



Servant as Leader: The Effects of Servant-Leaders on Trust, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intentions in Intercollegiate Athletics

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Abstract

This study examined the possible influence of servant leadership in NCAA Division III intercollegiate athletics. Using a survey research design, 326 athletic department employees were asked to provide their perceptions of their athletic directors' servant leadership characteristics and respond to questions on trust in leader, turnover intentions, and job satisfaction. Results from structural equation modeling suggested servant-leaders significantly and positively impacted perceptions of trust in leader and job satisfaction. Additionally, there was a significant effect of perceptions of servant leadership on turnover intentions as mediated by job satisfaction. Sport leaders taking a servant leadership approach in their organizations could help nurture a trusting, collaborative, and more satisfying work environment.

Keywords: Leadership, Effective Leadership, Ethics, Sport

In 2006, a task force of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) completed a report on life and work balance in intercollegiate athletics, citing that the “performance-incentive model that constrains personal and family obligations can jeopardize the retention and inclusion of talented and motivated staff” (p. 1). The current environment, according to the executive report, leads to frequent turnover, high stress, and poor health. At the time of the report, 57% athletic staff members were considering leaving athletics or had yet to decide if they wanted to stay, and 52% were working more than 55 hours per week. Potentially, low job satisfaction results when employees become burnt out, are unable to balance personal and professional obligations, and feel undervalued. At the conclusion of the report, the task force suggested that focusing on the people who work in intercollegiate athletics was essential for athletic departments to succeed.

The leadership provided by athletic directors has an opportunity to prioritize people over results, a concept that is especially important in the collegiate athletic environment when employees of institutions facilitate academic misconduct (e.g., the University of North Carolina), cover up failed drug tests (e.g., Syracuse University), and irresponsibly handle sexual assaults (e.g., Florida State University) for the sake of athletic success. As many become disenchanting with intercollegiate sports, due to ethical failures like these as well as other frustrating aspects such as long hours and low pay, it is essential for athletic directors to embrace leadership that keeps employees satisfied, motivated, and ethically responsible. The question is, though, what type of leadership can be implemented to reach these desirable outcomes?

In the context of sport, servant leadership could be a viable form of leadership in intercollegiate athletics (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013; DeSensi, 2014). The NCAA claims it “prioritizes academics, well-being and fairness so college athletes can succeed in the field, in the classroom and for life” (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2019). Given the NCAA’s mission to ensure intercollegiate athletics are an integral part of the educational process, the potential congruency between leadership in intercollegiate athletics and servant leadership seems highly feasible. This emphasis may be especially poignant in NCAA Division III institutions, which do not award athletic scholarships, play at a lower competitive level, and are specifically committed to placing the highest priority on how athletics and academics are compatible and mutually beneficial (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2018). This focus on academics minimizes conflicts with athletics, such as through shorter practice and playing seasons to support timely graduation and supporting integration of athletes into campus life like other students. In Division I and II institutions that truly prioritize academics, as the NCAA claims, servant leadership could contribute to academics, athletes’ well-being, and fairness.

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Greenleaf stressed that being a servant-leader means living a life of significance focused on serving others.

It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead....The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit or, at least, not be further deprived? (Greenleaf, 1977, pp. 13-14)

Servant-leaders possess several characteristics that Spears (1995) identified as listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community. Similarly, Hunter (1998) enumerated patience, kindness, humility, respectfulness, selflessness, forgiveness, honesty, commitment, and service and sacrifice as standing the test of time for servant-leaders. Additionally, Laub (1999) specified servant-leaders value people, develop people, build community, display authenticity, provide leadership, and share leadership. In describing a model of servant leadership, Van Dierendonck and Heeren (2006) identified integrity, authenticity, courage, objectivity, humility, empowerment, emotional intelligence, stewardship, and conviction as motivational aspects.

Van Dierendonck (2011) stated servant-leaders empower and develop people, demonstrate humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, and stewardship, and provide direction. Trust and fairness serve as important mediators in encouraging self-actualization, positive job attitudes, performance, and a stronger organizational focus. As such, servant leadership is rooted in ethical and caring behavior. The Servant Leadership Scale (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011) defined effective leadership through the constructs of empowerment, accountability, standing back, humility, authenticity, courage, forgiveness, and stewardship. Consistent among all these characterizations of servant leadership is serving others, listening with empathy, building trust, demonstrating integrity and other values, empowering others, and nurturing relationships. Pulling these characteristics of servant-leaders together, Kouzes and Posner (2010) concluded,

Exemplary leaders do not place themselves at the center; they place others there. They do not seek the attention of people; they give it to others. They do not focus on satisfying their own aims and desires; they look for ways to respond to the needs and interests of their constituents. 'Servant leadership' is what many have called this relationship, wherein the task of leaders is to serve others. (p. 138)

As former Super Bowl champion coach Tony Dungy reported, the Indianapolis Colts drafted players with character because talent could not make up for a lack of character. Dungy provides evidence of a changing paradigm in leadership as leaders shift from traditional autocratic, hierarchical, and highly competitive approaches to being servant-leaders who behave in ethical ways based on their values. For

example, in his interview of Dungy in 2010, Mark Sanborn describes Dungy's story and success in the National Football League and life as a case-study in servant leadership. Dungy's services to others are described repeatedly in his books *Quiet Strength*, *The Soul of a Team*, *Uncommon*, and *The Mentor Leader*.

Servant-leaders enhance the personal growth of people and facilitate teamwork for greater success. Servant-leaders are devoted to serving the needs of organizational members by listening and building a sense of community. Laub (2000) extended the application of how servant-leaders can lead this changing paradigm in leadership by describing a servant organization as "an organization in which the characteristics of servant leadership are displayed through the organizational culture and values and practices by the leadership and workforce" (p. 25).

