level of competition, or NCAA division, in which an institution participates is also a good indication of the size of the department. The NCAA has three overarching levels of athletic participation—Division I, Division II, and Division III—which are primarily separated by the level of competition and resources available within the athletics department. Division I includes institutions that not only compete at the highest level of competition but also have the most resources, including funding, facilities, equipment, coaching staff and administration, and the number and size of scholarships awarded to student–athletes

(full scholarships can be provided to student–athletes at the Division I level). In Division II, student–athletes may receive only partial scholarships, and the athletics department does not have as many resources as Division I, meaning smaller coaching staff, administration, facilities, operating budgets, and salaries. Division III institutions may not provide any athletic scholarships to student–athletes (though they may earn merit scholarships in other areas, such as academic merit), there are typically fewer resources available, and the level of competition is usually lower than that of Division II institutions.

The ability of an athletics director to delegate work depends on how many other administrators there are able to assume day-to-day management of certain areas. For example, many Division I athletic departments include "senior-level" administrators who report directly to the athletics director on a day-to-day basis. These senior-level administrators have titles such as deputy athletics director, senior associate athletics director, or associate athletics director, depending on the department's particular structure. This group typically has much more access to and interaction with the athletics director than the rest of the administration, which is made up of mid-level administrators and entry-level administrators. Depending on the structure of the athletics department, these mid-level administrators may have titles such as associate athletics director, assistant athletics director, or director/assistant director of a particular area (e.g., marketing or compliance).

Smaller athletic departments, as are standard across most Division II and III institutions, may have only a few senior-level and mid-level administrators who all report directly to the athletics director. Larger athletic departments, especially in Division I, may have anywhere from a handful to a dozen or so senior-level administrators, as well as up to a few dozen mid-level administrators. In these larger departments, the athletics director typically manages the senior-

level administrators while delegating day-to-day management of the mid-level administrators to those senior-level administrators. In this structure, which is common in Division I, senior-level administrators experience the athletics director's leadership behaviors on a daily basis, while mid-level administrators experience the leadership behaviors of the senior-level administrator/s to whom they report. This common structure has a few implications for the exploration of leadership styles present in college athletic departments. First, senior-level administrators may not necessarily practice the same leadership styles/behaviors with the mid-level administrators that the athletics director utilizes in managing the senior-level administrators. Second, in addition to possibly having a different leadership style from the athletics director, senior-level administrators may have various leadership styles among themselves; thus, mid-level administrators across the department may experience different leadership styles, depending upon to whom they report on a day-to-day basis. Finally, and especially in departments in which mid-level administrators make up one of the largest segments of the administration (if not *the* largest), their perceptions of the leadership styles in the athletics department may be more important than the perceptions of other, smaller segments of the administration.

Figure 1.

Example of Leadership Hierarchy in Division I Athletic Department Administration
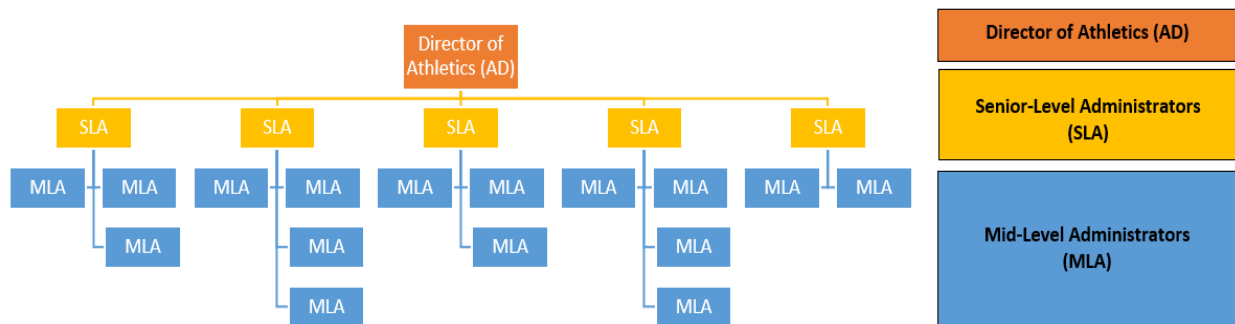
Problem Statement

Inadequate leadership in college athletic administration can be damaging for institutions, as poor leadership has been associated with moral and ethical scandals as well as poor job satisfaction among followers (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2014; DeSensi, 2014; Roby, 2014). The former can include instances of academic cheating and admissions fraud or recruiting violations and financial crimes. These incidents can be costly for institutions, as they can result in extensive legal expenses (e.g., lawsuits and fines) as well as negative press and media coverage. The issue of job satisfaction, although not exclusive to the college athletics industry, may be problematic for institutions due to potential negative outcomes. Job satisfaction has been associated with efficiency, motivation, truancy, mistakes, boredom, laziness, and turnover (Bernstein & Nash, 2008; Landy, 1978; Locke, 1976). Evaluating the leadership within the administration of the athletic department can help identify deficiencies in followers' job satisfaction and thus avoid negative outcomes.

Most literature exploring leadership styles in collegiate athletic administration includes the perceptions of senior-level administrators and head coaches regarding the leadership of ADs, and the director of athletics manages senior-level administrators, not mid-level administrators, on a daily basis. Thus, the perceptions of a large segment of the athletic department administration—mid-level athletic administrators—are not sufficiently explored. To obtain a more comprehensive understanding of leadership in college athletics, the perspectives of mid-level administrators regarding their senior-level supervisors would complement the extant research.

Purpose of the Study

The extant literature focusing on leadership styles in college athletics indicates that transformational leadership is perhaps the most commonly utilized leadership style in this sector. Social learning theory posits that followers who observe and mimic their leaders' behaviors can, in turn, adopt the same leadership style as their own (Bandura, 1971). Focusing on the second-tier leaders just below the pinnacle leader—senior-level administrators in this study—and utilizing various leadership style inventories to assess followers' perceptions of their supervisors' leadership styles allows measurement of the extent to which social learning theory exists in this context. Prior studies have also found relationships between leadership styles and organizational outcomes, including followers' job satisfaction.

The purpose of the current study was first, to employ leadership inventories to survey mid-level athletic administrators and gain a better understanding of how they, as followers, perceive their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles, and second, to explore the relationships between leadership styles and mid-level followers' job satisfaction. The multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ) 5X short form (Bass & Avolio, 1995, 2000) was used to measure transformational and transactional leadership, and the servant leadership questionnaire (SLQ) developed by Liden et al. (2008) was used to measure servant leadership.

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on leadership styles within collegiate athletic departments as perceived by leaders' subordinates. This topic is worthy of analysis for multiple reasons, including financial implications, turnover, and a lack of related research. College athletics, especially at the top-tier NCAA Division I level, have become big business in America. According to the NCAA's website, Division I schools accounted for 96% of all NCAA-generated revenues and 83% of spending in the 2019 fiscal year, which translates to roughly $18

billion and $15.6 billion, respectively. These data points not only reflect the massive size of the business of college athletics but also illustrate that Division I accounts for the large majority of this business, and this amount of money leads to much attention and scrutiny. Despite the attention given to this sector of higher education, leadership within collegiate athletic departments has been relatively neglected in terms of research and analysis. Leaders within collegiate athletic departments, including athletic directors and senior-level administrators, are typically charged with managing the department's finances, including allocating and managing the many budgets within the department, driving fundraising and revenue generation plans, and setting staff salaries within the department. Mid-level administrators are often commissioned with working toward executing these plans on a day-to-day basis. With so much money at stake, both in revenue and spending, the more a leader can get their subordinates to work effectively within their plans, the better it will be for the department. Logically speaking, ineffective mid-level administrators may, for example, fail to meet fundraising objectives or fall short of their revenue goals via tickets or merchandise sales. Thus, leadership from senior administrators is important in implementing plans and helping followers be effective and successful.

From a research perspective, much of the literature is produced by external leadership theorists and researchers rather than from within the sector itself. The external perspective is inadequate and problematic for multiple reasons, particularly with regard to the philosophical approach and limited scope. Some researchers (e.g., Anderson et al., 2017; Bass & Riggio, 2006) have noted that the pronounced increase in literature focusing on transformational leadership has served to inflate the perceived presence of this leadership style due to the idealized, all-encompassing qualities attributed to these types of leaders. Furthermore, van Dierendonck (2011) stated that most of the literature regarding servant leadership takes a philosophical

approach, outlining the qualities of the perfect servant leader, rather than a pragmatic approach that describes how servant leadership can be implemented in practice to serve and develop followers. Additionally, with respect to the scope, much of the research that does exist focuses solely on athletic directors' leadership behavior or on coaches' leadership behavior toward their respective teams of student–athletes.

While the literature generally agrees that leadership is an interpersonal phenomenon between leaders and followers rather than a solitary act of the leader, Porter and McLaughlin (2006) found that roughly three-quarters of leadership studies neglect followers' perspectives and instead examine only the leader's qualities and actions. In the context of college athletic administration, the group that has been overlooked in the research is mid-level athletic administrators who have senior-level administrators (rather than the AD) as their direct supervisor. Much of the research in this area focuses on specific types of leadership, particularly transformational leadership. An exploratory approach in which followers describe and identify their leaders' styles would better reveal which leadership styles exist and do not exist within collegiate athletic administration at the Division I level. Rather than assessing a leader who has already self-identified as a particular type of leader, I investigated followers' experiences as they relate to the leadership behaviors of their supervisors.

From a policy and pragmatic perspective, institutional leaders should be concerned with departmental leadership on their campuses for a number of reasons. First, poor leadership can lead to increased turnover, which can be costly in terms of recruiting, training, and hiring new employees (Burton & Peachey, 2014). Institutional leaders, stakeholders, staff members, and student–athletes should all be concerned with effective leadership within their athletic department—that is, not only focus on the athletic director at the top but also senior-level

administrators who supervise mid-level administrators and coaches on a day-to-day basis. Some of these mid-level administrators may strive to be senior-level administrators who will oversee mid-level administrators at some point in their careers, so it could be beneficial for them to experience and learn effective leadership behaviors from their current supervisors. For these reasons, a survey is needed to gather the firsthand perceptions of mid-level administrators regarding the styles of leadership they experience in the workplace. Much of the existing research either focuses on a specific style of leadership or takes a qualitative approach to present a more in-depth account of a smaller group of participants. To complement this research, a large-scale, quantitative survey can not only explore the range of leadership styles across Division I athletics but also provide sufficient information to identify trends or patterns within the field.

Research Questions

Taking into account prior research, this study addresses the central focus of how mid-level athletic administrators perceive their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles. By using this focus to guide the study, I aimed to determine which leadership styles are present and to what extent in Division I athletic administration. I also explored how and to what extent the identified leadership styles were associated with followers' job satisfaction. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do mid-level athletic administrators perceive their (senior-level) supervisors' leadership styles?

2. What is the relationship between leadership styles—specifically, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and servant leadership—and followers' job satisfaction?

Research Design

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For this study, I investigated which leadership styles exist across athletic department administrations, as perceived and identified by mid-level administrators, within the NCAA Division I level. Therefore, my population of interest was all Division I mid-level athletic administrators who report directly and on a day-to-day basis to a senior-level administrator other than the athletic director. These mid-level administrators work to support the plans and achieve the goals of their senior leaders in the department. They work in areas such as communications, marketing, academic advising, student–athlete development, sales/ticketing, fundraising, and compliance, and they are required to have a bachelor's degree, with some having advanced degrees. Unlike coaches, experience as a collegiate student–athlete is not important or required for administrators. Mid-level administrators are rarely fired when the athletic director who hired them leaves or is fired. The age range and years of experience among mid-level administrators vary greatly, but these positions are often occupied by individuals who are in their twenties or thirties and who have roughly 10 years or less of experience in athletic administration.

I intended to explore the perceptions that mid-level athletic administrators at Division I institutions have about their current supervisor's leadership style. The supervisors being assessed were senior-level administrators who were not athletic directors. Some examples of such positions or titles include senior associate athletic director, associate athletic director, and deputy athletic director. The data collected via this study were analyzed quantitatively to determine whether leadership in this context could be categorized using the styles of leadership discussed in the literature review, and which leadership style/s were most common. Additionally, the data collected were analyzed for commonalities and correlations between the various leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The concept of leadership, in a general sense, has been studied for nearly a century, but further development of defined leadership styles, identification of pertinent theories, and investigation into various industries, including college athletics, has largely occurred within the last 50 years (King, 1990). The purpose of this literature review is to highlight key findings within extant literature that examines leadership in the context of college athletics and to identify relevant gaps in prior research. The key findings in this literature review include themes regarding the leadership styles that have been examined, theories that have been commonly used in framing previous studies, and linkages between leadership styles and various organizational outcomes. The content included in this literature review sets the stage for and helps explain the design and foci of my study.

Review of Relevant Literature – Theories

Leader–Member Exchange Theory

Literature focusing on leadership styles often incorporates a particular theory or framework through which the data is explored. Leader–member exchange theory (LMX) considers the relationship between the leader and followers and the dynamics of that relationship as the focal point of leadership analysis (Northouse, 2019). Generally speaking, leader–member exchange theory includes an approach in which the leader cultivates their relationship with each of their followers such that both parties are motivated to support the other, respect each other, and trust each other (Northouse, 2019). The way in which a leader fosters these types of relationships may differ from follower to follower depending on the follower's particular personality, characteristics, and initial levels of trust, respect, and motivation. The positive

associations and organizational outcomes associated with leader–member exchange theory have been well documented in the leadership literature.

Regarding studies on LMX, researchers have found "that high-quality leader–member exchanges produced less employee turnover, more positive performance evaluations, higher frequency of promotions, greater organizational commitment, more desirable work assignments, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, greater participation, and faster career progress over 25 years" (Northouse, 2019, p. 141). Similarly, additional literature supports and further expands upon these findings by adding that positive leader–follower relationships are likely to result in more engagement in optional tasks and more willingness to take on extra responsibilities among followers (Chiu et al., 2021; Malloy & Kavussanu, 2021; Northouse, 2019). In summary, the findings in the relevant literature highlight many positive outcomes in organizations where leaders are able to develop these types of positive relationships with each of their followers.

Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory has also been incorporated into the literature on leadership styles and the perceptions of leaders because it deals with biases and stereotypes relating to one's identity as well as the expectations of the leadership position. Role congruity theory, in the general sense, speaks to the relationship between gender identity and perceptions of certain roles. Northouse (2019) found that characteristics stereotypically related to females are not compatible with the authoritative qualities associated with leadership roles, so women tend to be evaluated less favorably in these roles. Women are typically associated with qualities such as being supportive, nurturing, kind, and sympathetic, whereas men are typically associated with being

independent, authoritative, strong negotiators, self-confident, and dominant (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Researchers focusing on gender stereotypes and leader evaluation have found evidence suggesting that men and women are often evaluated differently—that is, with consideration to gender stereotypes and perceptions about leader characteristics. A meta-analysis of literature spanning more than two decades found that women more often used more communal, relational leadership styles, and men more often utilized task-oriented and authoritative leadership styles (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). More recently, another group of authors supported these findings and concluded that administrators considered male leaders to be transactional in their leadership style, while female leaders were perceived to be more transformational (Embry et al., 2008). This has been supported by various studies (Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2022) referenced in this review as well as additional studies focusing on the relationship between gender and leadership styles (Ayman et al., 2009; Bass, 1985; Eagly et al., 1992; van Engen & Willemsen, 2004).

