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## **Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership**

*Nannette W. Glenn, Ph.D.*

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Dr. Nannette Glenn, Dean of  
the College of Graduate and  
Professional Studies

Date 02 / 07 / 2023

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Abilene Christian University  
School of Educational Leadership

Leadership Style in a Faith-Based Athletic Department Setting

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

by

Adam P. Ybarra

February 2023

## **Dedication**

To Jackie, Noelle, Landon, and Elise

## Acknowledgments

I want to thank my wife Jackie for her support throughout this whole process. She always told me to keep my head up and keep going, you got this. Thank you to my daughter Noelle for always thinking daddy is the smartest, for your warm hugs and smiles; they got me through many tough days. Thank you to my dissertation chair Dr. James Adams, your vision and positivity absolutely motivated me to keep pressing on even when I thought I was stuck. Thank you to my colleague Dr. Melissa Long for helping with guidance and support through every step of the way; and thank you to Doc Ro, you are a great friend and a tremendous avenue of support for me. Thank you to Melinda Isbell for being so gracious and always being there to help out in whatever capacity that was needed but especially with APA formatting and getting me right and helping me get done. Thank you to Cory for being a friend and listening to me talk about the process while drinking a cup of coffee on your couch in the offices in the morning. I know I can't name everyone but thank you to all my friends and family with the constant support knowing that I would get this done. Thank you mom, you believed in me so much and always gave your unwavering support and love.

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## Abstract

In this intrinsic case study, the researcher sought to explore athletic directors' leadership styles with their coaches' and administrators' workplace satisfaction at a Christian-affiliated college in the Southwestern United States. The study explored which leadership style is likely to encourage motivation (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) and hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work conditions), which could potentially increase or decrease job satisfaction. The data collection method was semistructured interviews conducted with athletic department personnel. The researcher transcribed and quality-checked the interviews against the audio recordings. The transcripts were member-checked by sharing them with each of the study participants. The researcher analyzed the data using Dedoose, an online qualitative software, and conducted a thematic analysis using the six steps developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Key findings from this study are that there is no clear-cut approach to leadership, and that the most valuable thing that a leader can do is to know the employees and cater to their leadership needs. A leader may have a predominate leadership style, and it is best to use that style until the leader realizes that employees need something different. Although situational leadership was not listed by the employees, there were at least four different leadership styles that were listed by the participants in this study, with transformational leadership descriptors being the most prevalent.

*Keywords:* athletic director, leadership style, workplace satisfaction, transformational leadership, servant leadership, Christian-affiliated institutions

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Athletic departments within higher education institutions are organizations that act as significant businesses and employ vast numbers of individuals. In some college and university settings, athletic departments are as complex as any Fortune 500 organization. They often consist of multiple head coaches, hectic travel schedules, intricate budget management, compliance to its governing body, and venue maintenance, all which are overseen by the athletic director. Athletic directors' responsibilities include adhering to the governing body's rules, equity and fairness, Title XI, fundraising, and the disciplinary issues of coaches and athletes (Won et al., 2013).

Completing these tasks requires an extensive network of employees to ensure that the organization runs smoothly. At smaller institutions, such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Football Championship Series (FCS) Divisions I, II, and III, as well as the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), there is a smaller staffing budget and employees are required to perform multiple duties that can lead to workplace dissatisfaction (Baghurst et al., 2014; Herzberg et al., 2008). Conversely, at larger institutions, each role in the department is more specialized and one employee disseminates the workload amongst multiple available staff and this reduces the likelihood of dissatisfaction. Generally, an athletic director leads the entire athletic department in college and university settings. Like any other leader in a business setting, athletic directors may lead organizations in different ways with varying styles. Some of the leadership styles used are transformational, transactional, servant, and laissez-faire leadership styles.