Servant leadership is conducive to stronger organizational connections by helping create a culture wherein employees display positive attitudes and work behaviors (Russell & Stone, 2002). As followers reciprocate servant-leaders' positive actions, the values of honesty, integrity, warmth, caring, and concern for others pervade the organization's work environment leading to greater job satisfaction for all (Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010; van Dierendonck, 2011; van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant-leaders do not make themselves the focus of attention or credit; rather, they place others at the center and shine the spotlight on the accomplishments of others (Collins, 2001; Kouzes & Posner, 2010). When people are more satisfied with their work environment, they are more productive and committed to organizational goals (Goh & Low, 2014). The fit between individual expectations and the realities of organizational life yield greater job satisfaction and less turnover (Schneider, 1987). As servant-leaders build trust and focus on serving others and meeting their needs, this trust in leader results in greater job satisfaction and less turnover (Jaramillo, Grisaffe, Chonko, & Roberts, 2009).

In a review of servant leadership literature, Parris and Welty Peachey (2013) suggest the emphasis on service to others helps people resolve challenges of the twenty-first century and build a better tomorrow. By facilitating the growth, development, and general well-being of the individuals who comprise an organization, servant-leaders will achieve organizational goals on a long-term basis (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004). Burton and Welty Peachey (2013) further propose that servant leadership differs from other leadership approaches because of its explicit emphasis on meeting the needs of followers. Servant leadership, they espouse, benefits people by awakening, engaging, and developing employees while appealing to their hearts, minds, and spirits. This people-centered focus becomes the moral foundation of servant leadership (Graham, 1991). By creating a positive work environment, servant-leaders increase job satisfaction and performance (Neubert, Hunter, & Tolentino, 2016; Parris & Welty Peachey, 2013).

College athletic directors have an opportunity to improve the organizational climate and work lives of employees in their organizations by using servant leadership. We hypothesize that employees are more likely to trust their athletic directors if they perceive they exhibit behaviors of servant-leaders. If athletic directors who behave as servant-leaders contribute to perceptions of greater trust, increased job satisfaction, and less turnover, the implications for the preparation of

students earning degrees in sport management and for aspiring athletic directors during their careers to develop and model servant-leader characteristics are significant. The purpose of this study was to examine servant leadership in intercollegiate athletics from the perspective of employees to determine its impacts on trust in leader, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

Trust in Leader

Servant-leaders develop trust among those they serve through listening, behaving ethically, empathizing, and building community (Liden, Wayne, Liao, & Meuser, 2014), each of which are characteristics associated with servant leadership. Liden, Wayne, Zhao, and Henderson (2008) posit that servant-leaders building trust with followers is the most significant effect of listening. Furthermore, De Pree (1997) states, "Trust grows when people see leaders translate their personal integrity into organizational fidelity" (p. 127). Leaders must demonstrate competence to maintain trust, he adds.

Trust in leader is defined as the willingness of a subordinate to be vulnerable to the behaviors and actions of the leader that are beyond the subordinate's control (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Trust and fairness are related to many positive attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes in organizations (Brown, 2007; Brown & Mitchell, 2010; Lencioni, 2005; Victor & Cullen, 1988). Perceived level of servant leadership has a positive impact on trust in leader (Joseph & Winston, 2005; Sendjaya & Pekerti, 2010). Servant-leaders elicit the trust of followers when they prioritize followers' best interests (Joseph & Winston, 2005). Additionally, Stone et al. (2004) argue servant-leaders trust their employees to act in the best interest of the organization.

Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention

Servant leadership influences the job satisfaction of employees (Jenkins & Stewart, 2010; Shaw & Newton, 2014). For example, in nursing departments where staff members perceive managers demonstrate a higher servant leadership orientation, a significant positive impact on individual employee job satisfaction occurs (Jenkins & Stewart, 2010). In the field of education, higher job satisfaction and teacher retention rates predominate when principals display traits of servant-leaders (Cerit, 2009; Shaw & Newton, 2014). Shaw and Newton (2014) report servant leadership improves job satisfaction in public school teachers. They also propose that leadership training for principals and other school leaders includes how to be more servant-like in meeting the needs of teachers and advocate for adding content related to the values of servant leadership in leadership preparation programs.

According to Chan and Mak (2014), trust in the leader mediates the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction of employees, especially for those with fewer years with an organization. This trust may in turn positively sway subordinates' attitudes, job satisfaction, and retention. Employee commitment, as illustrated through job satisfaction and retention, directly connects with leader behavior (Kim, Magnusen, Andrew, & Stoll, 2012).

Two important predictors of turnover intentions are job satisfaction and trust in supervisor (Jaramillo, Mulki, & Solomon, 2006; Mulki, Jaramillo, & Locander, 2006). Voluntary turnover is one aspect of retention having a pervasive negative effect on organizations because it disrupts the ability to sustain and develop mutually beneficial relationships with customers (Palmatier, Scheer, & Steenkamp, 2007), while simultaneously burdening the organization with costs. More positively, some companies report a lower number of employees wanting to change jobs when led by servant-leaders (Babakus, Yavas, & Ashill, 2011; Jaramillo et al., 2009). With servant-leaders emphasizing personal development and empowerment of followers (Greenleaf, 1977, cited in Spears, 1995), it is not surprising followers who work for servant-leaders are less likely to leave.

In summary, the literature suggests positive relationships between servant leadership and trust in leader, job satisfaction, and retention. When servant-leaders model serving and putting others first, these actions build trust among employees. A people-centered organizational culture led by a trustworthy servant-leader is more likely to have employees who are satisfied with their jobs with no plans to leave. Intercollegiate athletic departments would greatly benefit from having trustworthy leaders and highly satisfied employees. Further investigation of the relationships between servant leadership, trust in leader, job satisfaction and retention should be undertaken within the context of sport, and specifically intercollegiate sport, especially since Burton and Welty Peachey (2013) suggested it could be a viable form of leadership in this context.