Review of Relevant Literature – Prior Studies and Contextual Information

While literature on the topic of leadership is abundant, the foci of such literature have failed to accurately and thoroughly address leadership within NCAA Division I athletic departments. Research that focuses on leadership within intercollegiate athletic departments typically provides sources from external perspectives, such as researchers and observers, focuses solely on the athletic directors and their leadership, or explores leadership with a very narrow focus of a particular lens, such as specific leadership styles or gender. Determining whether leaders are effectively managing their followers to accomplish their intended goals is necessary to mitigate negative outcomes. Thus, the perspectives of internal constituents—specifically mid-

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level athletic administrators—regarding their direct, senior-level administrator supervisors' leadership need to be explored. This literature review provides an overview of leadership styles that can be employed in the workplace and the impact of a supervisor's gender on perceptions of their leadership ability.

Transformational Leadership

One of the more prevalent leadership styles discussed in the literature about college athletics is transformational leadership, which emphasizes a leader's ability to motivate, inspire, and develop their followers (Bryman, 1992; Burns, 1978; Notgrass, 2014). Transformational leadership, in part, deals with leaders recognizing how to motivate their subordinates, identifying and accommodating their personal needs, and tending to each person rather than simply viewing them as cogs in the workplace machine. Transformational leaders are typically influential and charismatic, and they are able to generate buy-in from their followers, which then helps them achieve greater productivity (Avolio, 1999; Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978; Howell & Avolio, 1993; Mason et al., 2014). Moreover, transformational leadership has been associated with followers' willingness to work beyond what is required of them, higher levels of satisfaction with their leader, higher perceptions of their leader's effectiveness, and higher rates of job satisfaction (Burton & Peachey, 2014). Throughout the leadership literature of the last few decades, many scholars have highlighted the benefits of transformational leadership within the field of intercollegiate athletics.

Researchers focusing on leadership within collegiate athletic departments have noted various positive associations and outcomes relating to transformational leadership. Literature that includes input from coaches, administrators, and other staff members has found that elements of transformational leadership are not only largely preferred by followers but are also linked to

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beneficial organizational outcomes. Kim et al. (2012) found that staff in athletic departments whose directors provide individualized attention, intellectual stimulation, and charismatic leadership—the three main aspects of transformational leadership—were more satisfied in their roles. Further, Lee et al. (2018), who surveyed head coaches across NCAA Division II athletic departments, found that head coaches who had transformational leaders were more committed to their departments and therefore more willing to exert extra effort beyond their prescribed job requirements. These two studies reveal common findings and offer important insights into why transformational leadership may be a popular style within college athletics.

By the nature of this line of work, coaches and athletic administrators often work extended, non-traditional schedules. This type of work schedule can be taxing for employees, and these roles often require significant investments of time and energy. Therefore, a leader who is able to facilitate higher levels of enjoyment in their followers may foster more positive, engaged, and productive staff. To further support these findings related to transformational leadership in collegiate athletic departments, Burton and Welty Peachy (2014) surveyed senior administrators across NCAA Division I athletic departments and found that transformational leadership was positively associated with followers' satisfaction, and transformational leadership behaviors were shown to mitigate followers' intentions to leave their respective departments or institutions. Similarly, Malloy and Kavussanu (2021) conducted a study involving 421 student–athletes responding to surveys about their coaches' leadership behaviors. The researchers found that athletes who reported their coaches to be transformational leaders expressed higher levels of enjoyment with respect to their participation in their sport program.

Ultimately, research has shown that transformational leaders establish lofty goals and provide directional guidance, strengthen employees' sense of belonging with the department

through relationship building, and increase buy-in among employees through charisma and motivation (Lee et al., 2018). While transformational leadership may be an effective leadership style for college athletic departments, leaders would do well to understand how their followers perceive and experience their behaviors to ensure that their intentions align with actual outcomes among staff.

The literature highlighting positive outcomes relating to transformational leadership extends well beyond the field of college athletics while supporting the same themes and findings. In an exploration of workplace team learning behaviors, Chiu et al. (2021) analyzed survey data from 122 work teams to assess the relationship between transformational leadership and team effectiveness. Their work indicated that environments in which transformational leadership exists are likely to yield strong integration and learning among work teams, which in turn promotes effective organizational outcomes. In a meta-analysis by Peng et al. (2021), data from 30 empirical studies was explored across various fields and studies, and transformational leadership was found to be positively linked to employees' reactions to organizational change, openness to change, and readiness for change. In summary, studies from both athletics and other fields yield similar results in terms of positive organizational outcomes and follower perceptions.

Servant Leadership

Another leadership style that has gained significant support in recent years is servant leadership, which primarily focuses on the leader's ability to identify and tend to followers' needs. According to Northouse (2019), servant leaders primarily aim to help followers achieve their personal goals and aspirations. In addition, servant leaders maintain moral and ethical values that contribute to the greater good of the organization and society as a whole. Some proponents of servant leadership as an effective model for college athletics reference the

academic, financial, and unethical scandals that have taken place over the years in their

recommendation for leadership that is focused on ethical behaviors. Some scholars advocate that

this type of leadership warrants further examination to endorse ethical behavior and practices in

college athletics (Burton et al., 2017). As we have seen with various scandals—whether

academic, financial, compliance-related, or otherwise—unethical behaviors can be costly to

institutions, especially at the NCAA Division I level, where there is more money and media

scrutiny. A high-profile student–athlete who accepts a bribe, a head football coach who has their

staff complete schoolwork for their players, or an athletic department employee who gambles on

sports are all examples of unethical (and sometimes illegal) behaviors that could have severe

consequences for not only athletic departments but also their institutions. Burton et al. (2017)

reported that an ethically sound climate in sports organizations is positively associated with the

ethical decision making of employees.

Other researchers promoting the servant leadership style for college athletics maintain

that the overemphasis on revenue generation and winning, specifically at the NCAA Division I

level, has caused athletic directors to focus on achieving goals instead of leading and developing

their followers. Dodd et al. (2018) contended that highlighting the needs of followers ultimately

leads to achieving organizational success since they perceive their leaders' concern and are likely

to be highly motivated to work and support the organization's goals. Whether the main reasoning

for advancing servant leadership in college athletics is creating an ethical culture (and thus

deterring costly unethical scandals), or shifting the focus from revenue generation and winning to

the student–athlete experience and followers' needs, various researchers propose that leaders can

still achieve their organizational goals by focusing on ethical behaviors and developing their

followers as humans rather than just employees. By shifting the sole focus from the leader's

behaviors to the relationship between the leader and their followers, new theoretical frameworks are explored, as the perspectives of the followers are considered where they were not previously.

The servant leadership literature extends beyond the enterprise of intercollegiate athletics administration and pertains to other fields that also reveal positive outcomes associated with this leadership style. One group of researchers surveyed 230 public employees and found that servant leadership had a positive influence on service attitude as well as feelings of autonomy and competence (Sun et al., 2021).

In a meta-analysis that explored the relationships between servant leadership and several organizational outcomes, the results indicated that servant leadership was positively correlated with job performance, citizenship behavior, job satisfaction, employee commitment, and trust (Kiker et al., 2019). Yang et al. (2021) conducted a quantitative study that included CEOs and middle managers to explore whether servant leadership from the CEO trickled down to result in servant leadership behaviors in lower levels of leadership. Their findings suggest that servant leadership from the CEO was positively associated with middle managers' servant leadership behaviors and had an indirect positive impact on employees' willingness to collaborate and engage.

Transactional Leadership

In contrast to more recent literature that supports transformational leadership as the premier leadership style for leaders within intercollegiate athletics and servant leadership as a somewhat emerging style, earlier literature focused on the importance of transactional leadership. Transactional leadership refers to the approach in which leaders give followers something in exchange for something else, typically meeting objectives or completing tasks. This

leader–follower relationship usually does not include efforts on the leader's part to motivate their followers or have individual consideration for their followers as individuals (Northouse, 2019).

In one relevant study, which gathered self-assessments from 105 Division I athletic directors, the authors suggested that leaders who are more task oriented than focused on building interpersonal relationships with their followers—a tenet of transactional leadership—tend to lead more effective departments (Branch, 1990). However, the author also acknowledged that while earlier literature emphasized the importance of task-oriented leaders, more modern beliefs regarding leadership indicate that emphasizing task and goal accomplishment as well as personal development contribute to individual wellbeing and organizational success (Branch, 1990).

Beyond the athletics industry, Judge and Piccolo (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of leadership literature pertaining to the business industry and found that transactional leaders were perceived to be much less effective than transformational leaders, and followers of transactional leaders reported lower satisfaction than those of transformational leaders. Similarly, Harms and Credé (2010) found that transactional leaders showed a lack of understanding of their followers' needs, expectations, and stressors. Adopting a gender-specific perspective, Eagly et al. (2003) conducted a meta-analysis across industries to examine various leadership styles across genders and found that male leaders were evaluated much more favorably as transactional leaders than female leaders. This difference across genders has been explored by other researchers and is discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

Gender and Leadership in Athletic Administration

In addition to exploring leadership in college athletics through the lens of a specific leadership style, another angle used for analysis in prior research is gender, and the differences and similarities between the perceptions of male and female collegiate athletic directors.

Intercollegiate athletics is a field known to be dominated by males, especially in positions of leadership, with only about 24% of college athletic directors being female (as of the 2021–22 academic year). Many researchers have examined the reasons for this disparity (NCAA, 2018, 2023).

In their study of NCAA Division I athletic administrator perceptions of leadership, Comeaux and Martin (2018) provided a graphic depiction (sketch/picture) of a woman sitting at an office desk and another of a man sitting at an office desk and told collegiate athletic administrator participants that both individuals were NCAA Division I athletic directors. Upon gathering feedback from the participants in the form of their perceptions about each 'athletic director' pictured, they found that overall, participants felt the male athletic director was qualified, while roughly 20% of the participants stated that the female athletic director was not qualified to hold the athletic director position. These results indicate that commonly accepted and expected characteristics and behaviors associated with leaders are more aligned with masculine qualities and therefore men. These perceptions are likely to be reinforced by male athletic administration leaders, which creates a cyclical pattern of leaders displaying these behaviors and followers accepting them as effective leadership traits. The authors summarized the implications of their findings by stating that stakeholders of college athletics should work with athletic department leaders to broaden their leadership to be more cognizant of how women and minorities might perceive their leadership behaviors (Comeaux & Martin, 2018).

Another study that analyzed pertinent career/professional experiences among male and female college athletic directors found there was no significant tangible difference between the genders, but there were "some other phenomena at work for the disproportionate number of women as opposed to men being in the athletic director position" (Wright et al., 2011, p. 45).

The authors also contended that the homogeneity of college athletic administration likely yields one predominant perception of leadership—that of male athletic administrators about their male athletic directors. Wright et al. (2011) purported that the perspective of women in sports is largely ignored. Bower and Hums (2013) supported this idea and found that gender stereotyping and a lack of appropriate networking are largely responsible for the void of women in leadership positions in college athletics. This qualitative study revealed that female athletic administrators felt neglected by their supervisors, who were more likely to provide mentoring, networking opportunities, and preferential treatment to their male counterparts (Bowers & Hums, 2013). Studies on gender overwhelmingly concur that the perspectives of female athletic administrators are often ignored since they are largely outnumbered by their male counterparts. If their perspectives and perceptions of their leaders are neglected, perhaps leaders are not adapting their behaviors and leadership styles to account for their female followers.

Leadership Development

Currently, and according to the NCAA's own website (NCAA, 2016), the association facilitates leadership development opportunities for its various constituency groups—student–athletes, coaches, and administrators. Administrators at NCAA member institutions have access to a handful of professional development programs. A few of the programs are duplicates of those available to coaches, including the NCAA Leadership Collective and the Effective Facilitation Workshop. There are also a couple of specialized programs, including a football-specific program called the NFL/NCAA Administrators Academy and a fundraising-specific program called Foundations of Fundraising. Currently, two leadership-specific professional development programs are available for certain subpopulations of administrations. The NCAA and Women Leaders in College Sports Women's Leadership Symposium "is developed for

women aspiring to or just beginning a career in intercollegiate athletics" and aims to provide networking with other females in intercollegiate athletic administration, "improve soft skills (resume, interviewing, personal branding), and a better understanding of how the college athletics industry works" (NCAA, 2016, Leadership Development section, para 1). The caveat here is that applicants must be a member of Women Leaders to attend. According to the symposium website, there is no direct reference to leadership-specific education. The NCAA also offers the Dr. Charles Whitcomb Leadership Institute, which "provides tailored programming to assist ethnic minorities in strategically mapping and planning their careers in athletics administration by providing professional development," including networking opportunities, leadership development, assessment and development of soft skills, and training relating to technical, position-specific duties (NCAA, 2016, Whitcomb Leadership Institute section, paras 1–3). Although this institute is available for mid- to senior-level administrators, attendance is limited to those who identify as racial ethnic minorities and to a small number of administrators each year.

Also available to administrators on a broader scale are the Leadership Academy Workshop (LAW) and the Pathway Program, which both revolve around the leadership development of mid- and senior-level administrators. The NCAA LAW provides leadership development and education that includes resource identification, goal setting and measurement, objective execution plans, and best practices and research to help attendees customize their own leadership development journey in accordance with their respective campus needs (NCAA, 2016, LAW section, paras 1–4). Similarly, the Pathway Program "is designed to elevate senior-level athletics administrators to the next step as directors of athletics or conference commissioners" by further developing leadership knowledge and strategies as well as expertise

in various areas of administration (NCAA, 2016, Pathway Program section, paras 1–4). For these leadership development programs, administrators must apply with another colleague from their campus, and only a relatively small number of applicants are accepted to attend each year.

Employee Retention and "The Great Resignation"

As many people working within higher education institutions are aware, the education industry experienced significant turnover during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the relevant literature (Schroder, 2021), the phrase "The Great Resignation" is used to describe the disproportionate exodus of employees from their jobs—including professors, administrators, and staff members—to other professions. In related research exploring the motivations behind these departures (Anselment, 2022; De Smet et al., 2021), employees cited compensation, advancement opportunities, flexibility, job-related stress and fatigue (work–life balance), and workplace culture as some of the main driving forces behind their decisions to change professions. The authors of one study concluded that employees "want a renewed and revised sense of purpose in their work" and "they want to feel a sense of shared identity," as well as "pay, benefits, and perks, but more than that they want to feel valued by their organization and managers" (De Smet et al., 2021). In the same survey, which was conducted in September 2021, 32% of respondents working in education indicated that they were at least 'somewhat likely' to leave their current job in the coming three to six months. Further, these researchers highlighted the difference between what employees deemed important to them—notably, relational elements such as feeling valued and workplace culture—and what employers largely thought were most valued by employees—transactional factors such as compensation and other job prospects.

