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## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HOLISTIC COACHING IN SPORTS

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TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY AND THE  
CHARACTERISTICS OF HOLISTIC COACHING IN SPORTS

BY

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## **ABSTRACT**

For this study I developed two hypotheses. The first is that the four characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory represent a guideline for holistic coaching in sports because as of now, there is only a definition of holistic coaching, not a set of characteristics. These characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory are Individualized Consideration, Intellectual Stimulation, Inspirational Motivation, and Idealized Influence. The second hypothesis, that Transformational Leadership would relate more to holistic coaching than Transactional Leadership. In order to do this, I surveyed 25 athletes from various athletic teams at the University of Rhode Island. I also interviewed five coaches of various athletic teams at the same university. The first hypothesis proposed that the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory act as a guideline for how to be a holistic coach was supported. Three out of four of the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory were found to have a significant relation with holistic coaching. The only characteristic to not be found significant was Idealized Influence and the most significant was Intellectual Stimulation. The second hypothesis, that those four characteristics are more representative of holistic coaching than Transactional Leadership was also supported. The data confirmed this hypothesis by finding that the highly rated holistic coaches did not use Transactional Leadership tactics in their coaching style but instead used Transformational Leadership.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Historically, coaching could serve as an exemplar of bad leadership. Coaches were seen as abusive and driven by the need for personal validation through team success. The movement to foster more effective coaches producing better rounded athletes champions an approach called holistic coaching. Holistic coaching uses positive methods to develop the individual as an athlete and as a person. But holistic coaching suffers from being defined by outcomes and not processes. Advocates tell coaches that they should set athletic and personal developmental goals for their players instead of providing guidance on how to achieve those goals. To fill this gap, I propose that transformational leadership theory may provide a description of the processes of developmental coaching that the holistic approach is missing.

Transformational Leadership Theory can be connected to holistic coaching by examining the ideas that they both represent. Bass (1990) defines transformational leadership as a “superior form of leadership that occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and the mission of the group and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (p. 2). This proves that Transformational Leadership Theory overlaps with the goals of holistic coaching because they both have the idea of improving the group members as people outside of



their sport or workplace and in turn, this will make their performance within their sport or within the workplace better. He goes on to lay out four specific characteristics of a transformational leader which are, “idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration” (Kelloway & Barling, 2000, p. 355). The characteristic of being an idealized influence means that the coach acts as a role model for players and they are highly respected because of their actions and the way that they conduct themselves. Being an inspirational motivator means that the coach is effectively motivating their players to want to go out and perform at their highest level and buy in to the goals proposed by the coach. A coach using intellectual stimulation with their players means they are challenging players to think differently and try new approaches. Coaches using this characteristic also encourage feedback and input from players when it comes to decision making. Lastly, individualized consideration is illustrated by a coach who tries to adapt their coaching style to each individual player because they recognize each player is different and respond differently to various coaching styles. Transactional Leadership is using rewards and punishments as a way of gaining compliance from team members. Transactional leadership promotes group success by controlling subordinate behavior without particular regard to the person performing the behavior. Transformational leadership promotes group success by influencing subordinate’s values, goals and motivation.

The goal for this research is to improve collegiate coaches by laying out for them how to be effective as a holistic coach and make their athletes better human beings as a whole, not just improve them within their sport. This demonstrates why Transformational Leadership Theory would be the best to relate the holistic coaching

style and those four characteristics would lay out a road map for coaches to use the holistic coaching style effectively.

The idea for this research came out of my own personal experience as a Division I baseball player. Over my four years I had two different coaches with very different styles of coaching. The coach I had my freshman year was a very autocratic coach, where everything had to be his way and there would be no input from the team on any decisions. Team members were afraid to approach him with suggestions or their opinions because of their fear of being yelled at or ignored. This lack of confidence and feeling up tight showed on the field and we did not win many games and came in last in the conference. My sophomore through senior year I had a new coach who was a breath of fresh air for the program. He could be described as using a democratic approach where team input was welcome and created a much more relaxed environment. This new attitude showed on the field with better results and more wins. The new coach having more success with virtually the same team illustrates that players responded better to his more relaxed and open to input coaching style rather than the previous coaches' tactics of yelling and punishment. Although some players find punitive coaching effective in fostering athletic improvement, having this style towards players all the time gets old and leads to resentment. Having a more open and relaxed coaching style works best when athletes know punishment is still an option but just not the first option. The new coaches' one fault was that he was really only focused on improving athletes on the field and not taking time to make us better as

men and prepared for life. I wanted to research what kind of characteristics he could have added to his coaching style that could make him more of a holistic coach.

This research is important because if the results of the study are confirmed, coaches would be able to know what characteristics they need to demonstrate in order to become a more holistic coach. This information would be able to reach a mass of coaches by implementing this into coaching clinics everywhere to make better coaches. Also, coaching journals could add the results to this research into their publications for coaches to read.