This study examines whether athletic department employees perceive their athletic directors to be servant-leaders and the impact of servant leadership on the organizational outcomes of trust in leader, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions within NCAA Division III athletic departments. Based on the literature, the model in Figure 1 was created to depict our examination of these relationships and was used to test the hypothesized relationships between variables. Hypotheses are listed below the model.

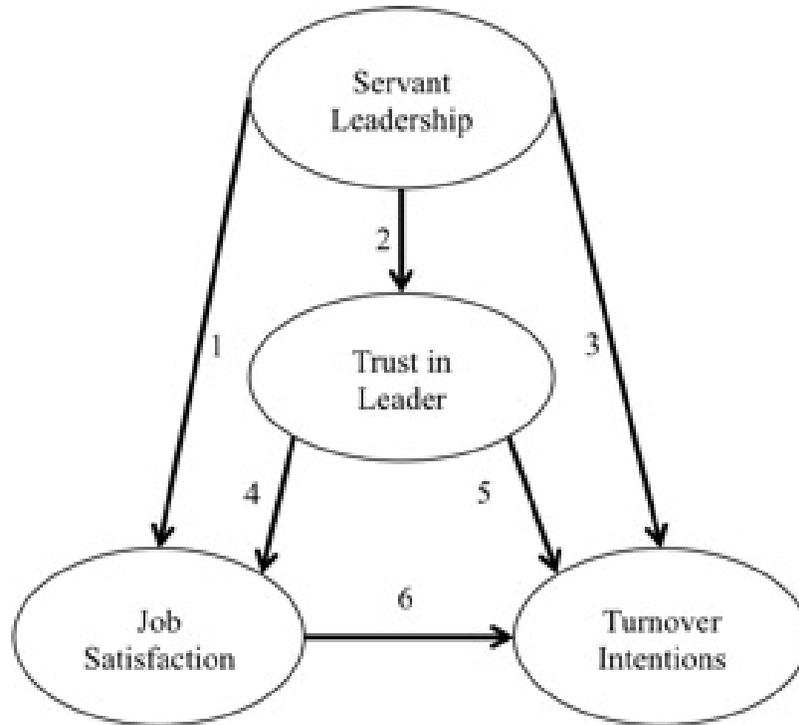


Figure 1. Hypothesized model for testing the effects of servant leadership on trust in leader, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. *Note. Numbers are used to label the paths for description in the model comparisons table (Table 7) and correspond to the hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Servant leadership will have a direct, positive effect on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: Servant leadership will have a direct, positive effect on trust in leader.

Hypothesis 3: Servant leadership will have a direct, negative effect on turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 4: Trust in leader will have a direct, positive effect on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5: Trust in leader will have a direct, negative effect on turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 6: Job satisfaction will have a direct, negative effect on turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 7: Job satisfaction will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 8: Trust in leader will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 9: Trust in leader will mediate the relationship between servant leadership and job satisfaction.

METHOD

This study used a cross-sectional survey design to examine employees in NCAA Division III athletic departments. Division III universities are the largest membership group in the NCAA but receive very little attention from sport management researchers. For this study, Division III athletic department employees were the best population to focus on because the philosophy of Division III is congruent with the ideals of servant leadership. This study was part of a larger examination of servant leadership in Division III athletics, which also included measures of ethical climate.

Participants

We recruited participants in this study via email. One researcher created a database of all athletic department employees listed in the directories on official athletic department websites. The only employees on this list that were not included in the database were student employees, faculty athletic representatives, or individuals listed on the website who were not employed primarily by the university, such as team physicians. We separated athletic directors from other athletic staff members. The final database included 16,133 potential respondents. We sent the survey to a random sample of 8,000 athletic department employees through Qualtrics. While 529 athletic department employees started the survey, 339 completed it. The final sample size was 326 because we deleted 13 cases with missing data on the non-descriptive variables (scale questions).

Measures

To create the initial survey, we reviewed the literature on servant leadership and outcomes of servant leadership. The survey included questions from the Servant Leadership Survey (van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011), Turnover Intentions Scale (Ganesan & Weitz, 1996), Trust in Leader Scale (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994), and Job Satisfaction Scale (Seashore, Lawler, Mirvis & Cammann, 1983). In addition, the survey included a measure of ethical climate and demographic questions.

Servant Leadership Scale. Van Dierendonck & Nuijten (2011) created the Servant Leadership Scale after an extensive literature review and thorough data analysis. It included eight dimensions with 30 items. The dimensions included empowerment (7 items), accountability (3 items), standing back (3 items), humility (5 items), authenticity (4 items), courage (2 items), forgiveness (3 items), and stewardship (3 items). In the current study, all items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. After examining the psychometric properties of the scale, they determined it was reliable and valid. They found factorial validity of the eight-factor model and good model fit ($\chi^2 = 562.5$, $df = 377$; RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05, CFI = .94, TLI = .93). The internal consistency of the subscales was acceptable as Cronbach's alpha was .89 for empowerment, .81 for accountability, .76 for standing back, .91 for humility, .82 for authenticity, .69 for courage, .72 for forgiveness, and

.74 for stewardship. Finally, after conducting additional studies with other leadership, organizational commitment, and performance scales, they found support for content, discriminant, and criterion-related validity.