Integrating Theories and Leadership Styles from Prior Literature

To synthesize the content in the previous sections, the following section is a summary and integration of the main findings from the literature review, along with the dominant theories that have been discussed in the literature. Leader–member exchange theory and role congruity theory have been included in prior studies and are thus discussed as frameworks that can help explain relevant findings. Transformational leaders, servant leaders, and transactional leaders alike can be strategic in the application and use of these two frameworks to better motivate their followers and reach organizational goals.

LMX Theory and Leadership Styles

The first theory discussed in the existing literature and this paper is leader–member exchange (LMX) theory. This theory of leadership is unlike most other leadership theories because it does not solely focus on the leader's qualities or behaviors but on the relationship between leaders and their followers. LMX theory stresses the importance of a leader's ability to foster a high level of dependability, trust, respect, and obligation with each of their followers (Northouse, 2019). While these types of leader–follower relationships have been shown to be associated with multiple organizational outcomes, the task of cultivating such a relationship with each follower may not be an easy, one-size-fits-all feat. Followers do not have the same needs, expectations, personalities, motivations, and communication styles, so this approach requires the leader to tailor their leadership behaviors to fit each follower. In this sense, LMX theory lends itself well to both transformational leadership and servant leadership, as both styles include an element of adaptability and customized leadership behaviors. Transformational leadership requires leaders to understand and satisfy each of their follower's motivations to influence them to grow within the context of their roles and the organization (Chiu et al., 2021; Malloy & Kavussanu, 2021; Northouse, 2019).

Servant leadership also requires leaders to understand and satisfy their followers'

motivations beyond their professional roles and the organization to influence and support them to

grow and develop their full sense of being (Kiker et al., 2019; Northouse, 2019; Yu et al., 2021).

A leader cannot know a follower's motivations, needs, and expectations unless they take the time

to communicate with them and get to know them. Thus, LMX theory lends itself to both

transformational leadership and servant leadership, as the one-on-one relationships that a leader

needs to build with their followers is a focal point of all three approaches. Transactional

leadership does not include an element of interpersonal relationship building and therefore does

not align well with LMX theory.

Role Congruity Theory and Leadership Styles

The second theory included in many prior studies and in earlier sections of this paper is

role congruity theory. This theory addresses the prejudice that has been found to influence the

evaluations of men and women differently with respect to leadership roles. Role congruity theory

posits that people are evaluated more favorably when the characteristics associated with their

gender align with the characteristics expected of or associated with their position—in this case, a

leadership role (Embry et al., 2008; Kim et al., 2020; Northouse, 2019). As stated in previous

sections, men are often evaluated more favorably in relation to leadership roles because the

characteristics associated with the male gender—independent, dominant, self-confident,

authoritative, and so forth—are characteristics widely associated with and expected from leaders,

whereas women are more often associated with being supportive, nurturing, kind, and

compassionate (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Northouse, 2019).

This theory can be applied in various ways to the three leadership styles discussed in this

review. Transactional leadership is more cut-and-dried and involves less interrelational behaviors

than the other two styles, so leaders who practice transactional leadership may be able to mitigate gender bias, as the lack of interpersonal relationships may lead to neutral perceptions among followers as they pertain to gender stereotypes. In other words, if an organization or department has well-defined structures in place that state goals and rewards (e.g., reach sales goals and receive a bonus), then the leader–follower dynamic is simply based on work-related tasks rather than personal relationships. Leaders who utilize either transformational or servant leadership styles may also be able to mitigate the gender bias described in role congruity theory by leveraging the one-on-one, leader–follower relationships they build with their followers. Specifically, a female transformational or servant leader may capitalize on her individual relationships with her followers by taking those opportunities to display more of the dominant, agentic characteristics typically associated with men and with leadership positions. Male transformational and servant leaders could exhibit more of the communal, supportive qualities typically associated with women while cultivating their individual leader–follower relationships.

Gaps in the Previous Literature

This section takes into account prior research and identifies gaps in the extant literature. I explain why these gaps are important to address and how my study expands on the scope of prior studies by filling these gaps to obtain a more comprehensive assessment of leadership in collegiate athletic administration.

Identification of Leaders' Styles

The first noteworthy limitation of the prior literature involves the design or approach of previous studies. Rather than surveying followers to seek their perspectives regarding which leadership styles their supervisors use, many researchers have studied a leader whose leadership style has already been identified, for example, via self-assessment. This type of self-

identification is potentially problematic because self-enhancement bias can occur. According to

Gosling et al. (1998), people who are asked to evaluate their own abilities tend to overestimate or

inflate their skills—known as self-enhancement bias—which can lead to inaccurate information.

Additionally, according to Northouse (2019), leadership is more of a two-way process between

leader and follower than a one-directional process from leader to follower. Therefore, including

the perspectives of followers is necessary to develop a more holistic view of the leadership styles

that exist within collegiate athletic administration.

Taking this limitation into consideration, this study employed leadership style inventories

to investigate followers' perceptions of their supervisor's leadership style. By allowing followers

to share their perceptions using these inventories, researchers can gain an understanding of the

actual leadership behaviors being utilized in college athletic administration. These could either

support existing literature, which maintains that transformational leadership and servant

leadership are prevalent in the field, or they could shed light on leadership styles that have gone

unrecorded or underrecorded. This approach may also address one of the contradictions in

existing literature and theories—the gender bias.

According to prior research, transformational and servant leadership are two of the most

prevalent and ideal leadership styles in collegiate athletic administration. However, while these

leadership styles are more often associated with women leaders (Eagly & Karua, 2002; Embry et

al., 2008; Johnson, 1990; Northouse, 2019), men dominate athletic director positions. According

to data from 2020 pertaining to all three divisions of NCAA athletic departments, men held 85%,

79%, and 68% of athletic director roles at the Division I, Division II, and Division III levels,

respectively (Burton & Peachey, 2009). These contradictory findings raise the question of why

two of the leadership styles most often used by women—transformational and servant—are

reported as the dominant leadership styles within collegiate athletic administration if men make up the large majority of athletic director positions at all divisional levels.

Leadership of Senior-Level Administrators

A second limitation of prior research is the focus on athletic directors' leadership behaviors, which fails to account for other leaders and supervisors within the administration. As mentioned earlier in this paper, the structures of athletic department staff vary greatly from institution to institution. Typically, lower levels such as Divisions II and III, have smaller athletic departments with more centralized organizational charts in which the athletic director is more likely to manage the smaller staff on a routine, day-to-day basis. However, in larger athletic departments, such as those within Division I, there are multiple levels of administrators. In these larger settings, it is common for an athletic director to lead or manage their team of senior-level administrators on a daily basis. Those senior-level administrators are then charged with managing the subsequent levels of administrators—typically referred to as mid-level administrators or middle managers. It is common for a team of senior-level administrators to lead more staff members on a day-to-day basis than the athletic director. An example of a Division I athletic department organizational chart can be seen in Figure 1, which illustrates how departments are often structured, with the AD supervising senior-level administrators and those senior-level administrators supervising mid-level administrators.

To fill this gap in the literature, I employed a different approach and explored the leadership behaviors of senior-level administrators within Division I athletic departments rather than focusing on the athletic director. Furthermore, taking the aforementioned limitations into consideration, I solicited perceptions from the followers of the senior-level administrators whose leadership styles I wanted to explore. My target population was mid-level administrators who

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were supervised by a senior-level administrator (other than the AD) on a routine basis. To ensure the accuracy of the information collected, respondents needed to self-identify as meeting these criteria. Investigating the perceptions these mid-level administrators had of their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles can contribute to the extant literature by revealing a more holistic assessment of the leadership styles present within college athletic departments.

Social Learning Theory

A third theme in the extant literature, which I consider a limitation, is the failure to consider how social learning theory may influence leadership behaviors within college athletic departments. According to social learning theory, followers may adopt the leadership behaviors of their leaders by observing and imitating them (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2014; Northouse, 2019). Prior literature that focuses solely on athletic directors' leadership either fails to recognize the delegation of day-to-day management and leadership to senior-level administrators or assumes that social learning theory is at play within athletic departments. For the latter, this would mean that senior-level administrators adopt the leadership style of the athletic director, and employ that same leadership style to the mid-level administrators they supervise. This phenomenon, which would promote the athletic director's leadership style throughout the department, has yet to be explored. Thus, by seeking to identify the leadership styles of senior-level administrators, this study's findings will either align with prior research, which implies that transformational and servant leadership are prevalent in college athletic administration, or uncover new information that indicates otherwise.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Using the existing literature and theoretical frameworks pertaining to leadership styles in collegiate athletics, this section outlines how this study was designed. I first describe how I collected and used the data, followed by the identification of the variables used. I then explain the statistical methods I used to analyze the data, and share some of the limitations of the methods used in this study.

Participants

For this study, I explored how mid-level collegiate athletic administrators perceive or identify their supervisors' leadership styles, as well as how the perceived leadership styles relate to followers' job satisfaction. Therefore, my population of interest was all Division I mid-level athletic administrators who report directly on a day-to-day basis to senior-level administrators other than the athletic director. These administrators work to support the plans and achieve the goals their senior leaders outline for the department. They work in areas such as communications, marketing, academic advising, student–athlete development, sales/ticketing, fundraising, and compliance, and they are required to have a bachelor's degree, with some having advanced degrees. Unlike coaches, experience as a collegiate student–athlete is not required or even important for administrators. Although these administrators are hired by the athletic director, it is highly uncommon for mid-level administrators to be fired when the athletic director who hired them leaves or is fired.

Variables

The independent variables explored were the leadership styles of senior-level managers— i.e., transformational leadership, servant leadership, and transactional leadership. The dependent variable measured was job satisfaction. This dependent variable has been studied within the

context of intercollegiate athletics, but as previously noted, job satisfaction has yet to be explored in relation to mid-level administrators and how this variable is associated with their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles. In addition to the dependent and independent variables, the instrument administered in this study also collected information pertaining to respondents' race and gender, as these are the control variables. Among extant literature focusing on leadership in intercollegiate athletics, a number of researchers (Abney & Richey, 1991; Cunningham, 2012; Johnson, 2017; Loggins & Schneider, 2015; Mansfield, 2020; Price et al., 2017; Price et al., 2017; Singer & Cunningham, 2018; Walker & Melton, 2015) have investigated the relationship between race and the experiences or leadership of athletic administrators. Other scholars (Bopp et al., 2014; Bower & Hums, 2013; Bower et al., 2015; Burton et al., 2009; Galloway, 2013; Taylor et al., 2018) have examined the variable of gender as it relates to athletic administrators' career paths and leadership styles.

Measures

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

As is evident throughout the literature review section of this paper, transformational leadership is one of the most explored leadership style within intercollegiate athletics over the past several decades, if not the most explored. Due to the presence of transformational leadership in related studies, and because it may be one of the more favored leadership styles, I chose to measure followers' perceptions of their leader's transformational leadership behaviors. According to Northouse (2019), the measure that has been used the most among the relevant studies identified in the literature review section is the multifactor leadership questionnaire (MLQ), which was developed by Bass and Avolio (1995, 2000). Northouse (2019) further explained that "transformational leadership can be assessed through the use of the MLQ, which

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measures a leader's behavior in several areas: idealized influence (charisma), inspirational

motivation, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, contingent reward,

management by exception, and laissez-faire" (p. 192). The MLQ is the most widely used and

accepted survey instrument for transformational leadership, and includes items that address some

of the other questions of interest of this study. Specifically, "the MLQ determines the degree to

which leaders exhibited transformational and transactional leadership and the degree to which

their followers were satisfied with their leader and their leader's effectiveness" (Naidoo et al.,

2015, p. 172). Therefore, to measure the independent variables of transformational leadership

and transactional leadership, I utilized the MLQ 5X—short form (Bass & Avolio, 1995, 2000,

2004). This version includes 45 items for which respondents indicate their answers on a 5-point

Likert scale. I did not use the entire measure; only the subscales that contain items pertaining to

transformational leadership and transactional leadership.

The MLQ includes 20 items that measure elements of transformational leadership and 8

items that measure elements of transactional leadership. The wide use of the MLQ in various

studies and designs pertaining to followers' perceptions of their leader's transformational and

transactional leadership behaviors, as well as followers' satisfaction, has been well documented.

For example, Burton and Peachey (2014) utilized the MLQ in their study assessing senior-level

college athletic administrators' perceptions of their athletic director's transformational leadership

behaviors. Malloy and Kavenusanu (2021) used the MLQ to explore athletes' perceptions of

their coach's transformational leadership behaviors and the athletes' commitment levels. Naidoo

et al. (2015) used the MLQ as their chosen measurement instrument in their survey of coaches

and administrators in higher education institutions in relation to their supervisor's leadership

style, and Kim et al. (2012) employed it to survey more than 300 Division I athletic department

employees to measure their perceptions of their athletic directors' transformational leadership behaviors. Another group of researchers (Valldeneu et al., 2021) used the MLQ in their study across several international companies (outside collegiate athletics) to assess followers' perceptions of their leader's transformational leadership in relation to multiple organizational outcomes, including followers' job satisfaction.

Servant Leadership

To measure followers' perceptions of their leader's servant leadership behaviors, I utilized the 7-item (SL-7) short form version (Liden et al., 2015) of the servant leadership questionnaire developed by Liden et al. (2008). The SL-7 has been utilized and validated in prior literature (Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2015; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), and served as an effective measure of servant leadership for this study while also keeping the number of items in the instrument within an appropriate range. Liden et al.'s full 28-item scale measures the various dimensions of servant leadership and provides context to help understand this complex leadership style. Liden et al. (2008) identified the need to synthesize prior definitions and facets of servant leadership. Taking previous research into consideration, this group of researchers first identified nine dimensions of servant leadership, and second, developed a multidimensional measure to assess these dimensions. The nine dimensions identified by Liden et al. (2008) are emotional healing, creating value for the community, conceptual skills, empowering, helping subordinates grow and succeed, putting subordinates first, behaving ethically, relationships, and servanthood. They then created items to assess these dimensions, ran a pilot test, conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) that yielded seven factors, and then developed a 28-item measure with four items from each of the seven dimensions. This measure was then validated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Liden et al.'s measure of servant leadership "has been

widely used to assess followers' perceptions of their leader's servant leadership behavior" across industries (Yu et al., 2021).