The results from this study can also be relevant for the world outside of sports. For instance, a boss in a work place acts as a coach of their employees. They are in charge of the employees' performance and aid in making them better at their jobs just like a coach does with their athletes on the field. Managers or bosses in the work place could adapt to a more holistic style of managing their employees in order to increase their performance. For example, a study done by Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) examined how using a transformational leadership approach to coaching in sports improved the well-being of the team as a whole. The results of this study illustrated that "the analyses revealed positive relationships between perceived transformational leadership, need satisfaction, and well-being" (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014, p. 182). These three positive outcomes could also come out of a manager adapting to become a more transformational leader and using a holistic approach. The results are important because coaching and leadership is so important in the world not only in sports but in the workplace. Improving leaders this way would lead to better outcomes and performance from their subordinates.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The holistic coaching style is widely supported as being the most effective style when it comes to athletes' improvement on and off the field. The following literature demonstrates the connection there is between the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory and what it means to be a holistic coach. These articles highlight the main outcomes that result from being a holistic coach as well as how implementing a transformational leadership style increases athletes' performance on and off the field. The four characteristics of transformational leadership are shown to be used by coaches implementing a holistic style. Therefore, this can be tested by seeing which of the four characteristics holistic coaches use compared to non-holistic coaches. The connection that can be made between holistic coaching and the characteristics of being a transformational leader is that their outcomes on student-athletes reach beyond sports and make them better people and citizens. This illustrates how using coaching strategies like individualized consideration, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and intellectual stimulation can be used as a road map to be a holistic coach.

Holistic coaching in sports is widely supported in literature as being an effective style for developing athletes into better players and better people off the field or court. In a study by West (2016) he explained that one of the most widely respected and successful coaches, not only in college basketball, but in all of sports, used the

holistic coaching style. This coach was John Wooden who coached men's basketball at UCLA from 1948-1975. Other studies done that supported each other by concluding that holistic coaching sports was effective were Bloom et al. (2014), Cassidy (2010), Hardman (2010), and Light (2012). These studies all listed similar outcomes for athletes that experienced a holistic style of coaching. Hansen (2001) conducted a study on holism in career planning and used the Integrated Life Planning Model, which has aspects that could also be used by sports coaches. Two components of the ILP Model that could be adopted by coaches are 1) managing personal transitions and organizational change, and 2) exploring spirituality, purpose and meaning. These could be used by coaches implementing a holistic coaching style to develop their players because athletes experience those two components every day.

The holistic coaching style was validated in these previous articles, while they also did an effective job of explaining the beneficial outcomes for athletes. These outcomes include off the field benefits such as, becoming better students, better community members, and better future spouses. Athletes are also instilled with a higher sense of self-confidence and improved character. As for on the field benefits from holistic coaching, athletes had a better relationship with their teammates and coaches, as well as more of a drive to work at their sport. In turn, this would increase their performance level because they were working harder at getting better.

The actions that the coach used to get positive outcomes through holistic coaching were not explained in previous articles. Transformational Leadership Theory draws similarities to holistic coaching by not only improving athlete's play on the field, by making them feel more respected and to have learned life skills for the future.

The four components of the theory, individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence could be transferred over to the holistic coaching style in order to explain the specific characteristics a coach uses to get the outcomes previously listed.

Transformational leadership, both in sports and the workplace, is explained and tested in the following articles. These articles examine the effect the theory has on athletes and how this form of leadership outside of sports has an effect on subordinates. After testing them, all four components of transformational leadership worked to positively affect the subjects.

Transformational Leadership improving organizational performance was examined by Boerner et al. (2007). They hypothesized that “transformational leaders boost follower performance by stimulating organizational citizenship behavior, whereas they enhance follower innovation by triggering controversial discussion of task related issues (debate)” (Boerner et al., 2007, p. 15). This demonstrates that a transformational leadership style used by a coach would better the team as a whole by bringing them closer together.

A study done by Stenling and Tafvelin (2014) looked at how effective transformational leadership in sports leads to a feeling of well-being by team members. The results of this study were “the analyses revealed positive relationships between perceived transformational leadership, need satisfaction, and well-being” (Stenling & Tafvelin, 2014, p. 182). Using a transformational leadership style is supported because it effectively improves the team as a whole. A holistic approach is

also supported because it promotes an increased feeling of well-being that goes beyond just the sport and translates into the athletes lives outside of sports.

Charbonneau et al. (2001) conducted a study on how a transformational leadership style would indirectly affect an athletes' performance in their sport. The results of this study were to "isolate intrinsic motivation as a mediator of the relationship between transformational leadership and sports performance, suggesting that transformational leadership may enhance intrinsic interest in the task" (Charbonneau et al., 2001, p. 1521). This suggests that transformational leadership invites the athlete to want to work harder at their sport, and that is how the coaching style indirectly affects performance.

Another study analyzing how transformational leadership relates to performance level in sports was done by Callow et al. (2009). Conducted in the United Kingdom, they used frisbee players as their participants, measuring various characteristics of transformational leadership theory. The results of this study "demonstrated that the leadership behaviors of fostering acceptance of group goals and promoting team work, high performance expectations, and individual consideration significantly predicted task cohesion; and fostering acceptance of group goals and promoting teamwork significantly predicted social cohesion" (Callow et al., 2009, p. 395). This reinforces the idea that the transformational leadership style of coaching improves team performance and team chemistry.