Job Satisfaction Scale. The Job Satisfaction Scale (Seashore et al., 1983) is part of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire. It included three items (All in all, I am satisfied with my job; In general, I do not like my job; In general, I like working here) measured on a five-point Likert-type scale. Chan and Mak (2014) utilized this scale in their research on servant leadership, organizational tenure, trust in leader, and attitudes. In their study, the coefficient alpha for the scale was .82.

Turnover Intention Scale. Turnover intentions were measured using a scale Ganesan and Weitz (1996) adapted from Keaveney (1992). In the current study, the scale included five statements measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The Cronbach's alpha for this scale in their study was .83. These five items measure short-term intentions to stay with the organization. Items were adapted for use in the intercollegiate athletics context.

Trust in Leader Scale. Robinson and Rousseau (1994) measured trust in leader by creating a scale based on Gabarro and Athos' (1976) bases of trust. This scale was used to measure trust in leader in this study and included eight items measured on a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). In their study, the scale's Cronbach's alpha was .92. Chan and Mak (2014) used this scale on a study on servant leadership and determined the reliability was good (Cronbach's alpha = .91).

Procedure

Three individuals working in Division II athletics were sent the survey to review the structure, format, and language of the questions. After making changes, the survey was coded into Qualtrics and a confidential link was created. Participants were sent an email with the anonymous link through Qualtrics. Two reminders were sent in the two weeks following the initial email. To check for nonresponse bias, the mean score on each construct for those responding to the initial email was compared to that of those who responded after the follow-up emails were sent. There were no statistically significant differences across the two groups on any construct.

Analysis

Data were downloaded into SPSS Statistics Version 22. Data were analyzed in SPSS to record descriptive statistics. The data file was then uploaded into MPlus Version 7.4 for further analysis. Cases that did not include data on all the scale variables were deleted list-wise.

The model was analyzed using two-step modeling, advocated by Kline (2011). First, the measurement model was run using a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in MPlus. Reliability of measures and model fit were examined prior to fitting the structural model. Next, multiple models were run in MPlus using

structural equation modeling (SEM). Structural models were used to examine the relationships between servant leadership, trust in leader, turnover intentions, and job satisfaction. Robust maximum-likelihood estimation was used. CFA and SEM were used because they adjust for measurement error while estimating relationships among variables (Brown, 2006; Kline, 2011).

Results

In the sample, employees had worked in athletics for a range of 1 to 47 years, with a mean of 12 years (SD = 10.10). On average, they had worked for their current athletic director for an average of 4.17 years (SD = 4.25). While 100% of the sample had worked for Division III, at some point in their careers 21.2% had worked in Division I and 12.3% had worked in Division II. The majority of respondents worked at a private institution (83.4%), while only 16.6% worked at a public institution.

All indicators were measured on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) Likert-type scale and descriptive statistics for these are listed in Table 1. Data normality was examined using Q-Q plots, skew values, and kurtosis values. A few indicators were deemed to be non-normal (Likert-type data often deviate from normality), so the robust-maximum likelihood estimator in MPlus was used. This estimator uses a scaling correction factor to adjust for non-normality. Listwise deletion was used for missing data. Table 2 shows the correlation matrix.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for all Variables

Variable	Mean	SD
E1: Gives me the information I need to do my work well.	3.59	1.17
E2: Encourages me to use my talents.	3.88	1.17
E3: Helps me to further develop myself.	3.41	1.25
E4: Encourages the staff to come up with new ideas.	3.52	1.21
E5: Gives me the authority to make decisions, which makes work easier for me.	3.92	1.11
E6: Enables me to solve problems myself instead of just telling me what to do.	3.93	1.04
E7: Offers me abundant opportunities to learn new skills	3.09	1.22
SB1: Keeps in the background and gives credit to others.	3.65	1.20
SB2: Is not chasing recognition or rewards for the things done for others.	3.94	1.10
SB3: Appears to enjoy colleagues' successes more than personal successes.	3.80	1.16
ACC1: Holds me responsible for the work I carry out.	3.98	.97
ACC2: Holds me accountable for my performance.	4.00	.92
ACC3: Holds me and my colleagues responsible for the way we handle a job.	3.92	.91
FOR1: Continues criticizing staff for the mistakes they have made in their work.	2.33	1.20

FOR2: Maintains a negative attitude toward people who have offended him/her at work.	2.32	1.29
FOR3: Finds it difficult to forget things that went wrong in the past.	2.68	1.20
C1: Takes risks even when not certain of the support from others.	2.96	1.14
C2: Takes risks and does what needs to be done in his/her view.	3.22	1.16
AUTH1: Is open about personal limitations and weaknesses.	3.03	1.18
AUTH2: Is often touched by the things happening around him/her at work.	3.41	.99
AUTH3: Is prepared to express feelings even if it might have undesirable consequences.	3.24	1.05
AUTH4: Shows his/her true feelings to his/her staff.	3.34	1.05
H1: Learns through criticism.	2.78	1.04
H2: Tries to learn from the criticism received from others.	3.10	1.02
H3: Admits mistakes to others.	3.23	1.17
H4: Learns from the different views and opinions of others.	3.22	1.12
H5: Learns from people who express criticism.	2.95	1.05
S1: Emphasizes the importance of focusing on the good of the whole department.	3.83	1.19
S2: Has a long-term vision.	3.65	1.26
S3: Emphasizes the societal responsibility of our work.	3.46	1.10
TRUST1: I am not sure I fully trust my athletic director	2.58	1.42
TRUST2: My athletic director is open and upfront with me.	3.60	1.18
TRUST3: I believe my athletic director has high integrity.	3.85	1.15
TRUST4: In general, I believe my athletic director's motives and intentions are good.	4.08	1.03
TRUST5: My athletic director is not always honest and truthful.	2.33	1.21
TRUST6: I don't think my athletic director treats me fairly.	2.27	1.28
TRUST7: I can expect my athletic director to treat me in a consistent and predictable fashion.	3.80	1.12
JOB1: In general, I like working here.	3.97	1.01
JOB2: In general, I do not like my job.	1.85	1.02
JOB3: All in all, I am satisfied with my job.	3.88	1.02
TO1: I do not think I will spend my career with this department.	3.12	1.37
TO2: I intend to leave this department within a short period of time.	2.44	1.26
TO3: I have decided to quit this department.	1.68	.97
TO4: I am looking at some other jobs now.	2.42	1.36
TO5: If I do not get promoted soon, I will look for a job elsewhere.	2.13	1.26
Empowerment	3.62	.96
Standing back	3.80	1.03
Accountability	3.97	.83
Forgiveness	3.55	1.05
Courage	3.09	1.04
Authority	3.25	.76