### **Background**

Leadership is a transactional process in which the leader usually gives employees a monetary reward for their work (Bass, 1985). This definition of leadership includes transactional

leadership. Another definition of leadership is to motivate followers toward completing a goal (Baghurst et al., 2014). This definition includes transformational leadership (TFL). Suryanto et al. (2019) defines leadership style as the pattern of leaders' behaviors during their work with and through others. However, leadership style is not a one-size-fits-all approach. What is best suited for one organization or individual may fail or produce poor results for a different institution. Copeland (2014) suggested that values-based leadership is rooted in moral and ethical foundations.

Bass (1985) compared and contrasted two types of leadership styles: transactional and transformational. A transactional leadership style depends on external rewards from the leader to compensate subordinates for their work. In contrast, TFL theorizes that leaders will motivate their employees to do more than expected. TFL directly affects workplace satisfaction because it focuses on motivating employees internally from their core being (Kim et al., 2012). The relationship between a TFL-style and workplace satisfaction have been the focus of several studies (Kim et al., 2012; Kuchler, 2008; Orlando, 2012; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). The results of these studies were mixed.

Locke's (1969) definition of workplace or job satisfaction is the most widely accepted, describing it as a pleasurable or positive emotional state. Workplace satisfaction can lead to less turnover and higher productivity, because there is less time used to train new employees (Kim et al., 2012). In its most simplistic form, workplace or job satisfaction is how well individuals like their jobs (Spector, 1997). Many factors can dictate if a person enjoys their job; for example, treatment in the workplace, the effect of the job on their emotional well-being, and being compensated appropriately for their work (Chang, 2017; Locke, 1969). Herzberg et al. (2008) provided a two-factor theory about workplace satisfaction. In this theory, motivation and hygiene

contribute to employee satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Herzberg et al. (2008) defined motivation factors that can lead to workplace satisfaction as the following: “achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement” (pp. 44–46). The hygiene factors or the factors that lead to workplace dissatisfaction are supervision, company policy, salary, working conditions, and interpersonal relations of supervision (Herzberg et al., 2008). Employing the right leadership style is paramount to subordinate job satisfaction, while garnering job satisfaction is crucial for productive and efficient employees (Suryanto et al., 2019).

In general, the existent literature regarding the relationship between workplace satisfaction and leadership style are oppositional. TFL-style is positively related to workplace satisfaction in several instances (Bayram & Dinç, 2015; Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996; Suryanto et al., 2019; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008), while others negatively correlate it with workplace satisfaction (Kim et al., 2012; Kuchler, 2008). A study conducted by DeLay and Clark (2020) examined several leadership styles (i.e., transformational, transactional, laissez-faire) to determine if they had any correlation to job satisfaction. Their study concluded that transformational and transactional leadership promoted job satisfaction while the laissez-faire leadership style did not. Chang (2017) determined that leadership style positively affects job satisfaction, and leaders should choose a style that increases their employees’ job satisfaction.

In an athletic department setting, an athletic director has the potential to use one of these prevalent leadership styles. Several researchers examined the leadership styles of athletic directors (Baghurst et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2012; Kuchler, 2008; Northington, 2016; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). These studies explored TFL as the principal form of leadership using a quantitative study format. The findings of Kim et al. (2012) findings differed from other studies in that their research determined that TFL helps workplace satisfaction and overall

organizational performance. Yusof's (2002) research confirmed that TFL motivates coaches to do more with less. This is important as athletic directors struggle to meet the organization's fundamental needs amid rising operational costs and decreasing budgets. Yusof (2002) further established that TFL had a positive effect on employee satisfaction. It is also noted that TFL is valuable and influential outside of a business setting.