Kelloway and Barling (2000) gave an overview of what transformational leadership is and why it is the superior way to be an effective leader. They opened the article by asking in their experience, what characteristics make up the best leaders.

The characteristics that most participants gave to the question fell into the four different categories of transformational leadership. The definition of transformational leadership given was a “superior form of leadership that occurs when leaders broaden and elevate the interests of their employees, when they generate awareness and acceptance of the purposes and the mission of the group and when they stir their employees to look beyond their own self-interest for the good of the group” (Bass, 1990, p. 2). The four components of the theory are idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration. This article gives a good overview of what transformational leadership is.

Developing youth sports coaches is important to the development of kids because sports gives them a feeling of structure and organization that kids who do not play sports will not experience. Vella et al. (2013) conducted a study that examined the effect of putting youth sport coaches through training that gave them transformational leadership skills. After that they measured how they thought they improved as coaches and how those new skills improved their players. One of the results of this study were “Coach training was associated with a predictability and reliability to athlete outcomes that was not evident in athletes of a comparison group” (Vella et al., 2013, p. 513). This illustrates that a coach that was trained to use a transformational leadership style has better personal and team outcomes than a coach that does not use this style.

Gomes (n.d.) looked to examine transformational leadership as a whole as it relates to sports. One finding was that “several studies have demonstrated the impact of transformational leadership in diverse contexts such as the business world, the



healthcare system, the military, education, and others. However, in the case of sports, transformational leadership research has not achieved the same relevance as demonstrated by the number of studies conducted, but the situation is changing, and the preliminary results are encouraging” (Gomes, n.d., p. 46). This proves that there is substantial room for research when it comes to transformational leadership and sports.

Price and Weiss (2012) conducted a study in order to test the transformational leadership theory on a group of adolescent female soccer players. The results of the study that pertained to the coach-peer relationship was “Structural equation modeling revealed that coach leadership was more influential than peer leadership for predicting individual outcomes and collective efficacy” (Price & Weiss, 2012, p. 265). This illustrates how important the coaching style is when it comes to the outcomes of the players.

Yusof and Shah (2008) took a different approach in their study by measuring a coaches’ job satisfaction compared to how their athletic director was treating them. One of the results from the study was “It was concluded that transformational leadership behaviours of athletic directors have a direct relationship with coaches’ job satisfaction in the absence of a strong leadership substitute or neutralizer” (Yusof & Shah, 2008, p. 29). This demonstrates that even coaches prefer a transformational leadership style from their boss to make them enjoy the job the most.

Northouse (2019) goes in depth into the origins of transformational leadership what the definition of transformational leadership is. He defines transformational leadership as “the process whereby a person engages with others and creates a connection that raises the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the

follower. This type of leader is attentive to the needs and motives of followers and tries to help followers reach their fullest potential” (Northouse, 2019, p. 172). This illustrates that transformational leadership motivates its followers to be the best they can be at whatever they are doing.

Being an effective coach relies on more than just making an athlete better at their sport but includes improving them as a person. The following studies highlight what makes an effective coach as well as lists some of the main problem’s athletes feel there are with coaching.

Gilbert (2009) defined coaching as “The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection in character in specific coaching contexts.” This supports the fact that there is more to an effective coach than just improving athletes on the field.

Coaches can cause a large amount stress on athletes that could be fixed by adjusting their coaching style. Woodman (2001) studied the areas of organizational stress in elite sports. More specifically, different leadership issues were examined, and the main two problems were coaches and coaching style. The main coaching style issues listed by Woodman (2001) were “inconsistent coaching style, coach making athletes feel more nervous, unsuited coaching style to athletes, and different coaching styles.” This illustrates that even at the elite level there are gaps in how effective coaches are with developing athletes. These coaching issues could be fixed by implementing the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory and becoming a more holistic coach.

Athletes brought up issues regarding coaches and their coaching styles in the previous articles such as, athletes feeling pressured and nervous because their coach is yelling at them, or athletes do not think their coach is preparing them for life after sports are over. Could implementing a holistic coaching style fill these gaps and address these coaching challenges?

The previous studies proved that the characteristics of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence that make up transformational leadership have a positive effect on athlete's development within their sport and as a person outside their sport. It could be proposed that coaches who are rated high as holistic coaches also are rated as being more of a transformational leader than transactional. Also, athletes who report their coach as being a transformational leader have better outcomes as players and people. These characteristics could be applied to the holistic coaching style to give definitive characteristics that were unclear before for coaches to use in order to get the best outcomes from their players.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **PARTICIPANTS**

The population of interest for the study is collegiate athletes and collegiate coaches. This is because coaches and players in a college athletics atmosphere spend more time together than any other level of coaches and players. From spending three or more hours a day together on the field or on the court, to spending time together on trips interacting at breakfast and around hotels. The participants in the survey portion of the study consisted of 25 collegiate athletes on various teams such as, Women's Soccer, Baseball, Softball, Men's Track, and Volleyball. There were 11 males and 14 female athletes in the study. Participants in the interview portion of the study consisted of five coaches, four men and one woman, from the Volleyball, Men's Soccer, Men's Track, Baseball, and Women's Rowing program. All of the participants selected were from a midsize New England public university with a robust Division I athletic program were selected.