Humility	3.06	.93
Stewardship	3.65	.99
Trust in leader	3.73	1.00
Job satisfaction	4.00	.93
Turnover intentions	2.37	1.02
Servant leadership	3.50	.74

Note: N = 326.

Table 2
Correlation Matrix for Mean Scores on each Measure

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Empower	1											
2. Standing Back	.76	1										
3. Accountability	.59	.51	1									
4. Forgiveness	.65	.63	.36	1								
5. Courage	.39	.20	.33	.17	1							
6. Authority	.68	.62	.41	.47	.39	1						
7. Humility	.81	.71	.51	.62	.39	.78	1					
8. Stewardship	.78	.64	.53	.59	.43	.65	.76	1				
9. Trust in Leader	.84	.79	.49	.68	.31	.69	.81	.72	1			
10. Job Satisfaction	.65	.56	.42	.47	.25	.43	.52	.54	.62	1		
11. Turnover Intentions	-.50	-.42	-.39	-.39	-.25	-.31	-.40	-.42	-.49	-.75	1	
12. Servant Leadership	.91	.82	.67	.73	.54	.79	.89	.87	.86	.62	-.50	1

Note. All correlations are significant at the $p < .01$ level.

Reliability was examined by calculating McDonald’s (1999) omega coefficient (ω) for each scale individually. The omega coefficient was used as a measure of internal consistency because it allows for a variable relationship with the construct (i.e., factor loading) and variable error variances (McDonald, 1999). Table 3 lists the results of reliability analysis. Scales were deemed sufficiently reliable because coefficient values were greater than .80 (Kline, 2011). Additionally, convergent validity was supported by the average variance extracted (AVE) of all constructs being greater than .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). This was also supported by the significant factor loadings reported in Table 4 (Hair, Tatham, Anderson, & Black, 2005).

Table 3
Reliability of the Scales

Scale	AVE	ω
Servant leadership	.70	.95
Job satisfaction	.77	.92
Trust in leader	.66	.91
Turnover intentions	.60	.87

Table 4

Factor Loadings and Residuals for the Measurement Model

	Factor Loadings			Error Variances		
	Std. Est.	SE	p	Std. Est.	SE	p
Empowerment						
E1	.85	.02	< .001	.28	.03	< .001
E2	.84	.02	< .001	.29	.03	< .001
E3	.86	.02	< .001	.26	.03	< .001
E4	.83	.02	< .001	.31	.04	< .001
E5	.68	.04	< .001	.54	.05	< .001
E6	.67	.04	< .001	.55	.06	< .001
E7	.81	.03	< .001	.34	.04	< .001
Standing back						
SB1	.80	.03	< .001	.36	.05	< .001
SB2	.78	.03	< .001	.40	.05	< .001
SB3	.92	.02	< .001	.16	.03	< .001
Accountability						
ACC1	.90	.02	< .001	.20	.04	< .001
ACC2	.86	.03	< .001	.27	.05	< .001
ACC3	.72	.05	< .001	.48	.08	< .001
Forgiveness						
FOR1	.69	.05	< .001	.52	.06	< .001
FOR2	.87	.03	< .001	.25	.05	< .001
FOR3	.74	.04	< .001	.45	.06	< .001
Courage						
C1	.69	.06	< .001	.53	.09	< .001
C2	.91	.08	< .001	.17	.14	.239
Authority						
AUTH1	.72	.04	< .001	.48	.05	< .001
AUTH2	.63	.04	< .001	.60	.06	< .001
AUTH3	.42	.07	< .001	.82	.06	< .001
AUTH4	.54	.06	< .001	.71	.07	< .001
Humility						
H1	.72	.04	< .001	.49	.06	< .001
H2	.84	.02	< .001	.29	.04	< .001
H3	.80	.03	< .001	.37	.04	< .001
H4	.89	.02	< .001	.21	.03	< .001
H5	.88	.02	< .001	.22	.03	< .001
Stewardship						
S1	.84	.03	< .001	.30	.04	< .001
S2	.72	.03	< .001	.49	.05	< .001
S3	.67	.04	< .001	.56	.06	< .001
Servant leadership						
Empowerment	.95	.01	< .001	.10	.02	< .001
Standing back	.89	.02	< .001	.20	.04	< .001
Accountability	.63	.04	< .001	.61	.05	< .001

Forgiveness	.79	.04	< .001	.38	.06	< .001
Courage	.44	.06	< .001	.80	.06	< .001
Authenticity	.94	.03	< .001	.11	.05	.039
Humility	.94	.01	< .001	.13	.02	< .001
Stewardship	.94	.02	< .001	.13	.04	.004
Turnover intentions						
TO1	.72	.04	< .001	.48	.05	< .001
TO2	.88	.02	< .001	.23	.04	< .001
TO3	.74	.04	< .001	.46	.05	< .001
TO4	.76	.04	< .001	.42	.05	< .001
TO5	.75	.03	< .001	.44	.05	< .001
Job satisfaction						
JOB1	.89	.02	< .001	.22	.04	< .001
JOB2	.81	.04	< .001	.34	.07	< .001
JOB3	.93	.02	< .001	.15	.03	< .001
Trust in leader						
TRUST1	.86	.03	< .001	.26	.05	< .001
TRUST2	.87	.02	< .001	.25	.04	< .001
TRUST3	.84	.03	< .001	.30	.05	< .001
TRUST4	.81	.03	< .001	.34	.04	< .001
TRUST5	.82	.03	< .001	.32	.05	< .001
TRUST6	.67	.05	< .001	.55	.07	< .001
TRUST7	.78	.04	< .001	.40	.06	< .001

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; *SE* = Standard Error.