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction, the dependent variable investigated in this study, has previously been studied within the context of how supervisors' leadership styles influence employees' job satisfaction (Robinson et al., 2021; Yusof, 1998; Zhang et al., 2004). Job satisfaction has been defined as the level of satisfaction one person derives from their job, which can be associated with satisfaction with the organization or supervisor (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kiker et al., 2019). For this study, I utilized Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) 5-item measure of job satisfaction. This measure has been used to assess employees' job satisfaction in similar contexts, exploring the relationship between supervisors' leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction (Judge et al., 1998; Judge et al., 2003; Mount et al., 2006). The five items for which respondents responded on a 5-point Likert scale are:

1. I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.
2. Most days, I am enthusiastic about my work.
3. Each day at work seems like it will never end.
4. I find real enjoyment in my work.
5. I consider my job to be rather unpleasant.

With respect to item arrangement, the instrument began with screening items, which is a recommended best practice (Brace, 2018; Krosnick & Presser, 2010) to ensure that respondents self-identified as individuals within the target population. The main questionnaire included items relating to the variables followed, and, as recommended by literature pertaining to survey design (Fanning, 2005; Knowles, 1988; Knowles & Byers, 1996), items were grouped by subject or variable as this can help respondents follow along and better understand the flow of the instrument. Finally, demographic questions, which in this case were related to the control

variables of race and gender, were positioned at the end. Scholars maintain that questions that may be perceived as personal or invasive have a higher response rate when in this position (e.g., Brace, 2018; Dillman, 2000).

Assumption Checks

Internal consistency refers to the degree to which the multiple items of an instrument measure the same variable, or the degree to which inter-item reliability exists (Cronbach, 1951; Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Since the instrument in this study consists of items from multiple questionnaires, I used Cronbach's alpha to test internal consistency, which is a recommended best practice (Bonett & Wright, 2015; Cronbach, 1951; McDonald, 1999). Once I collected the data, I ran this analysis with each scale to check for sufficient reliability. The general rule of thumb maintains that on a scale of 0 to 1, an alpha of .7 is sufficient, with .8 indicating good reliability and a .9 indicating strong reliability among items.

Table 1

Variables and Measures Used

Variable	Measure
Transformational Leadership (IV)	Bass & Avolio's (1995, 2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X—Short Form; 20 items
Transactional Leadership (IV)	Bass & Avolio's (1995, 2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X—Short Form; 8 items
Servant Leadership (IV)	Liden et al.'s (2015) Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SL-7); 7 items
Job Satisfaction (DV)	Brayfield & Rothe's (1951); 5 items

With respect to the three leadership style scales, it is important to note that, although the survey utilized a 5-point Likert scale response format, these variables are not on a single standardized scale. The MLQ has 20 items measuring transformational leadership and 8 items measuring transactional leadership, while the SLQ has 7 items measuring servant leadership. Additionally, the statistical analyses include weighting and combining variables within these scales, so they are not standardized and cannot be directly compared without further standardization. The following chapter includes additional details regarding the standardization process as it relates to the regression results in Table 5.

Procedures

First, I utilized the NCAA's official directory to identify the 358 institutions classified as NCAA Division I institutions in the 2021–22 academic year. Using that list of institutions, I visited each institution's athletics department website and viewed its athletics department staff directory. Next, I compiled a list of the names (first and last), positions/titles, and email addresses for all administrators from each institution.

Once the list of potential participants was compiled, each individual was contacted via email during business hours on a weekday (Monday through Friday) in the first half of July. The email contained a brief description of the study, its purpose, and a link to the Qualtrics survey. A second/reminder email was sent one week after the initial email. The survey included questions pertaining to basic demographic information (e.g., age, race, ethnicity, gender, and number of years of athletic administration experience), and questions that verified whether the respondents were from the target population of mid-level managers who were directly managed, on a day-to-day basis, by senior-level managers other than the athletic director. Any individuals who identified as not in this group were routed out of the survey. No personally identifying

information was collected via this study's instrument. Respondents were notified that the study was anonymous, that participation was voluntary, and that aside from the opportunity to contribute to this study, no incentives were being offered.

Design

The design of this study was correlational, as the collected data was analyzed to measure the correlations between the independent variables—the perceived leadership styles of the senior-level administrators—and the dependent variable—followers' job satisfaction. Furthermore, this study was quantitative in nature, as the data was collected via Likert-type surveys to measure the data numerically, examine relationships among variables, and explore the assumed relationships between leadership styles and job satisfaction. The following paragraphs summarize the correlational significance and strength of leadership style (transformational leadership or servant leadership) with various organizational outcomes. Using the G*Power software, with a significant correlation coefficient, a minimum sample size of 84 respondents was identified. This study yielded a sample size ranging from 145 to 173 across the various scales. A total of 173 respondents completed the servant leadership scale, 163 respondents also completed the transactional scale, 146 also completed the job satisfaction scale, and 145 of the respondents also completed the transformational leadership scale. The sample size in this study satisfies the minimum requirement.

One group of researchers (Kim et al., 2012) surveyed a wide range of NCAA Division I employees to measure the effects of leadership behaviors on job satisfaction and found a moderate correlation between transformational leadership and followers' job satisfaction. In their study exploring athletic directors' leadership behaviors, Burton and Peachey (2014) found a significant correlation between transformational leadership and multiple organizational

outcomes. Similarly, Valldeneu et al. (2021) studied the effects of leaders' transformational and transactional leadership behaviors and found that these leadership styles were strongly correlated with various organizational outcomes. Yusof (1998) collected data from head coaches at the NCAA Division III level and found that athletic directors' transformational leadership was significantly related to coaches' job satisfaction. In an international study that examined various leadership styles within sports administration at the collegiate level, Naidoo et al. (2015) found a significant correlation between leaders' transformational behaviors and organizational effectiveness.

Some researchers, such as Robinson et al. (2018), have focused on servant leadership rather than transformational or transactional leadership and have found significant correlations between this leadership style and followers' job satisfaction. In a meta-analysis of over 40 studies, Kiker et al. (2019) investigated leadership styles in relation to a number of organizational outcomes and concluded that there was a significant correlation between servant leadership and job satisfaction. Outside of administration but still in collegiate athletics, Lee et al. (2018) surveyed NCAA Division II head coaches about their athletic director's leadership behaviors and also found that servant leadership was significantly correlated to their job satisfaction.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

I used the data collected via electronic surveys to calculate descriptive statistics for the dependent and independent variables in this study. The descriptive statistics include the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of each variable.

Correlational Tests

A correlational analysis allows a researcher to identify and explain the relationships between multiple variables in a measurable way (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, to explore the relationships between each dependent variable (leadership style) and my independent variable of participants' job satisfaction, I ran correlational tests for the following: transactional leadership and participants' job satisfaction, transformational leadership and participants' job satisfaction, and servant leadership and participants' job satisfaction.

Multiple Regression Analysis

I utilized multiple regression analysis to measure the correlations between the independent variables (leadership styles) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction). This method of analysis not only accounts for the degree of correlation but also explores how the various leadership styles compare to each other as well as how they are correlated to job satisfaction when controlling for race and gender. This comparison contributed to the findings by allowing me to make an assessment about which leadership style is "best," so to speak, in terms of its relationship to the dependent variable of job satisfaction.

While transactional leadership behaviors differ from the other two styles of focus, there is moderate overlap between some of the behaviors of transformational leadership and servant leadership. Although motives and values are some of the distinguishing elements of transformational and transactional leadership, some researchers (Bass, 1985; Notgrass, 2001, p. 36) have identified some overlap between the two types of leadership behaviors; for example, a leader who utilizes transactional leadership behaviors of executing a reward system may, in turn, foster perceptions of credibility, trust, and transparency among their followers, elements that are also foundational for transformational leadership. When exploring the relationship between two or more independent variables (in this case, leadership styles) and a dependent variable (job

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satisfaction), a multiple regression analysis allowed me to "learn about the relationship between several predictor or independent variables and an outcome variable. It provides the relative prediction of one variable among many in terms of the outcome" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 159). Due to this overlap, which may result in respondents identifying their managers' leadership behaviors as falling under more than one leadership style, a multiple regression analysis was deemed appropriate.

Although the number of studies that have focused on leadership within college athletics is rather small, the majority of studies that have examined the relationship between leadership styles and organizational outcomes have employed a multiple regression analysis. Like my study design, Valldeneu et al. (2021), who examined the relationship between three leadership styles (transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire) and organizational outcomes (commitment, effectiveness, and extra effort), conducted bivariate correlation analysis as well as multiple regression analysis. In a similarly constructed study, Burton and Peachey (2014) utilized descriptive statistics, bivariate correlation, and multivariate regression analysis to explore the relationship between followers' perceptions of their athletic director's transformational leadership and various organizational outcomes, including organizational commitment, turnover intentions, and job search behaviors. Zhang et al. (2004) employed a multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and different work environment factors, and Ryska (2002) conducted a multiple regression analysis to explore the correlation between leadership styles and followers' levels of occupational stress.

In an older study investigating the perceptions of athletic director's leader behavior to organizational effectiveness, Branch, Jr. (1990) utilized a multiple regression analysis to investigate the relationship between followers' perceptions of their athletic director's leadership

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behaviors and organizational effectiveness. The researcher explained the importance of this

design model, stating that multiple regression analysis allows for not only the examination of the

association between two variables but also for the investigation of multiple variables in relation

to outcomes and in consideration of each other. The regression model included below is the

model I used for each set of variables in the analysis, where Y is the dependent variable and X is

the independent variable.

$$y=a+b1x1+b2x2+...+bpxp$$

The regression models that were used for the various sets of variables are included below,

with the following abbreviations used: transformational leadership (TFL), transactional

leadership (TAL), servant leadership (SL), job satisfaction (JS), race (R), and gender (G).

Independent Variable (X)	Dependent Variable (Y)	Regression Model
Transformational	Job Satisfaction	JS=a+b1(TFL)
Transformational	Job Satisfaction, Race, Gender	JS=a+b1(TFL)+b2(R)+b3(G)
Transactional	Job Satisfaction	JS=a+b1(TAL)
Transactional	Job Satisfaction, Race, Gender	JS=a+b1(TAL)+b2(R)+b3(G)
Servant	Job Satisfaction	JS=a+b1(SL)
Servant	Job Satisfaction, Race, Gender	JS=a+b1(SL)+b2(R)+b3(G)

Additionally, I utilized the following regression model to examine the extent to which

leadership styles were associated with the dependent variable of job satisfaction. To compare the

differences in how the three leadership styles relate to job satisfaction, the model used was as

follows:

$$JS=a+b1(TFL)+b2(TAL)+b3(SL)$$

Factor Analysis

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Because the instrument includes several items for each variable, I combined items measuring the same construct. I used principal component analysis to yield factor loadings for each item pertaining to a single variable, and these values were used to weight each of the items. Principal component analysis is a function often used to reduce the number of items or values relating to a single measure while maintaining the variations of the data (Jolliffe, 2002; Rao, 1964; Wold et al., 1987). Once I collected the data, I ran this analysis with each scale (i.e., each set of items that corresponds to each variable) within the instrument.

Limitations

In this section, I identify some limitations of the design and scope of this study. The first involves the dependent variable of job satisfaction, whose relationships to the independent variables were explored. While leadership styles and leader behaviors have been associated with job satisfaction in prior literature, as previously discussed in the literature review section, other factors have also been identified as contributors to job satisfaction. Specifically, factors such as compensation, level within the organization, fringe benefits, job security, and opportunities for advancement have been identified as contributors to job satisfaction (Iiacqua et al., 1995). Readers of this study should understand that in addition to leader behaviors, there are other factors that contribute to job satisfaction.

The second limitation is the scope of the study, which revolves around mid-level athletic administrators and senior-level administrators (other than the director of athletics, or the "AD") within NCAA Division I athletic departments. The results of this study should not automatically be generalized to other populations within Division I athletic administrations, such as athletic directors or head coaches. Similarly, findings from this study may not be generalizable to administrators or coaches in the NCAA Division II or III levels.

A third limitation of this study revolves around the independent and dependent variables. The independent variables are the three leadership styles—transactional, transformational, and servant—for which my instrument included leadership scales. While the research I conducted identified these three leadership styles as those that should be further explored within this context, it is important to note that other leadership styles, theories, and approaches do exist. Similarly, the current study explored followers' job satisfaction as the sole dependent variable, but there are other variables included in previous studies that future researchers could include in similar studies.

The final limitation pertains to one of the measures used in this study—specifically, Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) MLQ 5X—Short Form. Due to copyright restrictions, as shown in Appendix C, I am not able to share specific items from the MLQ; however, I am able to speak to the essence of the items' topics. Thus, in the following chapter, items from the scales for job satisfaction and servant leadership are stated explicitly, but the items from the scales for transactional leadership and transformation leadership are intentionally omitted, as they are from the MLQ.

Chapter 4: Results

The aim of this study was first, to explore how mid-level athletic administrators perceived their senior-level administrators' leadership styles, and second, to examine the relationship between the leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction. The three leadership styles included in this study as independent variables were transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. By employing an instrument that includes scales for each of these variables, this study reveals how this population of followers perceives their supervisors' leadership styles and how these observed leadership styles relate to followers' job satisfaction. In this chapter, I outline the results from the multiple analyses conducted on the data collected via the Qualtrics electronic survey. The sections included in this chapter relate to the analyses, including a review of descriptive statistical information, correlational tests, multiple regression analysis, factor analysis, and assumption checks.

Factor Analysis

In instances where there are several items measuring a single variable, factor analysis is an effective way to reduce the data so it is more manageable. In this study, I utilized principal component analysis to shrink the original data sets for each measured variable, including servant leadership (IV), transformational leadership (IV), transactional leadership (IV), and job satisfaction (DV). Using Stata, I ran a principal component analysis to yield a single weighted factor loading for each item within each scale measuring a single variable. These weighted factor loadings represent the extent to which each item is associated with the variable or factor that the set of items is measuring. Once the factor loadings (weights) were produced, the weighted value for each item was generated by multiplying the factor loading (weight) by the original value to yield the weighted value. The final function in this process was to generate one final value for

each variable. The factor loadings were then combined, accounting for their respective weights in explaining the variable, to produce the final value for each variable.

Descriptive Statistics

The information collected via the electronic Qualtrics survey was analyzed using Stata. The first analysis I conducted was to identify the descriptive statistical information, including the number of observations, mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation (SD). The tables below represent the values for the independent variables of servant leadership, transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and the dependent variable of job satisfaction. Contextualization of the descriptors included in Table 2 is necessary to accurately assess the significance of the values. The range of each variable is different because each variable has a different number of items within the instrument. The instrument contained 20 items pertaining to transformational leadership, 8 items pertaining to transactional leadership, 7 items pertaining to servant leadership, and 5 items pertaining to job satisfaction. Because each variable was measured with a different scale, the differences in the ranges and standard deviations do not play an important role in the scope of this study. Although not particularly relevant to this study's analyses, the reason for these differences is important to note when reviewing the data. The descriptive statistical analyses yielded the results I used to address the first research question.