#### **MEASUREMENTS**

The sampling method that was used to choose participants was a sample of convenience. This method was used because since there is Title IX in place there is a close to equal population of male and female athletes in the department so there would be an equal chance of males and females getting selected for the study. There was a

variance between underclassman and upperclassman to demonstrate how a relationship between coach and player can change over the four years in college.

The instrument being used for this portion of the study was a survey. This was the easiest way to conduct this study because there was a large number of participants involved in the study and it was able to get results in the most efficient manner and be the most efficient way to collect the data. The only determinant characteristic of the sample was that the participants are an athlete. The survey consisted of questions asking about age, sex, and year in school. Questions were asked using a Likert Scale from 1-5 with one being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The questions listed in Appendix A asked the participants about their position coach or coach they work most closely with relating to holistic coaching and how they do or do not demonstrate the characteristics of Transformational Leadership. The questions were developed to reflect the underlying dimensions of leadership, but we chose to create questions focusing directly on coaching rather than using published generic questions on leadership. For each of the questions, we include an estimate of the reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. The threshold for acceptable reliable is conventionally set at 0.7 not all of the dimensions reached that level, which reduces our confidence in the results. Questions 7-11 asked the participants' if their coaches are trying to use a holistic coaching style and this reached a reliability score of .713. Question 12-22 went into the four components of Transformational Leadership. More specifically, questions 12-14 asked about Idealized Influence and had a reliability score of .480. Questions 15-17 covered the component of Inspirational Motivation and achieved a reliability score of .877. Questions 18-19 examined Intellectual Stimulation, which

had a reliability score of .603. While questions 20-22 looked into Individualized Consideration and had a reliability score of .750. Finally, Transactional Leadership was measured in questions 23-24 and received a reliability rating of .625 and general happiness with their time at URI was measured in question 25.

For the next portion of the study, data was collected by using the qualitative method of interviewing coaches. This method was effective because it was a more personal way of conducting the study and could get more in-depth information by having the coaches expand on their answers. The only determinant characteristic of the sample was that the participants are a coach. The questions in Appendix B went into what their coaching style is and other questions relating to holistic coaching and transformational leadership. The holistic level and transformational leadership level of the coaches was determined by analyzing the transcript of the interviews and judging which of their responses fit into each measure. The amount of times their answers fit into each of the measures also went into determining the coaches' ratings. After doing this analysis coaches were rated on a 0-2 scale with 0 being low level holistically and 2 being high level holistically. The results of the interviews were then compared to the results from the surveys completed by the athletes that also used the same four components of Transformational Leadership Theory. While the method of analyzing the interviews was not formal, it did receive validation when it came to the results because my judgment of holistic rating corresponded with the ratings from the surveys.

## **PROCEDURE**

The participants of the survey were recruited by approaching them in person and asking them if they would like to be involved in the study and participants were also recruited by email. Surveys were administered to team members in person and in an electronic version by email with the link to the survey included. Surveys were then filled out and returned to me. All of the athletes who participated were given a consent form telling them what the study was about and what the risks of participating might be.

The students' rights were protected by not putting their name on the survey that was filled out and the fact that I was not there when they filled out the survey, so I had no idea what any of the participants answers were. I will also not release any of the names of the participants that were chosen for the survey.

For the interviews, coaches were recruited by email asking if they would like to participate in this study. Coaches then responded and a time was set up to interview them in their athletic office. The coaches all gave permission for the interview to be recorded and the recordings of the interviews were then transcribed so they could be more effectively analyzed. Questions for the coaches were formulated in order to get information on how holistic they were and if they demonstrated the four characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory. All of the coaches who participated were given a consent form telling them what the study was about and what the risks of participating might be.

The coaches' rights were protected by not putting their name on the notes being taken during the interview only what team they are a coach of. I will also not release any of the names of the coaches who were chosen for the interview either.



## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESULTS**

One of the goals of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the four characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory and the process of what goes into a holistic coaching style. Another goal was to prove that holistic coaches use transformational leadership characteristics opposed to transactional leadership methods. The results suggest that both hypotheses were proved to be supported and overall, participants who rated their coaches as being highly holistic were also found to be happier with their athletic experience than participants who rated their coaches as being lower on the holistic scale. Statistically, there was a lot of information to back up the proposed hypotheses, including descriptive statistics and testing of the results that was done using ANOVA. The results of the two hypotheses will be explained and what those results mean. The results of how happy an athlete is with their experience will then be compared to which of the four characteristics had the biggest impact on their experience being positive or not.

#### **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS**

The descriptive statistics bring more clarity to confirming the results of the study. For instance, the average rating players gave their coaches on transactional leadership practices was 3.04. This was rated lower than all of the characteristics of transformational leadership. This confirms that instituting transformational leadership

practices is more effective than transactional leadership practices. The highest average rating between the four characteristics was individualized consideration. This makes sense because athletes would like to have their coaches cater to their individual needs and tailor their coaching style to what they like. On the other hand, idealized influence had the lowest average rating in descriptive statistics and most athletes answered that they were above average when it came to their happiness with their experience with an average rating of 3.92.

