The Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership in NCAA Division III College Coaches

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived leadership in Division III college coaches.

Coaches (N=15) from a convenience sample of six different NCAA Division III colleges were invited to participate, along with their athletic directors (N = 14), peers (N = 27) and student-athletes (N = 182). The coaches represented these sports: Women's field hockey, lacrosse, and softball, and men's baseball, golf and tennis. The average age of the coaches was 34, with an average coaching tenure of 4.8 years, and most were Caucasian (87%). The majority of athletic directors were male (64%), with an average age of 48 years, all Caucasian, with an average of nearly 10 years in their positions. Just over half (52%) of the peers were males, and all but one was Caucasian. Among the student-athletes 52 percent were male, 95 percent were Caucasian and 16 percent were team captains. Participants completed the Leadership Practices Inventory and the Emotional Intelligence Appraisal – Multi-Rater (EIA; Bradberry & Greaves, 2004).

Enabling was the leadership practice most frequently reported engaged in by coaches, as well as by their constituents (supervisors and peers). Students rated this practice as second most engaged in, with Inspiring as the behavior they perceived as most frequently exhibited by their coaches. Coaches, athletic directors, and peers reported Inspiring as one of the least frequently engaged in leadership behaviors.
Between coaches and their supervisors there were no significant differences between their scores on any of the five leadership practices or four components of emotional intelligence. Coaches rated themselves significantly higher on all five leadership practices than did their peers; although there were no significant differences for emotional intelligence. Comparisons between coaches and the student-athletes revealed significant differences on Modeling, Enabling and Encouraging (coaches all higher); no differences between the two groups were found on emotional intelligence.

Generally, student team captains rated the coaches lower on Inspiring and Challenging in comparison with ratings from student non-captains. Female coaches compared with male coaches were rated by the student athletes as engaging in Modeling, Inspiring, Enabling and Encouraging more, as well as higher in self-management and social awareness. The same pattern for leadership practices by gender were reported by coaches themselves (i.e., female coaches reported higher scores than their male counterparts on all five leadership practices). Regression analysis showed, however, that most of the variance (51%) around total LPI scores was accounted for by EQ assessments rather than gender or constituent relationship (supervisor, peer or student).

A moderate correlation was found between the overall LPI score and overall Emotional Intelligence score as reported by coaches. Significant relationships between these two variables were found from the perspective of supervisors, peers and students. Little to no correlation was found between the observers’ (supervisor, peers, or students) perception of the coaches’ emotional intelligence and the coaches’ self-perception.

For both emotional intelligence and leadership, the analysis revealed that the coaches’ years of experience yielded a negative coefficient, indicating that the longer a person coaches the lower their perception is for emotional intelligence and leadership as rated by others.