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Transformational Leadership	145	51.52	11.20	19.61	70.42
Transactional Leadership	163	14.20	2.29	8.01	19.57
Servant Leadership	173	17.80	4.22	6.56	26.05
Job Satisfaction	146	15.01	3.82	4.26	21.30

In addition to the descriptive statistics for each variable's scale within the instrument, and to provide additional context regarding the data collected within this study, Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics for each item within the job satisfaction scale. Since all items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale for responses, the minimum for all items is 1 and the maximum is 5. The transactional leadership and transformational leadership scales were both taken from the MLQ and therefore cannot be shared due to copyright restrictions. The SL-7 scale was used to assess servant leadership; however, the specific questions cannot be included in text. Although specific items cannot be included, the following paragraphs discuss noteworthy results within the transactional and transformational leadership scales.

Table 3.

Aggregate Descriptive Statistics – Job Satisfaction

Job Satisfaction Scale	Mean	SD	*n*
1. I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	3.27	1.15	146
2. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	3.43	1.06	146
3. Each day at work seems like it will never end.	2.67	1.11	146
4. I find real enjoyment in my work.	3.71	0.88	146
5. I consider my job to be rather unpleasant.	2.13	1.05	146

The results of this study revealed that the item within the servant leadership scale with the highest mean (4.05) indicates that mid-level administrators feel that their supervisors maintain appropriate moral and ethical standards. The item with the second-highest mean (3.77) implies that the leaders assessed in this study provide appropriate flexibility and autonomy to their followers. The item with the lowest mean (3.01) indicates that followers feel as though their needs are secondary to their leader's needs and goals. On a five-point response scale, a mean difference of one point between the highest mean and the lowest mean was significant. The mean

of the means across the servant leadership scale was 3.43, which indicates how inadequate the leaders were with respect to these two leader behaviors.

Within the transformational leadership scale, the item with the highest mean (3.88) indicated that leaders were, on average, optimistic that organizational objectives would be accomplished. The two items with the second-highest mean (3.85) indicated that leaders not only approached options and decisions with a lens of fairness and in alignment with relevant rules and values but also took a more individualized approach with their followers rather than a one-size-fits-all strategy. The item with the lowest mean (2.84) indicated that leaders should spend more time mentoring and instructing their followers, and the item with the second-lowest mean (3.24) indicated that leaders should spend more time helping followers sharpen and improve their own skills. Both of these items' means fell noticeably below the mean of the means (3.53) across the items on the transformational scale. Drawing upon the items that pertain to individually tailored relationships between leader and follower, this study revealed the need for leaders to strengthen these people-centered behaviors, as this approach is part of the foundation of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2019).

Results from the transactional scale items indicated that the lowest means (2.40, 2.50) were associated with leader behaviors that deal with focusing on negative outcomes such as errors and consequences, while the highest mean (3.77) revealed that leaders showed contentment when followers achieved objectives. Another noteworthy mean (2.83) indicated that leaders could be more transparent and specific when presenting the rewards or exchanged for meeting objectives, as this is a primary tenet of transactional leadership. The mean of the means for the transactional scale was 2.98, which is notably lower than for the other two leadership scales.

Research Question 1

The first research question presented in Chapter One is: How do mid-level athletic administrators perceive their supervisors' leadership style? The data collected via the instrument used in this study revealed that the three leadership styles were relatively similar in terms of the extent to which they were observed in the workplace. As indicated in prior research and the scales used in this study, leadership styles include many dimensions and behaviors that can be practiced by leaders and observed by followers to varying degrees (Echols, 2009; Lemoine et al., 2019; Northouse, 2019). In other words, leaders' behaviors typically do not fall into just one category of leadership style. Rather, leaders likely practice behaviors across multiple leadership styles to various extents. Therefore, to measure the extent to which a certain leadership style was observed by followers in this study, I calculated the average scores for each leadership scale within each item. I added up all respondents' scores for the seven items relating to servant leadership, and then divided the sum by seven to obtain the composite average score for servant leadership. These steps were also undertaken for responses to the 20 items addressing transformational leadership and the 8 items relating to transactional leadership.

Addressing the first research question, the composite average scores from the three leadership scales revealed that transformational leadership had the highest composite average score (3.54), followed by servant leadership (3.43) and transactional leadership (3.30). For the purpose of this study, these values indicate the degree to which these leadership styles were observed by followers. Thus, with the highest composite average score, followers observed transformational leadership to the strongest degree. In contrast, transactional leadership had the lowest composite average score, indicating that followers observed their leaders practicing transactional behaviors to the weakest degree of the three styles. While the data from this study

revealed the extent to which these leadership styles were observed by followers, these findings also show that these three leadership styles, on average, were observed to similar degrees.

Previous research indicates that transformational and servant leadership are the most prevalent leadership styles practiced in college athletic administration. The findings in this study align with these prior accounts; however, this study also revealed observations of transactional leadership. This difference may speak to the fact that the target population of the current study has not been explored previously. Additionally, some prior studies were designed as self-evaluations by the leaders themselves rather than soliciting feedback from followers. Still, while this study uncovered some observations of transactional leadership behaviors, these findings indicate, in alignment with the extant literature, that transformational leadership and servant leadership behaviors are more prevalent than other leadership styles, such as authoritarian or laissez-faire leadership, in college athletic administration.

Correlational Tests

This section describes the correlational analyses that were conducted using the three independent variables (leadership styles) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction). Using Stata, the correlational tests produced correlation coefficients for the variables. Correlation coefficients range from a value of -1, indicating a perfect negative correlation, to +1, indicating a perfect positive correlation. Correlation coefficients within the +/-0.3 range are considered weak, correlation coefficients between +/-0.3 and +/-0.7 are considered moderate, and coefficients between +/-0.7 and +/-1.0 indicate strong correlations between variables (Schober et al., 2018). The correlational tests yielded the results I used to address the second research question.

Correlation Among Leadership Styles

An additional noteworthy outcome for discussion is the correlation between the three leadership styles, as shown in Table 4. Transformational leadership and servant leadership are highly correlated, with a coefficient of .85. Transformational and servant leadership styles were much more similar to each other than to transactional leadership. Transformational leadership and transactional leadership had a correlation coefficient of .49, while servant leadership and transactional leadership had a correlation coefficient of .45, both of which fall within the range of moderate correlation (Cronbach, 1951; Sijtsma & Pfadt, 2021). As discussed in various sections throughout this study, transformational leadership and servant leadership share some overarching characteristics and are thus similarly differentiated from transactional leadership, which does not share primary leadership behaviors with either transformational or servant leadership. These data serve as empirical evidence of the relationships among these three leadership styles, which has also been demonstrated in the extant literature.

Research Question 2

The second research question posed in Chapter One is: What is the relationship between leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction? Within the context of this study, correlational tests were used to explore the relationships between each leadership style and job satisfaction. The first correlational test, as shown in Table 4, was a pairwise correlation analysis that included all three leadership styles (IVs) and job satisfaction (DV). The results from the pairwise correlation analysis indicated that all three leadership styles were moderately correlated with job satisfaction. Servant leadership had the strongest correlation with job satisfaction ($r = 0.60$), transformational leadership had the second-strongest ($r = 0.52$), and transactional leadership had the weakest ($r = 0.45$) of the three. The data produced by this study could help practitioners better serve their institutions and employees.

Table 4.

Results – Correlations

Correlation Coefficients	Job Satisfaction	Transformational Leadership	Servant Leadership	Transactional Leadership
Job Satisfaction	1.00			
Transformational Leadership	0.52	1.00		
Servant Leadership	0.60	0.85	1.00	
Transactional Leadership	0.45	0.49	0.45	1.00

To provide further context for these correlation coefficients, Figures 2, 3, and 4 illustrate the direction of the relationship between each independent variable (leadership styles) and the dependent variable of job satisfaction. The three scatter plots show positive relationships, with the servant leadership graph showing the strongest correlation of the three and the transactional scatterplot showing the weakest correlation.

Figure 2.

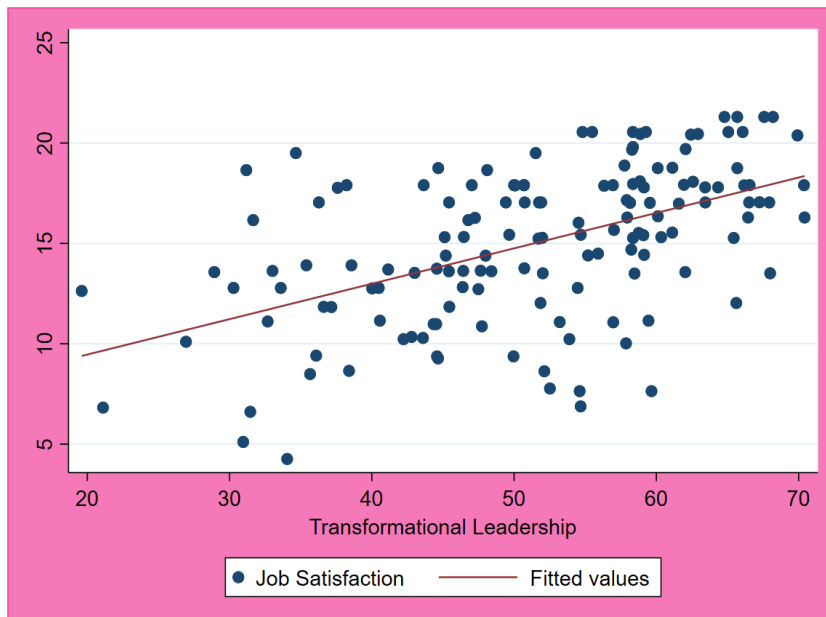*Scatter Plot – Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction*

Figure 3.

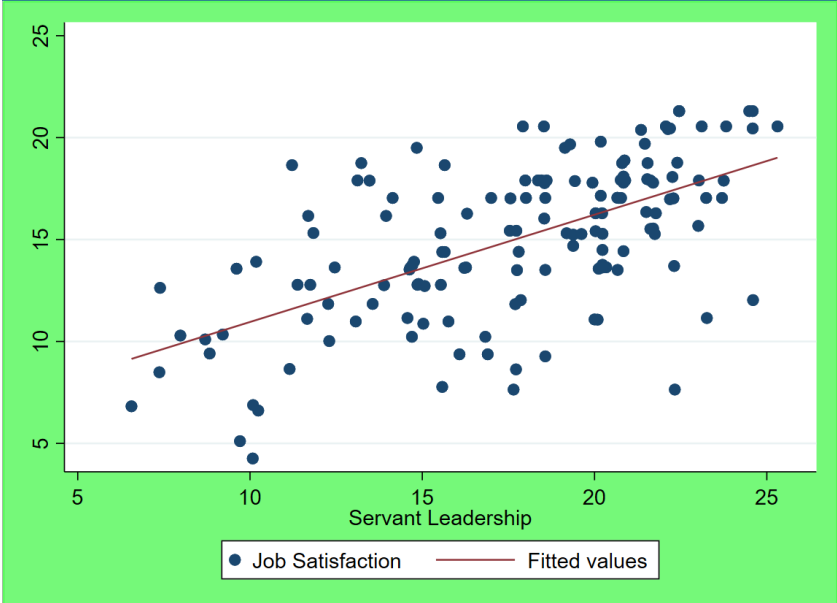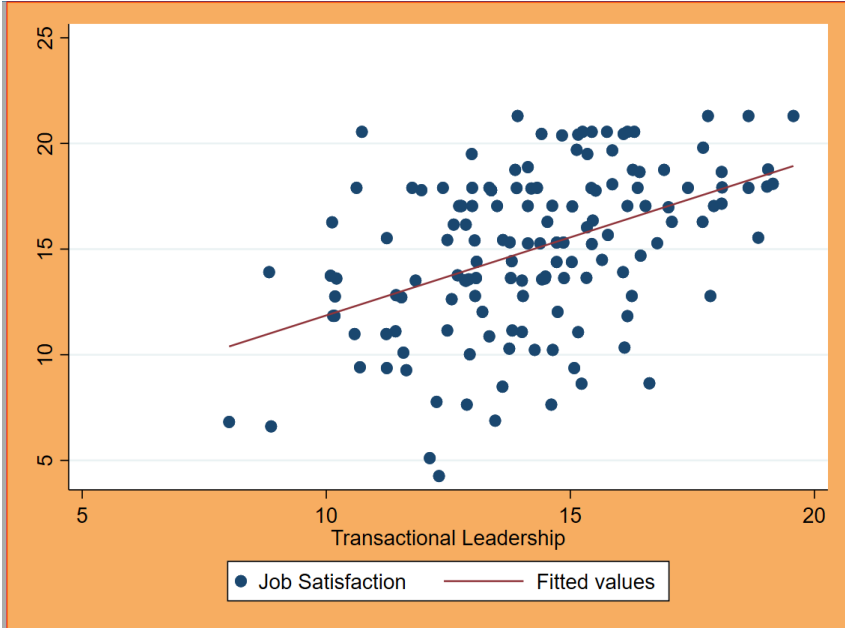*Scatter Plot – Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction*

Figure 4.

Scatter Plot – Transactional Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis is widely used by researchers to explore the degree of correlation between independent and dependent variables. In this study, I utilized multiple regression analysis to measure the relationships between each independent variable (leadership style) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction). Additionally, multiple regression analysis allowed me to compare these relationships within the same context and control for the covariates of race and gender. Using Stata, I ran several regressions with the three independent variables, the dependent variable of job satisfaction, and the covariates of race and gender. In this section, I share the results of the regressions and interpret the results in terms of statistical relevance.

Table 5.

Regression Results – Job Satisfaction and Leadership Styles

Variable	Coefficient (std err)
Servant Leadership	.59
	(.83)
Transactional Leadership	.33
	(.59)

* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

The first regression, shown in Table 5, assesses the relationships between the independent variables (leadership styles) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction), with transformational leadership serving as the referent variable. Since the three leadership style scales are different, standardization of the scales is necessary to compare the variables directly. To do this, I used Stata to turn each leadership style scale into z-scores. Z-scores represent the number of standard deviations away from the sample mean. By transforming the scales into z-scores, they can be compared directly in terms of SDs away from the mean.

The regression coefficient for servant leadership was .59 higher than the referent variable of transformational leadership, while the regression coefficient for transactional leadership was

.33 higher than that of transformational leadership. These results reveal that servant leadership is the best predictor of job satisfaction among the three leadership styles. These findings also align with the correlational findings, in which servant leadership also had the strongest correlation with job satisfaction.

A p-value equal to or less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant relationship between two variables. This regression yielded a p-value of .49 for servant leadership and a p-value of 0.67 for transactional leadership—neither of which was statistically significant. The following regressions measured the associations between each leadership style and job satisfaction.

Table 6.