## **HYPOTHESIS TESTING**

### *Hypothesis 1*

This hypothesis proposed that the four characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory could be used to describe the characteristics used by a holistic coach in order to get the outcome of becoming a better player and person. It also proposes that transformational leadership characteristics are more effective than transactional leadership when connecting them with a holistic coaching style. After testing the results, MANOVA generated a Wilks' Lambda of 0.19, which means this was found to be statistically significant with a p value of 0.011. We also did a series of one-way ANOVA's to test the relationship between coaches' holism ratings each transformational leadership construct.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
Happy	25	3.92	0.81	N/A
Holism	25	3.45	0.58	0.71
Influence	25	3.64	0.68	0.48
Motivation	25	3.76	0.98	0.87
Stimulation	25	3.68	0.73	0.63
Consideration	25	4.09	0.78	0.75
Transactional	25	3.04	0.84	0.62

**Table 2. ANOVA**

		<b>ANOVA</b>				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
holismp	Between Groups	3.164	2	1.582	7.810	.006
	Within Groups	2.633	13	.203		
	Total	5.798	15			
influencep	Between Groups	.437	2	.219	1.020	.388
	Within Groups	2.785	13	.214		
	Total	3.222	15			
motivep	Between Groups	4.669	2	2.334	5.083	.023
	Within Groups	5.970	13	.459		
	Total	10.639	15			
stimulationp	Between Groups	6.900	2	3.450	14.468	.000
	Within Groups	3.100	13	.238		
	Total	10.000	15			
considerationp	Between Groups	4.930	2	2.465	10.462	.002
	Within Groups	3.063	13	.236		
	Total	7.993	15			
transactionalp	Between Groups	1.751	2	.876	1.362	.290
	Within Groups	8.358	13	.643		
	Total	10.109	15			

### *Holism*

This measure examined how the coaches demonstrated characteristics that fit the definition of holistic coaching, which is developing players for life outside of sports and as people so they can be more successful in the future. The results of this also supported the hypothesis because coaches who were rated as high from their interviews were also rated highly by their players in the survey with an average rating of 3.70. On the other hand, coaches who were rated as low from their interviews were also rated as low from the survey results with an average holistic rating of 2.53. This was found to be statistically significant with a number of .006. The measure provides independent validation of the judgment used categorizing coaches as high, moderate or low in holism based on the interview.

### *Idealized Influence*

This measure examined how the coaches acted as a role model for their team and that they would make decisions in the best interest of the team. The results from this measure were that the coaches who were rated as being highly holistic in their interviews also had a higher rating for how they demonstrated the characteristic of an idealized influence than coaches who were rated as being medium or low on the holistic scale. The coaches rated high holistically from interviews had an average idealized influence rating from the athlete surveys of 3.86 while the coaches on the low end of the spectrum had an average influence rating of 3.44. These average ratings were the closest together of any of the four components measured in the study. This suggests that idealized influence is not statistically significant because of the lack of separation in the average ratings. This would mean that idealized influence is not as

important to being successful as a holistic coach than the other three components of the theory because this characteristic is so important to coaching in general that there is not a distinction between holistic and non-holistic coaching.

#### *Inspirational Motivation*

This measure examined how much the coach is able to motivate their players and inspire them with a clear vision for the team. The results from this measure were that the coaches who were rated as being highly holistic in their interviews also had a very high rating for how they exhibited the characteristic of Inspirational Motivation than coaches who were rated as being medium or low on the holistic scale. The coaches who were rated as being highly holistic from their interviews had a mean from the surveys of 4.20. On the other hand, coaches who were rated low holistically had an average rating of 2.77 for inspirational motivation. This suggests that Inspirational Motivation is an important characteristic for athletes when determining if their coach is being holistic or not. This was found to be statistically significant with a number of .023.

#### *Intellectual Stimulation*

This measure examined how much the coach challenges their athletes to think differently and think independently so they can develop. The results from this measure were that the coaches who were rated as being highly holistic in their interviews also had a very high rating for how they displayed the characteristic of an Intellectual Stimulation than coaches who were rated as being lower than them on the holistic scale. Coaches whose interview results put them in the highly holistic category for this measure had an average rating of 4.20 from the athlete surveys. The coaches who were

put in the low holistic category had an average rating of 2.50. This was the most significant difference in all four characteristics between the highly holistic coaches and the coaches who were rated as being low level holistically. This makes this category the most statistically significant at .000 and also suggests that this is the most important characteristic of the four for an athlete when they are deciding how holistic their coaches' style is.

#### *Individualized Consideration*

This measure looked at how effectively a coach tends to their player's individual needs and supports their players. This characteristic had the most interesting results when comparing high, medium, and low holistic levels to the survey results. The high-level coaches had a high average survey rating of 4.36 while the low-level coaches had an average survey rating of 3.00. The most unique result came when examining the medium-level coaches and their average survey rating was an extremely high 4.55, which was a higher average rating than the high-level holistic coaches.