Northington's (2016) study showed that successful college athletic directors applied TFL at their institutions. However, a similar study conducted by Burton and Peachey (2009) examined the difference and preference of transformational versus transactional leadership styles and found no preference toward either style. In fact, both styles were being employed in a situational manner by the study participants. Burton and Peachey (2009) surveyed athletic administrators at the NCAA Division III level and it was discovered that no particular leadership style was preferred; transactional and TFL were received equally well. Yusof (2002) noted the need for more qualitative research related to leadership style and employee satisfaction in sport organizations, which would allow researchers to collect data on leaders' actual behaviors, traits, personalities, and characteristics. They would also examine the actual interaction between the leader and subordinates (Yusof, 2002). The results would provide an understanding of the relationship between athletic directors' leadership styles and workplace satisfaction of athletic department personnel.

Athletic departments in Christian-affiliated colleges and universities are unique collegiate settings because of their institution's mission and vision. Christian-affiliated institutions are bound by a specific set of morals, values, ideals, and beliefs that their secular counterparts are not (Nite et al., 2013). Christian institutions also differ from secular colleges and universities because the employees and coaches often have the additional duty of fostering the spiritual well-

being of their student athletes. Employees at Christian-affiliated colleges and universities must adhere to specific institutional policies, including ensuring that students attend chapel services or spiritual events. Coaches and administrators are required to adhere to specific university policies while employed at a Christian-affiliated institution (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006). There is often a lack of organizational commitment from the coaches to the mission and vision of the Christian-affiliated institutions to not only win games but to promote the spiritual growth of their student-athletes. Furthermore, the leadership of the athletic department at these institutions can influence the logistics of the organization's culture (Nite et al., 2013).

Although most of the research supports TFL-styles and employee satisfaction in business and secular university college settings, there is a paucity of published empirical studies related to such relationships at Christian-affiliated college athletic settings. Research conducted in college settings have primarily focused on nonreligious institutions (Baghurst et al., 2014; Northington, 2016; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). Baghurst et al. (2014) sought to discover the lived experiences of secular junior college athletic directors. Northington (2016), using a qualitative study, wanted to record the behaviors of athletic directors versus the perceived behaviors by their subordinates, and found that athletic directors of winning athletic departments exemplified TFL. Both Yusof (2002) and Yusof and Shah (2008) examined whether or not TFL was successful in a secular athletic setting and increased coaches' or subordinates' job satisfaction. In both instances, the researchers concluded that TFL was an asset to an organization and increased job satisfaction. However, it is unknown if leadership styles work similarly in a Christian-affiliated organization.

## **Problem Statement**

The high turnover of athletic directors at a small Christian institution has created instability, poor leadership, and lower employee satisfaction. This study addressed the need to understand how maintaining an athletic director may improve the athletic department's performance at this institution and its ability to sustain quality leadership going forward. Working at a Christian organization combines faith and work in one setting. An athletic department of a Christian university is one of those places where an individual can live their faith while working in their chosen coaching profession. A relationship exists between religion and the dimensions of leadership in which religion has a significant influence on leadership behavior (Hage & Posner, 2015; Sass, 2000). However, no published empirical studies have been conducted on the phenomena related to leadership style and workplace satisfaction at religious-affiliated postsecondary institutions in general and as they relate to athletic departments in particular. It is not understood throughout the university the level of commitment, requirements, funds, and resources needed to be a successful athletic department at the Division I-FCS-level; additionally, the allure of being employed at a Christian university fades over time (Athletic Department Employee (ADE) #1, personal communication, November 4, 2021). It is difficult at this level (Division I FCS) to locate and hire the exceptional individual who can carry out the embodiment of the vision and mission of a Christian university as well as win consistently. Typically, an institution must settle for either one or the other. To achieve winning athletic success, sometimes the spiritual aspect must be set aside (ADE #2, personal communication, November 9, 2021).

There are potential implications of not knowing the athletic director's leadership style at a Christian-affiliated college athletic department and whether it influences workplace

satisfaction. The athletic director can also encourage employees' lower-order hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work conditions) or their higher-order motivational (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) needs. The athletic director's leadership style can affect the functioning of the department and the rest of the organization, including assistant or associate athletic directors, coaches, other personnel, and the institution as a whole. After comparing these types of institutions, the research question arose: Do athletic directors working at a Christian university athletic department require a specific type of leadership style to mesh with the university mission, vision, and values?