Regression Results – Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Transformational Leadership	.18* (.02)	.17* (.02)
Male	–	-0.03 (.56)
Black	–	.27* (.97)
Asian	–	1.46* (1.70)
More Than One Race	–	-1.99* (2.38)
Adjusted R²	.26	.25

Notes: Coefficients[1] includes leadership style and job satisfaction, but no covariates.
Coefficients[2] includes leadership style, job satisfaction, and covariates of race and gender.
* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

The regression results for job satisfaction and transformational leadership are presented in Table 6. The first regression included transformational leadership style as the independent variable and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. This model yielded a regression coefficient of .18, indicating that the relationship between these two variables is statistically

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significant, and an adjusted R² = .26, which is the proportion of variance explained by the model. The second regression model included these same two variables as well as the covariates of gender, with female serving as the referent group, and race, for which White served as the referent group. In this second regression, the regression coefficient for transformational leadership was .17, which is still statistically significant, and an adjusted R² of .25; each of these values decreased by .01 when controlling for gender and race.

In this model, with transformational leadership as the independent variable, male respondents had a reported job satisfaction level that was .03 lower than for female respondents. In the race category, with White as the referent group, Black respondents had .27 higher job satisfaction, and Asian respondents had a job satisfaction level 1.46 higher than the referent group. Respondents who identified as having more than one race had a job satisfaction value that was 1.99 lower than the referent group. To further illustrate relative proximity in terms of SD, dividing the coefficient for each leadership style by the SD of job satisfaction, the result was a value indicative of relative proximity in terms of SD. For transformational leadership, a 1-unit increase in transformational leadership was associated with an increase in job satisfaction of .05 SD; however, when controlling for race and gender, a 1-unit increase in transformational leadership was associated with a .04 SD increase in job satisfaction.

Table 7.

Regression Results – Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Servant Leadership	.53* (.06)	.52* (.06)
Male	–	-0.56* (.51)
Black	–	.54* (.90)

Asian	–	2.10*
		(1.57)
More Than One Race	–	-0.02
		(2.22)
Adjusted R²	.36	.35

Notes: Coefficients¹ includes leadership style and job satisfaction, but no covariates.
Coefficients² includes leadership style, job satisfaction, and the covariates of race and gender.
* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

The regression results for job satisfaction and servant leadership are presented in Table 7. The first regression included servant leadership style as the independent variable and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. This model yielded a regression coefficient of .53, indicating that the relationship between these two variables is statistically significant, and an adjusted R^2 = .36. The second regression model included the same two variables with covariates of gender and race. The regression coefficient for servant leadership is .52, which is still statistically significant, and an adjusted R^2 of .35; each of these values decreased by .01 when controlling for gender and race.

In this model, with servant leadership as the independent variable, male respondents had a reported job satisfaction level that was .56 lower than the referent group of female respondents. In the race category, Black respondents had .54 higher job satisfaction, and Asian respondents had a job satisfaction level 2.10 higher than the referent group. Respondents who identified as having more than one race had a job satisfaction value .02 lower than the referent group. To further illustrate relative proximity in terms of SD, these data revealed that a 1-unit increase in servant leadership was associated with an increase in job satisfaction of .14 SD. The regression results show that a 1-unit increase in servant leadership is associated with the same change (.14 SD) in job satisfaction when controlling for race and gender.

Table 8

Regression Results – Transactional Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Transactional Leadership	.74* (.12)	.73* (.12)
Male	–	-0.22* (.58)
Black	–	.29* (1.01)
Asian	–	2.25* (1.75)
More Than One Race	–	-2.15* (2.46)
Adjusted R^2	.20	.20

Notes: Coefficients[1] includes leadership style and job satisfaction, but no covariates.
Coefficients[2] includes leadership style, job satisfaction, and the covariates of race and gender.
* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

The regression results for job satisfaction and transactional leadership are presented in Table 8. The first regression included transactional leadership style as the independent variable and job satisfaction as the dependent variable. This model yielded a regression coefficient of .74, indicating that the relationship between these two variables is statistically significant, and an adjusted R^2=.20, which explains the proportion of variance in the model. The second regression model included these two variables as well as the covariates of gender and race. The regression coefficient for transactional leadership was .74, which was still statistically significant, and an adjusted R^2 = .20; when controlling for gender and race, these values changed by -.01 and 0, respectively.

In this model, with transactional leadership as the independent variable, male respondents had a reported job satisfaction level that was .22 lower than the referent group of female respondents. In the race category, Black respondents had .29 higher job satisfaction, and Asian respondents had a job satisfaction level 2.25 higher than the referent group. Respondents who identified as more than one race had a job satisfaction value that was 2.15 lower than the referent group. To interpret in terms of SD, analyses revealed that a 1-unit increase in transactional

leadership was associated with an increase in job satisfaction of .19 SD. The regression results show that a 1-unit increase in servant leadership was associated with the same change in job satisfaction (.19 SD) when controlling for race and gender.

Assumption Checks

The data were checked for internal consistency when multiple items were used to measure one variable. I utilized Cronbach's alpha to measure the consistency across items for each scale used in this study's instrument. The widely accepted standard states that an alpha of .7 is good, an alpha of .8 is very good, and an alpha of .9 is excellent in terms of interscale reliability (Cronbach, 1951; Sijtsma & Pfadt, 2021; Taber, 2018). The transactional leadership scale, taken from Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) MLQ 5X—short form, contained eight items and yielded a scale reliability coefficient of 0.74, indicating sufficient reliability. The servant leadership scale, taken from Liden et al.'s (2015) SL-7, contained seven items and yielded a scale reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating good reliability. The transformational leadership scale, also taken from Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) MLQ 5X—short form, contained 20 items and yielded a scale reliability coefficient of 0.95, indicating very strong internal reliability. The job satisfaction scale, taken from Brayfield and Rothe (1951), contained five items and yielded a scale reliability coefficient of 0.90, indicating excellent reliability. All four scales used in this study were confirmed to be effective measures of the variables.

Summary

This study aimed to examine the perceptions mid-level athletic administrators in NCAA Division I athletic departments have of their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles. I sought to explore the relationships that these three leadership styles had with followers' job satisfaction. The data collected in this study revealed that followers reported observations of all three

leadership styles, with the composite average scores (on a scale of 1–5) for the leadership scales indicating that transformational leadership (3.54) behaviors were observed the most, followed by servant leadership (3.43), and transactional leadership (3.30). All three leadership styles were moderately correlated with job satisfaction and within the +/-0.3 to +/-0.7 range. The correlation tests revealed that servant leadership had the strongest correlation to job satisfaction ($r = 0.60$), transformational leadership had the second-strongest correlation coefficient ($r = 0.52$), and transactional leadership had the weakest correlation ($r = 0.45$) of the three. Regressions were utilized to explore the covariates of race and gender. Findings from these regressions revealed that female respondents and Black respondents reported the highest levels of job satisfaction with servant leadership, while Asian respondents reported their highest levels of job satisfaction with transactional leadership. Transformational leadership was associated with the highest job satisfaction for White respondents and male respondents. The results of this study warrant further discussion about how practitioners can use these data to develop better leaders for improved job satisfaction among followers. The following chapter includes these points for discussion and explores how this study's findings relate to the extant literature.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The leadership behaviors of senior-level managers have been found to significantly impact both organizational outcomes and the individual outcomes of employees (Hambrick, 2007; Lee et al., 2018). Good leaders can have profoundly positive effects on their organizations and employees, and bad leaders can have adverse effects. This leads to the question, *What makes a "good" leader?* Presumably, to have a positive impact on organizational outcomes, a good leader is, in part, one who can understand not only how their organization can achieve its goals but also how to provide the type of leadership that fosters job satisfaction among followers. This study aimed to answer these questions by exploring followers' perceptions of their senior-level supervisors' leadership styles and the relationships between the observed leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction.

The leadership of a department or organization has tangible outcomes, for better or worse. Certain leadership styles are more often associated with negative outcomes, such as turnover among employees, scandals, poor employee morale, and subpar output relating to organizational goals (Bugenhagen, 2006; Burton & Peachey, 2009; Washington, 2007). Other leadership styles are more often associated with positive outcomes, such as increased retention, better employee morale, increased output, and a more positive, ethical workplace culture (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2018). In light of these outcomes, senior leaders and hiring managers on college campuses should have an understanding of the leadership behaviors that are more likely to yield positive outcomes. By identifying these desirable leadership behaviors, organizations can take intentional steps to avoid employee turnover and the costs associated with acquiring, training, and retaining new employees, not to mention losses in productivity or ethical errors that may occur as a result of unhappy, unmotivated employees. The following sections

serve as a roadmap providing insight into which leadership behaviors should be sought by senior-level administrators and hiring managers to better serve their respective followers and improve their job satisfaction.

This final chapter includes a brief review/summary of the findings, a discussion of the theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations for future research. A summary of the data collected in this study is reviewed in relation to the research questions posed in this paper. The subsequent section incorporates current findings and previous literature to present theoretical and practical implications that aim to address some of the notable gaps identified in this paper. Finally, I draw upon current data and prior research to propose suggestions for future research.

Review of the Study

I began by discussing college athletic administration as a field of employment and as a business to highlight the driving forces behind NCAA Division I athletics. I then presented previous literature that examined the leadership styles of managers and the various outcomes of said leadership styles. Tying my area of focus—college athletic administration—and the extant research on leadership, I then identified the relatively small number of studies that explored leadership within college athletics, and revealed the gap in literature related to senior-level administrators in college athletic administration.

I designed this study to survey followers of senior-level athletic administrations (other than the athletic director) using an instrument that includes scales for the three leadership styles most discussed in relevant research: transactional leadership, transformational leadership, and servant leadership. I also included an appropriate scale for job satisfaction as the dependent variable. My target population was mid-level administrators who directly report to a senior-level

administrator within an NCAA Division I athletic department. I compiled a list of these administrators' emails by visiting all 358 NCAA Division I athletic department websites and staff directories, and the electronic survey was distributed via email three times over roughly four weeks. The aim of this design was to explore to what extent these three leadership styles were observed by followers in Division I athletic administrations and to identify the relationships between these leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction. Once I collected my responses to the electronic survey, I analyzed the data gathered in a number of ways. First, I calculated the descriptive statistics for the independent and dependent variables. I then ran correlational tests for each independent variable (leadership style) and the dependent variable (job satisfaction). I utilized multiple regression analysis to explore the relationships between the variables to identify which leadership style was the "best" predictor of job satisfaction. The main points for discussion are included in the following section.

Theoretical Implications

Leadership Styles

Since this study revealed servant leadership as the leadership style with the strongest association with followers' job satisfaction, employers and managers could utilize these data in their professional development strategies. Improving managers' leadership abilities to include more servant leadership behaviors could improve job satisfaction among followers.

Employees working in the setting of collegiate athletics have unique roles, including their job responsibilities and work schedules, which are unlike many other fields. Athletic administrators are responsible for managing a department that operates largely outside standard work hours. Athletic competitions largely take place in evenings and on weekends, which means that administrators' schedules often include nights and weekends throughout the academic year.

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This schedule can be prohibitive and more tiring than a standard 40-hour week. In addition to the taxing work schedule, the workload itself includes multiple sources of stress. Administrators working in intercollegiate athletics are not only responsible for overseeing other employees, such as coaches and staff, but also the student–athletes participating in their athletic programs. This level of supervision also creates an increased level of stress, as many things can go wrong at any given time. For example, if a student–athlete suffers an injury, performs poorly in their academics, or participates in problematic behaviors on campus, athletic departments are often tasked with addressing the issue, providing support or treatment, and/or enforcing disciplinary actions or consequences when appropriate. Similarly, if a coach or staff member within the department makes a mistake, for example, with evaluating an injury or interpreting an NCAA bylaw, there could be consequences such as fines, lawsuits, penalties, forfeitures, and suspensions. Athletic administrators are often tasked with numerous responsibilities that can bring significant stress, with pressure to reach organizational and programmatic goals, such as generating revenue and winning championships. The combination of these dimensions of mid-level athletic administrators' roles can lead to high stress, poor work-life balance, susceptibility to burnout, low job satisfaction, and high likelihood of turnover (Goodwin et al., 2011; Grandey, 2000; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Umanets & Song, 2023).

In this setting, a transactional leader is focused on the completion of tasks and the achievement of objectives rather than focusing on the unique combination of work stressors in college athletics. This type of leadership may further exacerbate the strain on employees because they are stressed about meeting objectives. Transactional leaders typically do not sympathize with their followers' extensive work schedules but simply expect that their employees perform the duties relating to their position, even if that expectation creates poor morale or an undesirable

work environment for their followers (Burns, 1978; Notgrass, 2014). They readily reward those achieving goals but may not acknowledge the elevated stress or extensive schedules their followers endure. Transactional leaders tend to evaluate things in a more black-or-white way: followers either succeed in meeting goals or fail to meet them; there is no partial credit, so to speak.

The results of this study revealed that transactional leadership had the weakest correlation with followers' job satisfaction. This could speak to the fact that followers in this type of work environment, where mid-level administrators are required to work extended, unconventional hours and manage great amounts of stress, require more individual-level support and understanding. The rigidity of transactional leadership does not allow for individual considerations, such as accommodating flexible work schedules or adjusting expectations or tasks based on individual circumstances. From that standpoint, the data from this study aligns with prior research in that transactional leadership is not a strong predictor of job satisfaction.

Servant leadership and transformational leadership both include approaches whereby the leader identifies their followers' individual needs and motivations to tailor their support and supervision to best accommodate each follower (Greenleaf, 1970; Lee, 2019; Northouse, 2019). To that end, these leaders show appreciation for their employees and express their gratitude to show that they value their followers (Cengiz Ucar et al., 2021; Echols, 2009). Servant and transformational leaders may consider their followers' work–life balance and allow a more flexible work schedule so that administrators working nights and weekends do not burn out. Supervisor appreciation goes a long way in terms of follower morale and motivation, so this leadership skill is integral to producing the positive outcomes discussed in this study (Johnsrud et al., 2000). Additionally, a servant leader supports their followers as individuals rather than just as

employees fulfilling their roles, and encourages them to practice self-care and personal development, which may mean that they pursue other hobbies and activities that impact their work schedules and require some flexibility (Greenleaf, 1970; Hurt & Long, 2023; Tuner, 2022).

The data revealed that servant leadership was the best predictor of job satisfaction and that transformational leadership was approximately halfway between servant leadership and transactional leadership. These results support previous studies that revealed servant leadership to be a strong predictor of job satisfaction, as well as literature that promotes servant leadership as the ideal style for higher education (Correia de Sousa et al., 2010; Sendjaya et al., 2016; Turner, 2022; Tropello & DeFazio, 2014). Several authors have reported servant leadership to be the best approach for mitigating stress and turnover among employees and promoting the individual wellbeing of followers (Hakanen & van Dierendonck, 2011; Schneider & George, 2011), especially within the context of higher education (Turner, 2022). Overall, this study supports the extant literature relating to the roles that leadership styles play in predicting followers' job satisfaction as well as the call for servant leadership in areas of higher education and student affairs, including athletics.