#### *Transactional Leadership*

Transactional Leadership focuses on using punishment and rewards as ways of gaining compliance from their team. The results illustrated that coaches who were considered to be highly holistic from their interviews had a low rating of 2.65 when examining if they used a Transactional Leadership. On the other hand, coaches with a low holistic rating had an average transactional rating of 3.33, which is slightly above average. This supports the hypothesis that the characteristics of Transformational Leadership are more important to holistic coaching than Transactional Leadership.

## *Hypothesis 2*

This hypothesis proposed that participants were overall more-happy with their athletic experience when their coach used a transformational leadership style opposed to a transactional leadership style.

## *Happiness Rating*

We examined the relationship between the athlete's reports of their coaches' use of transformational and transactional leadership behavior and their judgments of their own happiness with their experiences as an athlete. There was a statistically significant relationship between the predictors and the outcome variable ( $F_{5,19} = 3.96$ ;  $p=.012$ ). The resulting regression equation using standardized beta coefficients was  $.47(\text{Idealized Influence}) + .169(\text{Inspirational Motivation}) + -.004(\text{Intellectual Stimulation}) + .162(\text{Individualized Consideration}) + .130(\text{Transactional Leadership} = \text{Happiness}$ . Only one coefficient, idealized influence, was significantly different from 0 ( $t=2.12$ ;  $p=.047$ ). In fact, because of the power reduction coming from the additional predictors, a model only including idealized influence accounts for more variation in happiness than the full model. The full model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of .382 while the influence only model has an adjusted  $R^2$  of .423. This result is surprising because intellectual stimulation was found to be the most important characteristic when it came to if coaches were found to be holistic or not.

Both hypotheses were supported when examining the results of the study. It was proved that individualized consideration, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence can be used as a guide for how a holistic coach to act in order to get the best outcome. Also, a Transformational Leadership style was



found to be more effective than a Transactional Leadership style when it came to being a holistic coaching. We were also able to find other important information, like which Transformational Leadership characteristic had the biggest impact on an athlete as far as determining if they were happy with their experience as an athlete at their school or not.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Hypothesis 1*

This idea of implementing the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory to make it easier for holistic coaches to get the best outcomes was confirmed. The fact that this was confirmed is important for the future of coaching because it can give any coach looking to become a more holistic coach a road map for the actions that they need to take. Previously, holistic coaching only focused on the outcomes of becoming a better athlete and more importantly, a better complete human being with no guidance of how to get there. The most interesting result came when examining the characteristic of individual consideration. In these results it was found that middle level holistic coaches were found to be rated higher than any of the higher rated holistic coaches. This could suggest that if a coach is too caring for their players and focus too much on being supportive instead of other coaching characteristics then Individualized Consideration loses its effectiveness to players when deciding if they are holistic or not. Both high and medium level coaches from interviews have a very high average survey rating so the results are still significant. Transformational leadership was found to be the preferred coaching style when rating holistic coaching to transactional leadership. The possible reasoning for this could be that athletes feel like they are more cared for by their coaches than if their coaches are just using a punishment and reward technique. Transactional Leadership does not involve getting to know players

better and trying to improve them as people, it only teaches athletes that they are rewarded for doing something good and punished for doing something bad. This is not always the way it will be in life after college so student-athletes should not get used to this. When a coach challenges a player to give input or think differently using intellectual stimulation, they are teaching the player to think for themselves and develop these skills. When a coach tries to get to know player through individualized consideration this builds a connection not found through transactional leadership and a player is more likely to want to perform for that coach. The results demonstrate how important it is for a coach to use these four characteristics when leading by a holistic coaching style.

### *Hypothesis 2*

None of the characteristics had a big impact on whether a student-athlete was happy with their experience or not except for idealized influence. This was a surprising result because of the fact that it would make sense for an athlete to be happier if their coach was tailoring their coaching style to them through individualized consideration. A possible reason for idealized influence having the biggest impact on happiness might be because if a coach is effectively acting as a role model then an athlete would be happier with the environment that the coach is creating. Another reason for this might be that if a coach is someone a player looks up to then they would be happier interacting with that coach because they can relate to them and they want to learn from them. This would make them happy with their experience because of their ability to get along with their coach and want to be like them some day. Some athletes might perceive idealized influence to mean different things and athletes have

different characteristics they look for in a role model that could affect their interaction with that coach and their overall happiness.

### *Contrasting Coaching*

After conducting the interviews with coaches, it was apparent that there was more than one way to demonstrate the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory effectively. Coaches who were found to be highly holistic after the study, used different tactics to demonstrate the four characteristics of the theory. This illustrates that there is more than one way to be use the holistic coaching style successfully. Two characteristics that proved this to be true were Intellectual Stimulation and Idealized Influence.