Prior to running structural models, the measurement model was run. Fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(149, n = 326)} = 1,941.85$, scaling correction factor = 1.10, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.054, .061)} = .058$; CFI = .90; TLI = .89; SRMR = .05. Factor loadings are reported in Table 4 and factor variances and covariances are reported in Table 5. The partial mediation model, shown in Figure 1, testing all direct and indirect effects was run next and model fit was acceptable, $\chi^2_{(149, n = 326)} = 1,941.85$, scaling correction factor = 1.10, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.054, .061)} = .058$; CFI = .90; TLI = .89; SRMR = .05. To test the relationships between constructs, non-significant paths were deleted from the model and likelihood ratio difference tests using the scaling correction factor were completed. Once the best-fitting, most parsimonious model was found, the process was discontinued. Table 7 lists the results of the likelihood ratio tests. Model 4 (shown in Figure 2) was retained with acceptable model fit, $\chi^2_{(146, n = 326)} = 3,551.70$, scaling correction factor = 1.10, $p < .001$; $RMSEA_{(.054, .061)} = .058$; CFI = .90; TLI = .89; SRMR = .05. This was the first model where deleting a path resulted in a significant degradation in model fit. Because of this, all models (where one path was deleted from the model at a time) after Model 4 were compared to Model 4 to determine the best-fitting model. Table 6 lists the direct and indirect effects for the partial mediation model and the retained model (Model 4).

Table 5
Factor Variances and Covariances for the Measurement Model

	Std. Est.	SE	p
Servant leadership	1.00		
Servant leadership with Turnover intentions	-.52	.06	< .001
Servant leadership with Job satisfaction	.69	.04	< .001
Servant leadership with Trust in leader	.94	.02	< .001
Turnover intentions	1.00		
Turnover intentions with Job satisfaction	-.84	.03	< .001
Turnover intentions with Trust in leader	-.52	.05	< .001
Trust in leader	1.00		
Trust in leader with Job satisfaction	.68	.04	< .001
Job satisfaction	1.00		

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 6
Estimates of Direct and Indirect Effects

	Estimate	Std. Est.	SE	p
Partial Mediation Model				
Direct Effects				
Servant leadership → Turnover intentions	0.07	.07	.19	.73
Servant leadership → Job satisfaction	0.42	.44	.23	.06
Servant leadership → Trust in leader	1.22	.94	.02	< .001
Trust in leader → Turnover intentions	0.04	.05	.18	.78
Trust in leader → Job satisfaction	0.20	.27	.23	.23
Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions	-1.01	-.92	.05	< .001
Indirect Effects				
Servant leadership → Trust in leader → Turnover intentions	0.05	.05	.17	.78
Servant leadership → Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions	-0.42	-.40	.22	.06
Servant leadership → Trust in leader → Job satisfaction	0.24	.25	.21	.24
Trust in leader → Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions	-0.20	-.25	.21	.23
Retained Model (Model 4)				
Direct Effects				
Servant leadership → Trust in leader	1.22	.95	.02	< .001
Servant leadership → Job satisfaction	0.66	.69	.04	< .001
Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions	-0.91	-.84	.03	< .001
Indirect Effects				
Servant leadership → Job satisfaction → Turnover intentions	-0.60	-.58	.04	< .001

Note. Std. Est. = Standardized Estimate; SE = Standard Error.

Table 7
Model Comparison Results

Model	Log-likelihood	Correction factor	Parameters	$\Delta\chi^2$	p-value
Partial mediation model	-17445.730	1.3425	149	-	-
Model 2 (path 5 deleted)	-17445.774	1.3441	148	.796	.37
Model 3 (paths 5 and 4 deleted)	-17446.721	1.3434	147	1.309	.25
*Model 4 (paths 5, 4, and 3 deleted)	-17448.564	1.3442	146	3.005	.08
Model 5 (paths 5, 4, 3, and 2 deleted)	-17701.444	1.3342	145	181.004	< .001
Model 6 (paths 5, 4, 3, and 1 deleted)	-17537.502	1.3420	145	106.948	< .001
Model 7 (paths 5, 4, 3, and 6 deleted)	-17585.515	1.3449	145	101.720	< .001

*Note. Retained model.