Improving the job satisfaction of followers is important, as higher levels of job satisfaction are associated with positive personal and organizational outcomes, such as low turnover, high output, and a positive workplace culture (Burton & Peachey, 2013; Northouse, 2019). By intentionally working to improve workplace experiences for employees, institutions can mitigate the negative outcomes of turnover and the costs associated with replacing employees, decreased output, and discontent (Goodwin et al., 2011; Hakanen & van Direndonck, 2011). In the context of this study, this approach would include encouraging or requiring senior-level administrators to pursue leadership development opportunities, with a focus on servant

leadership education. As previously discussed, senior-level athletic administrators often directly supervise more individuals than the director of athletics, which emphasizes the importance of their leadership abilities.

Researchers have noted the alignment between the primary considerations of servant leadership and transformational leadership, which include attending to followers' individual needs or motivations, inspiring others, and prioritizing the intentional act of sharing empowerment among followers (Stone et al., 2004; Washington, 2007). Transformational leadership and servant leadership are both somewhat distinct from transactional leadership for the same reasons that they have much in common (Bugenhagen, 2006; Parolini, 2007; Smith et al., 2004). Transactional leaders are primarily interested in task completion and exchanging workplace rewards for objectives met. These leaders tend to be less focused on their follower's individual needs or motivations. In servant leadership and transformational leadership, leaders recognize their followers as individuals and aim to motivate them by addressing individual needs and fostering belief in the organizational vision (Northouse, 2019; Washington, 2007).

Social Learning Theory

Utilizing a lens of social learning theory, which posits that followers can learn and adopt the leadership behaviors of their leaders (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Grusec, 1992), institutions may wish to invest in the leadership development of their current department heads, which in the context of this study is the director of athletics. This strategy may be helpful because it can allow for the day-to-day reinforcement of servant leadership behaviors. If the director of athletics or department head consistently practices servant leadership, their senior-level team can observe these leadership behaviors, adopt them, and develop their own leadership skills accordingly. This approach was supported by Yang et al. (2021), who found that leaders' servant leadership

behaviors led to servant leadership behaviors in their subordinates. Thus, if leaders consistently practice servant leadership, there may be more uniformity in the types of leadership behaviors experienced by mid-level managers, thus improving the job satisfaction levels of followers.

In line with other authors who have found servant leadership to be a strong predictor of job satisfaction (Aboramadan et al., 2020; Johnsrud, 2000), the data presented in this study confirmed that servant leadership had the strongest correlation ($r = 0.60$) with job satisfaction, while transformational leadership had the second-strongest ($r = 0.52$). The data supports other research that has found servant leadership to have a positive impact on follower outcomes, including job satisfaction (Kiker et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2021). In light of this, department heads and senior-level managers should develop their servant leadership skills so that these behaviors permeate the organization at different levels.

Situated near social learning theory, and relating to organizational leadership, researchers examining the influence and replication of management's leadership have referred to the upper echelon theory (Boal & Hooijberg, 2001; Finkelstein et al., 2009; Hurt & Long, 2023; Lee et al., 2018; Lee, 2019). This theory posits that an organization's production, attitudes, values, and policies are primarily influenced by those characteristics of the 'senior' or 'executive' leadership team (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Hambrick, 2007). Hurt and Long (2023) asserted that "the executive team seems to ultimately set the tone for organizational performance via the vision they cast, the strategic actions and decisions they make, the policies they implement, and the behaviors they pay attention to, measure, and reward" (p. 7).

Leader–Member Exchange Theory (LMX)

Leader–member exchange theory (LMX) emphasizes the need for leaders to build individual relationships with each follower to better understand each person's respective

motivations, preferences, priorities, and values (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995). This leadership theory

somewhat aligns with both transformational leadership and servant leadership, which both

involve leaders practicing a level of individualized attention to their followers. The findings of

this study suggest that LMX is practiced by senior-level managers across Division I athletic

administration to some extent. Since LMX emphasizes the importance of leaders being able to

foster relationships with each follower to better develop them on an individual level, it is worth

evaluating which servant leadership and transformational leadership behaviors leaders are

already doing well and which they need to improve.

Extant literature indicates that in effective leader–follower relationships, "leaders provide

support, developmental opportunities, mentoring, and other benefits to the employee," which

leads followers to feel dedicated to their leader, work harder, and be less likely to leave the

organization (Erdogan & Bauer, 2015, p. 641; Northouse, 2019). Assessing the results from this

study with the LMX lens, the highest mean (4.05) from the servant leadership scale indicated

that followers, on average, trust the ethical principles of their leaders, which may serve to build

trust in the leader–follower relationship. The item from the transformational scale with the

lowest mean (2.84) revealed that leaders were not mentoring their followers at the individual

level sufficiently, which is a key component of an effective leader–member relationship.

Drawing upon items related to individually tailored relationships between leaders and followers,

this study revealed the need for leaders to strengthen certain people-centered behaviors.

Control Variables – Race and Gender

Gender as a Control Variable

As discussed in the literature review section of this paper, role congruity theory maintains

that an individual is perceived as more effective in their professional role when there is more

alignment with their perceived traits, which are often based on gender stereotypes (Eagly & Karau, 2002), and those required for their role. Taking this theory into account, coupled with the extant literature indicating that employees prioritize relational factors over transactional factors, one might assume that females, who are more inherently associated with relational traits, may be favored for management positions (Echols, 2009; Notgrass, 2014). The data indicate, however, that the large majority of senior leadership positions in college athletics, as well as in most other industries, are held by males (NCAA Demographic Database, 2108, 2023). If employees are indicating that their preferred leadership behaviors are those typically associated with women, why are men disproportionately occupying senior leadership positions? Perhaps long-standing beliefs about what and who makes a good leader are outdated and have not kept pace with leadership research that highlights followers' perspectives.

In this study, the regression results revealed that male respondents, on average, had lower job satisfaction than female respondents after controlling for all three leadership styles and race. The differences between the two groups in the gender category were rather small, at .03 (transformational), -.22 (transactional), and -.56 (servant). The data produced in this study indicated that females whose leaders practiced servant leadership had much greater job satisfaction than those whose leaders practiced transactional and even transformational leadership. This study's findings support the extant literature concerning gender and servant leadership. Previous research maintains that servant leadership not only aligns with females' innate characteristics but also allows for a more inclusive environment in which females and ethnic minorities may feel more valued and motivated and have greater job satisfaction (Eagly & Wood, 2013; Echols, 2009; Schwartz & Rubel, 2005). This study's findings support these data, as servant leadership saw the highest level of job satisfaction among female respondents.

Race as a Control Variable

For the sake of this discussion about race as a covariate within this study, I focused on comparisons between White, Black, and Asian respondents. This study revealed that the non-White respondents reported greater job satisfaction than their White counterparts with respect to all three leadership styles. Servant leadership saw the largest gap in job satisfaction between Black and White respondents, with Black respondents reporting a job satisfaction level .54 points higher than the White group. In transactional and transformational leadership, Black respondents reported greater job satisfaction than their White counterparts at .29 and .27 points, respectively. Transactional leadership accounted for the largest gap in job satisfaction between the Asian respondents and White respondents, with Asian respondents reporting a job satisfaction level 2.25 points higher than White respondents.

Servant leadership also revealed a sizable gap between Asian respondents and White respondents, with the former reporting job satisfaction 2.10 points higher than the latter. The results of this study suggest that servant leadership is most likely to create an inclusive environment that is preferred by minority followers. The data in this study does not support research that proposes transformational leadership as the most likely to create inclusivity (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015), as the job satisfaction levels reported by female, Black, and Asian respondents were not significantly different from those reported for transactional leadership. Therefore, this study further advances the case for leaders to focus on developing their servant leadership skills to better attend to the job satisfaction of female and ethnic minority followers.

In prior research (Cengiz Ucar et al., 2021; Howell & Higgins, 1990; Jung et al., 2003), transformational leadership and servant leadership have been deemed the two leadership styles

most suitable for creating an inclusive work environment. Servant leaders who acknowledge and strive to satisfy the individual needs of their followers create psychologically safe environments in which individuals are comfortable expressing differing perspectives (Schaubroeck et al., 2011; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant leadership fosters an inclusive culture because it "is a leadership concept that acts in the direction of not gathering power in one man but sharing power" among followers (Cengiz Ucar et al., 2021). These servant leadership behaviors foster inclusion by empowering individuals, encouraging diversity of thought, and sharing power rather than utilizing an authoritarian approach of management.

Howell and Higgins (1990) contended that a transformational leader encourages diversity "by exhibiting unexpected and creative behavior and sees it appropriate to encourage cognitive opposition" to find the best solution for the organization. This collaborative approach of gathering different ideas to find the best option for the team creates a climate in which followers are expected to seek and respect others' perspectives and ideas (Kearney & Gebert, 2009). Further, Cengiz Ucar et al. (2021) described both transformational and servant leadership as requiring leaders to prioritize the socioemotional needs of each follower, which creates a culture of mutual respect and consideration for others' needs, desires, and ideas. Prior literature exploring leadership styles and inclusive leadership in the workplace posits that leaders who practice a more people-centered approach, such as servant leadership and transformational leadership, are more likely to promote inclusion, whereas leaders who utilize a more task-oriented approach, such as transactional leadership, "are less likely to invest effort that would ensure that all constituents have equal inclusion and opportunity for full self-actualization" (Echols, 2009, p. 93).

Practical Implications

Employee Retention and "The Great Resignation"

As discussed in the literature review, the field of higher education, including college athletics, is seeing employees leaving for other fields in significant numbers. Long-time employees are leaving their positions for new fields, and researchers are turning their attention to this. This large-scale shift in employee behavior points to the significant gap between their wants, needs, and expectations for their careers and what their employers and managers are providing. Recent studies during the pandemic indicate that employers and managers have focused more on factors traditionally associated with transactional leadership (Turner, 2022). They appear accustomed to attributing employee discontent and departures to things like compensation and other job offers. However, data show that employees value the relational factors typically associated with servant leadership more than their employers realize (De Smet et al., 2021). From a theoretical standpoint, employers and leaders would benefit from developing their servant leadership skills to provide the type of work environment desired by employees and thus mitigate followers' discontent.

Servant leadership calls for leaders to genuinely value and support their followers in developing and pursuing their individual goals and aspirations. Integrity is a primary tenet of servant leaders, who are also intentional about identifying and satisfying their followers' individual needs and motivations. Employing servant leadership could address many of the reasons cited in research exploring employee discontent and turnover.

Leadership Development

As outlined in the literature review, the NCAA develops and provides various leadership development programs for its member administrators; however, these programs reach a limited number of individuals each year and lack the specific guiding principles to develop certain

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leadership skills. Of the three constituency groups, administrators have access to more leadership-specific programming than student–athletes and coaches; however, attendance is limited and optional. The two programs focused on furthering the leadership development of women and ethnic minorities are important for diversifying mid- and senior-level positions within athletics administration, thus increasing diversity and inclusion among leadership moving forward. The gap, however, is that the majority of current mid- and senior-level administrators are white men (NCAA Demographic Database, 2018, 2023) who would not be eligible for either the Women Leaders Symposium or the Dr. Charles Whitcomb Leadership Institute. While these mid- and senior-level administrators may not need professional development assistance as much as some other groups, since they are already in mid- and senior-level roles, their leadership skills may be underdeveloped or underdeveloped.

Furthermore, the two NCAA-sponsored leadership development programs—the Leadership Academy Workshop for mid-level administrators and the Pathways Program for senior-level administrators—both focus on leadership development but admit only a very small cohort each year. The LAW program accepted 36 attendees for the 2020–21 academic year, and the Pathways Program accepted 22 attendees for the 2022–23 academic year (NCAA, 2016/2023, Leadership Development section). Therefore, a more accessible leadership development program, perhaps designed to educate hundreds of administrators per year, may be beneficial on a large scale. With respect to program content, the Whitcomb Institute, which is for racial and ethnic minorities, and the Women Leaders program, which is specifically for female leaders, focus on skills such as resume building, interview practice, and networking. While these skills are important, these cohorts may be missing out on developing important technical leadership skills that would benefit them in becoming senior-level leaders in athletic

administration. Although the data from this study indicates that all three leadership styles were observed somewhat evenly across Division I athletic administration, servant leadership was much more strongly associated with job satisfaction. Thus, professional development programs—including, and maybe especially those for women and racial and ethnic minorities—should be designed around servant leadership skills and the positive outcomes with which they are associated. By including this specific education and training, the NCAA could better prepare all administrators for leadership roles.

From a pragmatic standpoint, it would be more feasible for the NCAA, as the national governing body with a surplus of resources (as noted earlier in this paper), to increase access to leadership development programming opportunities for administrators rather than expecting institutions to create leadership departments on campus or within athletics. Practically speaking, this could include the creation of a handful of full-time positions within the NCAA's leadership development area, the costs associated with developing relevant curricula, and the costs associated with facilitating this programming. One way to mitigate expenses for the association and attendees and to remove barriers to access and attendance could be to utilize virtual platforms, such as Zoom or Teams, for widespread leadership development programs. To propose a framework, perhaps an annual program in which attendees meet once a month via a virtual platform for the nine months of the academic year (September through May) for two hours each time would add up to 18 hours of education and development. This leadership development program should not be as limited as the existing programs but should be accessible to a large number of mid-level managers and have a higher impact on athletic administrations across the country.

Recommendations for Future Research

During the process of conducting research and executing this study, I came across additional contexts that led to ideas about how other researchers could expand upon this topic and add to the literature. While this study focused on the perceptions of mid-level administrators (followers) and the leadership styles of senior-level supervisors other than the department head, future researchers could consider additional factors. The following paragraphs include suggestions for future research that could contribute to developing a more thorough, broader understanding of leadership in college athletic administration.

Commitment as a Dependent Variable

While the current study included job satisfaction as the dependent variable, future researchers conducting similar studies could include followers' commitment levels as a dependent variable to gain further insight into the relationships between leadership behaviors and followers' perceptions. Affective organizational commitment refers to employees feeling a sense of belonging in their organization, connection to their organization, and a shared sense of identity with their organization (Kim et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2018; Meyer & Allen, 1991). Additionally, researchers have found that employees who feel more committed to their organization are more effective in their roles and more willing to perform duties beyond their prescribed roles (Lavelle et al., 2009; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990). Burton and Welty Peachey (2014) explored the relationship between athletic directors' transformational leadership and the affective organizational commitment of their senior-level administrators. This design could be replicated for the subsequent level of administration, exploring the relationship between the leadership styles of senior-level managers and the commitment levels of mid-level administrators. This approach would expand current knowledge and provide a more thorough understanding of the impacts of leadership behaviors at various levels of intercollegiate athletic administration.

Current Administrator Experiences with Leadership Development

Another suggestion for future research is to explore the extent to which current mid- and senior-level administrators have completed leadership development programs, whether provided through the NCAA or otherwise. A survey targeting mid- and senior-level administrators might be an effective tool to examine what leadership-specific professional development programs these administrators have completed, what leadership development programs they are aware of, and which they plan to pursue for their own professional development.