### *Intellectual Stimulation*

For instance, when talking about Intellectual Stimulation, one coach said “you have to convince them that a growth mindset is a thing. Convince them that they have to believe that they are capable of improving... as a player.” This successfully accomplishes Intellectual Stimulation because the coach is directly challenging the players to think different in order to improve themselves. On the other hand, another highly rated coach said “I’m not spoon feeding them, I’m not babying them, and they need to learn early they have responsibilities. I think the kids realize that you have to establish a value system.” This method of challenging the players by the coach is more indirect by putting more responsibility on the athlete to develop and learn like they will have to do in the real world. Both of these coaches used different methods, but both were successful in accomplishing being Intellectually Stimulating.

### *Idealized Influence*

Another example of this is illustrated when looking at the characteristic of Idealized Influence. There is more than one way for a coach to be a role model for their players and this was shown in the interviews. For example, one coach said, “trying to guide them as best as possible and not having everybody learn from their own mistakes, having them learn from I made this mistake (referring to himself), somebody else made this mistake, let’s not go down that path.” This is a direct approach of being a role model by telling players what they should and shouldn’t do based on their own experiences as a person. A more indirect way of being a role model is: “For them to see you talking to their families when their families come out, it shows you’re a person not just their coach.” A coach does this so their players see what a person should act like around other people’s families, that being kind, and showing an interest in people around you, is important.

These examples illustrate how there can be more than one way for a coach to display the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory and this is why it is important for us to analyze these interviews. It can’t be assumed that everything falls into one strict category.

The results of this study indicate that three out of the four characteristics listed in Transformational Leadership Theory are important when it comes to acting as a holistic coach. The characteristic that was found to not relate to holistic coaching as much was idealized influence because it is used by non-holistic and holistic coaches as a central approach, so it can’t specifically be isolated. This is because there was such a little difference in the averages that the data was not statistically significant. The other three characteristics were statistically significant, with the most important

characteristic being Intellectual Stimulation. Another important result of the study is that Transactional Leadership was rated very low when it comes effectively being a holistic coach in sports. This supports the hypothesis that Transformational Leadership Theory is more effective than Transactional Leadership Theory.

While this study only looks at holistic coaching and not what makes an effective coach in general. The results support what the definition of coaching effective is. In a previously mentioned study by Gilbert (2009, he gives the definition as, “The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes’ competence, confidence, connection in character in specific coaching contexts.” This agrees with the theory of holistic coaching that there is more to coaching athletes than just making them better in their sport.

Another previously mentioned study that supports the outcome of this study was by Woodman (2001). His study looks into what the main issues that players have with coaches that make them ineffective. The results of this study were, “inconsistent coaching style, coach making athletes feel more nervous, unsuited coaching style to athletes, and different coaching styles.” This makes the argument that Individualized Consideration is important to be an effective coach because getting to know each of their players individually makes it easier to suit coaching styles to athletes as well as making players feel more comfortable with their coach.

While there are not any studies which relate holistic coaching and Transformational Leadership Theory, Boerner et al. (2007) examined how transformational leadership can improve organizational behavior. This can easily be related to an athletic team because the head coach is the boss and the players are their

subordinates. The results of this study were, “transformational leaders boost follower performance by stimulating organizational citizenship behavior, whereas they enhance follower innovation by triggering controversial discussion of task related issues (debate)”. This is similar to what the results of transformational leadership has on an athletic team after examining the data from my study.

Lastly, the survey questions and interview questions asked in my study relate to how a previously mentioned study was done. Kelloway and Barling (2000) asked participants questions about what they felt made up the best leader and most of the results fell into the four categories of Transformational Leadership Theory. Something similar was done in this study by asking participants to rate coaching behaviors based on the characteristics of transformational leadership. Those who participated in the study rated Individualized Consideration, Inspirational Motivation, Idealized Influence, and Intellectual Stimulation as important when it came to what represented a holistic coaching style.

The results of this study could have real world implications if they are communicated the right way. This study highlights how important and effective holistic coaching is when it comes to sports teams. For most college athletes, sports will come to an end after they graduate from college and it is important that they are prepared for life after sports when they go into the real world. If coaches take advantage of the time that they get with these athletes they can have a massive impact on their development not just within their sport, but also develop them as a person outside of it. If this information of the positive impact they could have on athletes about adopting a holistic coaching style was passed on to them either at conventions or

just in athletic department meetings, then there could be a real change in coaching philosophies. Also, giving them the set of four characteristics from transformational leadership that they can use to be a holistic coach, then it would be a lot easier for them to change or adjust.

These same principles could be used in a workplace setting as well. The same implications apply because there is a boss and employees, which is the same concept of a coach and their players. As seen in previous studies that were mentioned, if a boss uses the characteristics of transformational leadership when interacting with their employees then there will be better job performance.

In conclusion, this study was important because of its relevancy to what many athletes experience in their athletic career. The effect coaches can have on their athletes is not fully appreciated because the coaches don't always see the end result after the player leaves college. They may only see the effect they have on an athlete with their performance in their sport. Giving coaches a road map to improving their coaching style by informing them of what holistic coaching is and telling them about the four characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory that relate to holistic coaching could have a big impact.