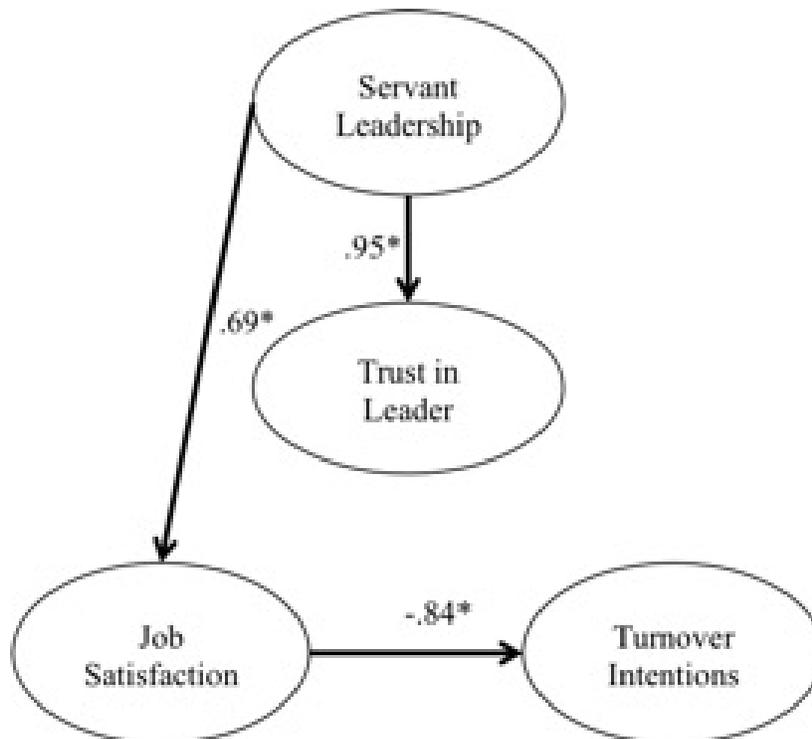


Figure 2. Retained model illustrating significant effects for the impacts of servant leadership on trust in leader, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

The retained model accounted for 48% of the variance in job satisfaction ($R^2 = .48$, $SE = .06$, $p < .001$). Based on these results, displaying the characteristics

of a servant-leader did have direct, positive, and significant impact on job satisfaction (H1 supported). For every 1 standard deviation increase in scores on the SLS, job satisfaction increased by .69 standard deviation.

The retained model explained 70% of the variance in turnover intentions ($R^2 = .70$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$). The direct effect of servant leadership on turnover intentions was not significant as shown in Table 6 (H3 rejected). However, the indirect effect of servant leadership on turnover intentions as mediated by job satisfaction was significant and negative ($-.58$ (.04), $p < .001$) (H7 supported). Displaying servant leadership characteristics increases job satisfaction, which then decreases intentions to turnover.

The model also explained 70% of the variance in trust in leader ($R^2 = .70$, $SE = .05$, $p < .001$). Trust in leader did not have a significant direct effect on job satisfaction or turnover intentions (H4, H5, H8, and H9 rejected). However, the direct effect of servant leadership on trust in leader was significant and positive (H2 supported). For every 1 standard deviation increase in score on the SLS scale, trust in leader increased by .95 standard deviation. The path between job satisfaction and turnover intentions was significant (H6 supported). For every 1 standard deviation increase in job satisfaction, intentions to turnover decreased by .84 standard deviation.

In summary, the retained model indicated that displaying the characteristics of a servant leader positively impacted job satisfaction and trust in leader. Additionally, when mediated by job satisfaction, displaying characteristics of a servant leader decreases intentions to leave the organization.

DISCUSSION

Servant leadership is a viable philosophy for sport organizations and can help leaders in sport create positive and empowering work environments. This study examined the impacts of servant leadership in Division III athletics specifically, as Burton and Welty Peachey (2013), and DeSensi (2014) proposed athletic departments in the NCAA should emphasize servant leadership.

The final model retained in this study has important theoretical implications as it illustrates that posited relationships between servant leadership and trust in leader and job satisfaction are supported by empirical data. It also leads to a better understanding of ways servant-leaders can positively influence employee behavior, which in turn improves organizational climate and outcomes. The positive effects of servant leadership identified in this study provide additional support for the call for servant leadership in athletic departments in NCAA-member institutions.

Servant-leaders focus on employees' needs (Greenleaf, 1977) and build an environment of trust, ethical behavior, empathy, and community (Liden et al., 2014). Because of this, servant-leaders should cultivate trust in leader. The final model retained in this study shows a positive, significant impact of servant leadership on trust in leader, indicating employees who rated their leaders as displaying servant-leader characteristics had more trust in their leaders. This finding supported those of Joseph and Winston (2005) in a wide variety of industries and Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010) in education, who reported a positive

connection between servant leadership and trust in leader, which creates a culture of trust. When employees trust leaders, it builds a more positive work environment (Brown, 2007). Leaders in sport should be encouraged by this finding and consider exhibiting the characteristics of servant-leaders, especially honesty, fairness, and truthfulness to build trust with employees. One way an athletic director or sport professional could create this level of trust is by being transparent and holding staff meetings with all employees to communicate important events or major changes to avoid employees feeling “in the dark” or left out on important issues. Additionally, trust can be built through shared experiences, such as team-building activities or employee appreciation events. When employees feel they are cared for and valued, they are likely to trust their supervisors.

Servant leadership also positively influences job satisfaction. Employees in the current study who rated their athletic directors as displaying servant-leader qualities were more satisfied with their jobs. Cerit (2009), Jenkins and Stewart (2010), and Shaw and Newton (2014) also determined servant leadership positively stimulates job satisfaction. High levels of job satisfaction improve organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Saari & Judge, 2004). Satisfied employees are more likely to stay on task at work, have a positive attitude, and work well with others. Because work with athletic departments often is interdependent, a positive and collaborative workplace with satisfied employees is essential. This finding is especially important in sport because employees often work long, non-traditional hours. If employees are more satisfied, they are more likely to be content, display a positive attitude, and maintain focus, even when working long hours.

Characteristics of servant-leaders consistent with job satisfaction include empowering and respecting employees and showing sincerity (Cerit, 2009). In sport, leaders could empower employees to make decisions without clearing them with their supervisors first. This would give employees autonomy over their work and ultimately increase job satisfaction. When employees receive a sense of satisfaction from their jobs, they will show a more favorable overall attitude toward their workplace and respond with increased commitment to the organization. For example, specifically in intercollegiate athletics, development officers could be empowered to create campaigns to increase funding based on interactions and experiences with donors. This would ensure that campaigns speak to the audience in ways they are most likely to respond to as employees who have the most contact with donors control the message.