Control for Areas of Administration

A third suggestion is to conduct a similar study and control for the area/s of administration in which the mid-level administrators work. For example, controlling for areas of administration, such as fundraising/development, compliance, communications/marketing, and facilities/operations, may uncover gaps or inconsistencies regarding leadership development. In addition to the NCAA as the governing body for NCAA intercollegiate athletics, there are professional development networks geared toward specific areas of administration. The National Association of Collegiate Directors of Athletics (NACDA) is the overarching network open to athletic directors. There are also several branches within NACDA that service different cohorts of athletic administrators by area of administration, such as CABMA for business managers, CEFMA for event and facility management, NAAC for athletic compliance administrators, and NAADD for administrators in the area of fundraising and alumni development. Future researchers may be able to offer these professional networks data and suggestions regarding how they can design leadership development opportunities for different cohorts of athletic administrators.

Conclusion

The topic of leadership within collegiate athletic administration has much potential for exploration. With many administrators leaving the field of higher education and student affairs, including athletics, and with the significant attention and scrutiny given to the billion-dollar business of college sports, responsibility has been placed on leaders within the field to retain employees and operate efficiently without scandals (Cascio, 2006; Lawrence, 2013; Martinez et al., 2011; Wells & Welty Peachey, 2011). This study explored the leadership behaviors of senior-level administrators, according to their mid-level followers, in NCAA Division I athletic administration. It utilized leadership scales to assess the extent to which transformational leadership, servant leadership, and transactional leadership behaviors were practiced by senior-level leaders. It also examined the relationships between these leadership styles and followers' job satisfaction.

All three leadership styles included in this study were moderately correlated with job satisfaction, but servant leadership had the strongest relationship of the three. Using multiple regression analyses and controlling for race and gender, the regression models produced correlation coefficients indicating statistical significance. The results also revealed that servant leadership showed the largest gap in job satisfaction between the genders, with female respondents reporting higher job satisfaction than their male counterparts. Servant leadership was also associated with higher job satisfaction among female respondents and Black respondents, while transactional leadership showed higher job satisfaction among Asian respondents, and transformational leadership led to higher job satisfaction among White respondents and male respondents.

The data produced in this study is useful for athletic administrators already in senior leadership positions as well as those in mid-level positions who intend to rise within athletic

administration. The results of this exploration can be used to inform the development of leadership skills most likely to yield high job satisfaction among followers, which can aid in improving retention and promoting ethical behaviors in organizations. This study provides an initial assessment of the target population, but further insight would lead to a deeper understanding of leadership in this context. The reach and profitability of college athletics have grown significantly, and this is likely to continue in the near future. Given the limited literature on leadership within collegiate athletic administration, researchers should continue to investigate the impact of various leadership behaviors on followers in the context of collegiate athletic administration.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTER FOR USE OF MLQ

Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (5X—Short Form)

    As per copyright restrictions, the MLQ cannot be reproduced or included in this study;

however, the following includes the approval to use MLQ items in the electronic survey that was

distributed to respondents, as well as three sample items.

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To Whom It May Concern,

The above-named person has made a license purchase from Mind Garden, Inc. and has permission to administer the following copyrighted instrument up to that quantity purchased:

Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire

The three sample items only from this instrument as specified below may be included in your thesis or dissertation. Any other use must receive prior written permission from Mind Garden. The entire instrument may not be included or reproduced at any time in any other published material. Please understand that disclosing more than we have authorized will compromise the integrity and value of the test.

Citation of the instrument must include the applicable copyright statement listed below. Sample Items:

As a leader ….
> I talk optimistically about the future.
> I spend time teaching and coaching.
> I avoid making decisions.

The person I am rating….
> Talks optimistically about the future.
> Spends time teaching and coaching.
> Avoids making decisions

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Sincerely,

Robert Most
Mind Garden, Inc.
www.mindgarden.com

APPENDIX B: SURVEY SOLICITATION EMAIL

Solicitation/Recruitment Email Language

Dear athletic administrators,

I'm writing to invite you to participate in an exciting study that will advance current knowledge of leadership styles present in division I athletic administration.

The purpose of this study is to first, survey followers to assess the leadership styles of senior-level athletic administrators (other than the AD) and second, to explore the relationship that leadership styles have on followers' job satisfaction and commitment.

Participation in this study is anonymous, and no identifying information will be collected. The survey consists of 59 multiple choice questions, and **should take approximately 15–20 minutes**.

Eligible participants:

1. are athletic administrators within Division I athletic departments; and
2. are directly supervised by a senior-level athletic administrator *other than the athletic director.*

If you meet these eligibility requirements, and want to voluntarily participate in this anonymous study, please click the link below to access the Qualtrics survey.

[Insert Qualtrics survey link here]

Thank you,

Valerie Gomez, doctoral candidate; Higher Education Leadership, Management & Policy Ed.D. program at the College of Education and Human Services at Seton Hall University.

Additional information:

The survey includes questions from the following leadership style scales:

- Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (to measure transformational and transactional leadership behaviors) (Bass & Avolio, 1995, 2000)
- Servant Leadership Questionnaire (to measure servant leadership behaviors)
- Brayfield and Rothe's (1951) Job Satisfaction Scale

Any data collected via the Qualtrics survey will be stored on a password-protected flash drive, which will be stored in the researcher's locked desk.

APPENDIX C: ATHLETIC ADMINISTRATION SAMPLE

Figure 1.

Example of Leadership Hierarchy in Division I Athletic Department Administration
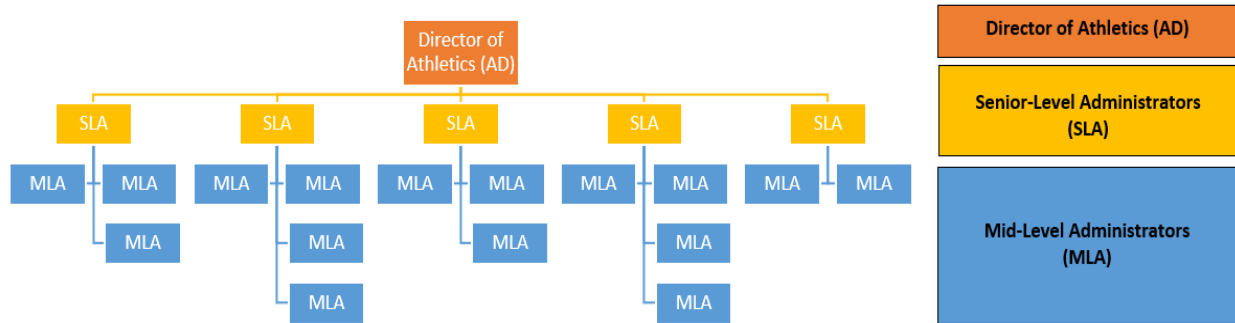
APPENDIX D: CORRELATION SCATTER PLOTS

Figure 2.

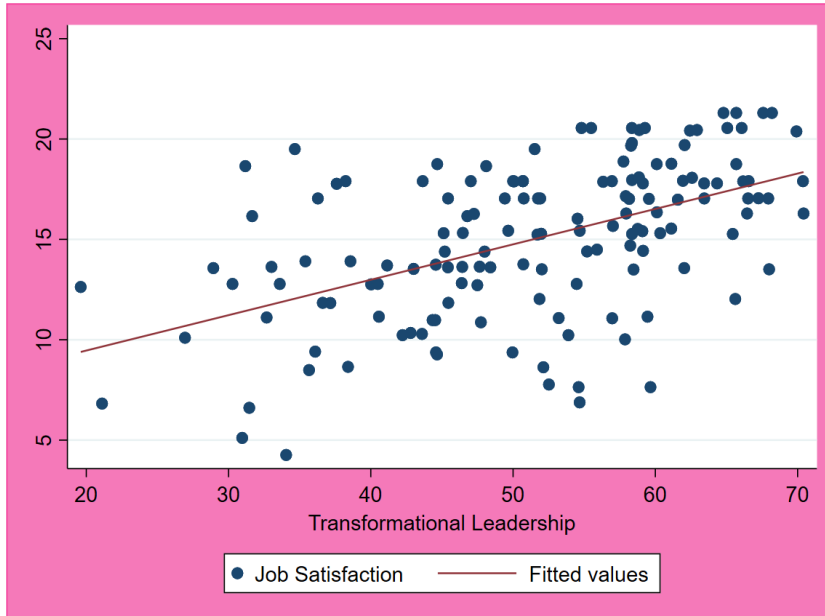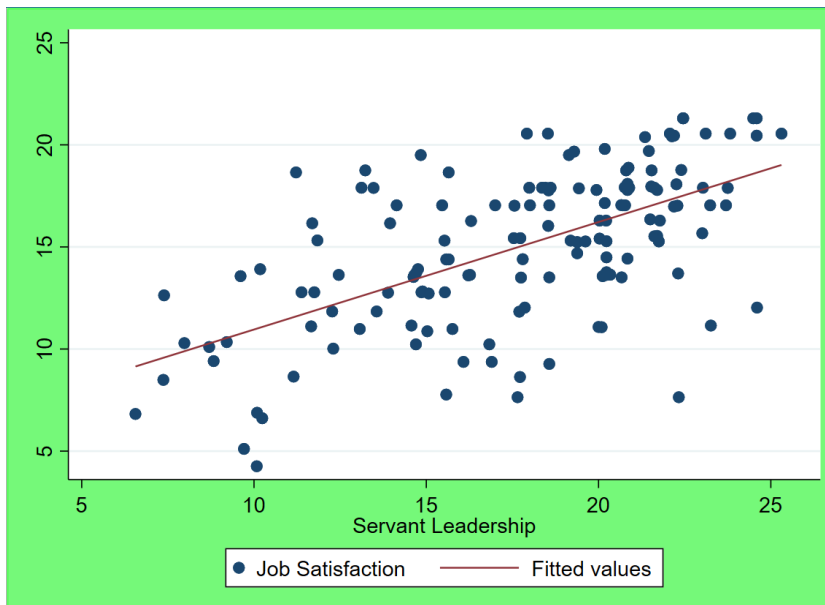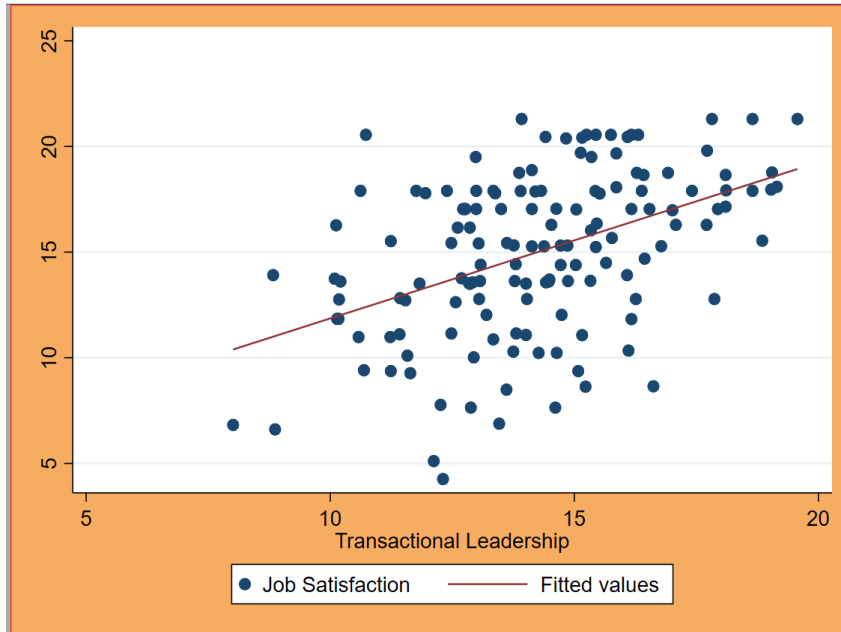*Scatter Plot – Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction*

Figure 3.

Scatter Plot – Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Figure 4.

Scatter Plot – Transactional Leadership and Job Satisfaction

APPENDIX E: VARIABLES AND MEASURES

Table 1.

Variables and Measures Used

Variable	Measure
Transformational Leadership (IV)	Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (5X—Short Form); 20 items
Transactional Leadership (IV)	Bass and Avolio's (1995, 2000) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) (5X—Short Form); 8 items
Servant Leadership (IV)	Liden et al.'s (2015) Servant Leadership Questionnaire (SL-7); 7 items
Job Satisfaction (DV)	Brayfield and Rothe's Index of Job Satisfaction (1951); 5 items

APPENDIX F: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 2.

Descriptive Statistics for Independent and Dependent Variables

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Transformational Leadership	145	51.52	11.20	19.61	70.42
Transactional Leadership	163	14.20	2.29	8.01	19.57
Servant Leadership	173	17.80	4.22	6.56	26.05
Job Satisfaction	146	15.01	3.82	4.26	21.30

Table 3.

Aggregate Descriptive Statistics – Job Satisfaction Scales

Job Satisfaction Scale	Mean	SD	n
1. I feel fairly satisfied with my present job.	3.27	1.15	146
2. Most days I am enthusiastic about my work.	3.43	1.06	146
3. Each day at work seems like it will never end.	2.67	1.11	146
4. I find real enjoyment in my work.	3.71	0.88	146
5. I consider my job to be rather unpleasant.	2.13	1.05	146

Table 4.

Results – Correlations of Leadership Styles

Correlation Coefficients	Job Satisfaction	Transformational Leadership	Servant Leadership	Transactional Leadership
Job Satisfaction	1.00			
Transformational Leadership	0.52	1.00		
Servant Leadership	0.60	0.85	1.00	
Transactional Leadership	0.45	0.49	0.45	1.00

APPENDIX H: REGRESSION RESULTS

Table 5.

Regression Results – Leadership Styles and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient (std err)
Servant Leadership	.59 (.83)
Transactional Leadership	.33 (.59)

* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

Table 6.

Regression Results – Transformational Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Transformational Leadership	.18 (.02)	.17 (.02)
Male	–	-0.03 (.56)
Black	–	.27 (.97)
Asian	–	1.46 (1.70)
More Than One Race	–	-1.99 (2.38)
Adjusted R^2	.26	.25

* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

Table 7.

Regression Results – Servant Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Servant Leadership	.53 (.06)	.52 (.06)
Male	–	-0.56 (.51)
Black	–	.54 (.90)
Asian	–	2.10 (1.57)
More Than One Race	–	-0.02 (2.22)
Adjusted R²	.36	.35

* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)

Table 8.

Regression Results – Transactional Leadership and Job Satisfaction

Variable	Coefficient[1] (std err)	Coefficient[2] (std err)
Transactional Leadership	.74 (.12)	.73 (.12)
Male	–	-0.22 (.58)
Black	–	.29 (1.01)
Asian	–	2.25 (1.75)
More Than One Race	–	-2.15 (2.46)
Adjusted R²	.20	.20

* = indicates statistical significance (p ≤0.05)