### **Limitations**

A limitation of this study is that the sample size for the study was smaller than expected. The sample size being small could lessen the trust in the results because the sample might not be representative of the community of athletes as a whole. This happened because athletes were busy and it was hard to get access to some teams, while some coaches never emailed back about giving me their team email



list to use to send an online survey. Also, a few coaches never responded to interview requests, so I was only able to meet coaches who responded. Only one university athletic department was involved in the study and the results may not reflect the views of other athletes and coaches from other institutions. Limiting the study to such a small sample size and only one university athletic department could also lessen trust in the results because different athletes have different cultures and their results might be different. In order to have complete trust in the results of this kind of study it would be necessary to study multiple university athletic departments with larger sample sizes. In the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, some of the measures tested were found to be unreliable. Even though they were found to be unreliable, it was evident from the results that coaching kids and student-athletes is about more than just developing skills within their sport. The happiness rating that was found to be most impacted by idealized influence could also be affected by the small sample size and it could be affected by the athlete's interpretation of what being a good role model is.

If we were able to conduct a more extensive study, more data would have been able to be discovered and analyzed. For instance, there would have been the ability to compare if there were any differences between male and female athletes when it came to which transformational leadership characteristics impacted them most. Including more coaches in the study would mean we would have been able to examine if coaches felt they needed to use the characteristics differently when it came to coaching males versus coaching females.

## **Future Research**

If someone were to replicate this study or do something similar to it, then it would be important for them to use a bigger sample size for athletes and coaches. The reason for doing this is so data relating to gender differences and differences in age could be used. Another idea for future research is to expand the survey and interview to ask more questions about Transactional Leadership so the researcher could go more in-depth in comparing the two theories. This current study could also be expanded to include studying multiple university athletic departments at one time to see if the athletic department cultures have an effect on how coaches and athletes responded.

Former student-athletes who have already graduated and are in the working world could be a subject of another study. The study could still focus on the characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory and holistic Coaching, but this time ask athletes which of the four characteristics translated most when transitioning into the world after sports, if they did at all. The results could potentially confirm the important role that coaching, and college athletics play in developing players as people outside of sports and making sure they are prepared for life after graduation.

Participants in this study could be former student-athletes from colleges across the country in order to see if different schools had different results with their athletes.

Conducting more studies involving the relationship coaches have with developing athletes as people is important for improving coaches. If coaches realize the impact they can have on a kid or student-athlete outside of sports, then they would be more likely to adopt a coaching style that was tailored towards doing that like holistic coaching. Getting even more specific, if coaches knew which of the four

characteristics of Transformational Leadership Theory translated most to success in the work place and other real-world success, then they could make an effort to implement that characteristic into their coaching.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A

**\*Please answer questions based on your position coach or coach you work most closely with, not necessarily your head coach\***

#### **Athlete Survey**

- 1) Age: \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) Gender:
- 3) Year in School: Freshman Sophomore Junior Senior 5<sup>th</sup> year
- 4) Years at URI:
- 5) Sport:
- 6) Coach you work most closely with:
- 7) Your coach tries to improve you as a person outside of sports

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

- 8) Your coach tries to prepare as a person for life after sports

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

- 9) Your coach only tries to develop your skills pertaining to your sport and not outside of it

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

10) Your coach tries to make all of the decisions without input from players

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

11) Your coach tries to ask for input from the team in making decisions

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

12) You coach acts as a role model for the team

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

13) Your team takes on the personality of your coach

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

14) Your coach tries to make decisions that are in the best interests of the team

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

15) Your coach remains positive even in the face of adversity

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

16) Your coach lays out clear team goals for the future and sticks to them

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

17) Your coach effectively motivates the team to perform

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

18) Your coach looks for input from team members before making decisions

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

19) Your coach challenges you to try a different approach than you are used to

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

20) Your coach tailors their coaching style to individual player's needs

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

21) You grew as a person during your time as a Division 1 athlete at URI

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

22) You grew as an athlete during your time as a Division 1 athlete at URI

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

23) The coach relies on yelling, punishment, or reduced playing time to correct mistakes

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

24) The coach uses rewards for following program rules such as increased playing time

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

25) I am happy with my experiences as an athlete at the University of Rhode Island

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

## APPENDIX B

### COACH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Individualized Consideration**

- Describe your feelings on the importance of getting to know each one of your players individually.
- Give me an example of how you try and tailor your coaching style to each individual players' needs?
- Give me an example of how you try to develop your players as people off the field as well as their skills within their sport?

#### **Intellectual Stimulation**

- Give me an example of a time you tried to challenge a player to think differently or try something different that you will improve their play?
- Describe the importance of laying out specific goals for the team.
- How do you handle how much input the players have before you make a decision for the team?

#### **Inspirational Motivation**

- Do you try and motivate your team? or do you leave it to them to internally motivate themselves? If you do what are your motivation techniques?

#### **Idealized Influence**

- Describe how you try and act as a role model for your players.

#### **General Coaching Style**

- How would you describe your coaching style?



### **Preparing for Life**

- Tell me about some ways you try and prepare your players for life after sports.
- Describe the off the field growth you see from your players from when they come in as freshman compared to when they leave as seniors.
- (Soccer Only) How much of an added responsibility do you feel to develop your international players to the American culture and make them feel more at home since they are so far away from their homes?

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