While our study did not find servant leadership directly influenced intentions to leave a job like Babakus et al. (2011) and Jaramillo et al. (2009) found, we did find an indirect effect of servant leadership on turnover intentions mediated by job satisfaction. Because exhibiting the characteristics of a servant-leader increased job satisfaction, turnover intentions decreased. Reducing turnover is important because turnover can have negative impacts on an organization’s success (Palmatier et al., 2007). Supervisors in sport organizations should strive to increase job satisfaction to keep a stable group of employees, which can increase collaboration and trust among employees and ultimately positively impact productivity. Additionally, reducing turnover rates allows employees to stay focused on work, instead of taking time to continually hire and train new

employees. This also saves the athletic department money because retaining current employees is less expensive than recruiting, hiring, and training new ones.

Finally, results from the current study did not support those found by Mulki et al. (2006), who reported job satisfaction of the sales staff to be positively related to the trust they had in their supervisor, or Chan and Mak (2014) who reported that trust in leader mediated the relationship between servant leadership and subordinates' job satisfaction. Since the literature confirms that trust contributes significantly to higher job satisfaction, greater organizational commitment, and lower turnover intentions, it is quizzical why these relationships were not significant in this study. Possibly, this could be attributed to the uniqueness of athletic programs' emphasis on winning. However, it is important to note that a lack of research exists on the relationship between these variables within the setting of sport and, more specifically, intercollegiate athletics, which could suggest that athletic staff members' job satisfaction is evaluated differently than those individuals who work in the business world. Intercollegiate athletics has been perceived as an environment where decisions are made in the best interest of the department overall instead of for individuals (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013). It may be that athletic staff members' job satisfaction has been dependent on factors such as their salaries, job titles, win/loss records, or relationships with colleagues and student-athletes, rather than trust in leader, because the latter has not always been a constant in their professional lives. For example, turnover among athletic directors, because they are seeking career advancement to higher competitive levels with increased salaries and prestige, means athletic department staff members may not have worked long enough with their athletic directors to develop strong feelings of trust in leader.

Implications of Servant Leadership to Intercollegiate Athletics

As the popularity of servant leadership has grown in the corporate world, it has gained credence for its potential applicability to the business of sports. Burton and Welty Peachey (2013) and DeSensi (2014) suggested that servant-leaders have the potential to alter and advance a positive, transformational organizational culture. Servant-leaders who are empathic, humble, respectful, selfless, honest, kind, fair, authentic, courageous, and communicate well will positively influence employees' behavior and job satisfaction, especially through a shared love of sports. Servant-leaders who display integrity and ethical behavior will build trust. Servant-leaders who empower their staff members will nurture loyalty, build community, and model service and a commitment to the growth of others. Even at the Division III level, if servant leaders do not feel rewarded financially or emotionally for displaying trust-building traits, they may be less likely to embrace and model servant leadership.

Intercollegiate athletics plays a unique role in educational institutions where mission statements claim to align their academic goals with the well-being of all students, faculty, and staffs, while claiming its sport teams contribute to the overall campus community. In this context, servant leadership within intercollegiate athletics has a great opportunity to contribute more fully to the achievement of this

mission by helping athletes grow and develop while being served by athletic department employees who trust their athletic directors and are satisfied with their jobs.

CONCLUSION

This study found that servant leadership positively influences job satisfaction of employees, which then decreases their intentions to leave the organization. Also, leaders who exhibit servant leadership are more likely to be trusted by employees. These results are important for supervisors or executives working in sport, as the work environment and pressures to win are often similar, or even more pronounced, than in intercollegiate athletics. Future work on servant leadership in sport organizations in general could provide a basis for expanding the implications of these findings across multiple contexts. Additionally, future research could explore the different responses to servant leadership in different sport contexts, including global ones.

The purpose of this study was to quantify the impacts of servant leadership on employee outcomes. However, this quantitative research does not allow us to understand how demonstrating servant leadership characteristics affects job satisfaction or trust. Qualitative work should be undertaken to provide a deep understanding of employees' attitudes, beliefs, and opinions on how servant leadership improves their work environment (i.e., what things do supervisors do that lead to the perception of servant leader behaviors), and how these influence employees' interactions with others.

While the sample size in this study was adequate, one limitation was the sole focus on Division III staff and athletic directors. If expanded to include all divisions, then potentially they could be compared. Additionally, this study was limited by the decision not to require respondents to indicate their athletic department in their survey responses; future research could match athletic directors' self-reported servant leadership behaviors to employees' perceptions of their leaders' servant-leader characteristics. Ideally, a study could attempt an experimental design to determine if a servant-leader can change a sport organization's culture, thus improving employees' work experiences.

The results of this study suggest it is beneficial for athletic directors in Division III to adopt a servant leadership orientation in their departments. The positive effects on trust, job satisfaction, and in turn, intentions to remain on the job, make displaying the characteristics of a servant-leader imperative. Athletic directors who cultivate an environment where employees are empowered to decide how to complete their work and consistently serve will subsequently empower and serve others. Ideally, the focus on the needs of employees will trickle down and ultimately positively impact student-athletes, whose coaches and support staff will focus on their needs, which in the end supports the mission of NCAA-member institutions. While pressures to win mount in intercollegiate athletics, the values departmental leaders espouse should drive strategy. Athletic directors would benefit from attending servant leadership workshops, or at the very least from reading the multitude of books written on becoming a servant-leader.

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