### **Purpose Statement**

In this intrinsic case study, I explored the leadership styles of an athletic director and his impact on the department, especially with the coaches' and administrators' workplace satisfaction at a Christian-affiliated college in the Southwestern United States. The study explored which leadership style is likely to encourage motivation (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) and hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work conditions), which could potentially increase or decrease job satisfaction. In that effort, I conducted semistructured interviews with athletic department personnel.

### **Research Questions**

**Primary Research Question:** How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the leadership style of the athletic director at a private Christian university influence their workplace satisfaction?

**Secondary Research Question 1:** How does the perception of the athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university



influence their perception of hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work) related to their employment?

**Secondary Research Question 2:** How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university influence their motivation factors (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) related to their employment?

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Athletic director.** An individual responsible for the daily tasks associated with managing and maintaining an athletic department, including promotion, marketing, tickets, and teams (Kent & Chelladurai, 2001).

**Laissez-faire leadership.** The absence of a leader leading in any particular way (van Dierendonck et al., 2014).

**Leadership.** According to Burton and Peachy (2009), "The behavior of a leader and having a significant influence on the success of an organization" (p. 245).

**Leadership style.** The selected style that a leader chooses to exhibit while in a leadership role at an institution to influence their followers (Chang, 2017).

**Servant leadership.** Leaders in this leadership style are not concerned with garnering prestige for leadership; rather, they are concerned with the employee or subordinate and their growth (Burton & Peachey, 2013).

**Transactional leadership.** An exchange between the leader and followers where if the follower does their job, then the follower gets a promotion, more money, and prestige (Bass, 1985).

**Transformational leadership.** a leadership style that motivates employees to do more than what is expected of them (Bass, 1985).

**Workplace satisfaction.** For this study, I used Locke's (1969) definition: "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from one's job or job experiences." (p. 10)

## **Summary**

Most studies that examined athletic department leadership used quantitative approaches centered around collecting data from subordinates regarding their superiors' perceived leadership. There has been only one study that has been qualitative in nature; in this study, Northington (2016) was able to capture athletic directors' actual leadership behaviors. TFL has been shown to increase workplace satisfaction in athletic departments (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). Yusof (2002) stated that there is a need for more qualitative research to discover the behaviors, traits, and personalities of leaders. While there has been an increase in the number of investigations exploring leadership style in college and university athletic departments, there is a dearth of studies that have examined leadership style at Christian-affiliated colleges and universities (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kuchler, 2008; Northington, 2016; Peachey et al., 2014; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008).

While Nite et al. (2013) and Schroeder and Scribner (2006) investigated a Christian-affiliated institution's culture, they did not examine whether or not the leadership was different due to the religious constructs involved. This study seeks to aid in organizational change and educate the institutions included in the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities on an appropriate leadership style that best suits their organization. The research is a qualitative case study seeking to examine the actual behaviors, traits, and personalities of the leaders.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership style of athletic directors at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Football Champion Subdivision (FCS) institution. It is unclear whether or not Christian-affiliated organizations could benefit from utilizing the same leadership styles as secular institutions. This literature review demonstrates a necessity for further study on the leadership styles of athletic directors in Christian-affiliated organizations. Topics included in the review are leadership style, workplace satisfaction outside of an athletic department, and these characteristics within the context of an athletic department. Last, Christian-affiliated institutions were examined and why they are potentially different from their secular counterparts. I employed the search engine Google Scholar as well as a University online library database. Search terms included *athletic director, leadership style, workplace satisfaction, job satisfaction, transformational leadership, servant leadership, Christian affiliated institutions, religion, higher education, Herzberg, and athletic departments.*

### Theoretical Frameworks

Leadership style and Herzberg's motivation theory are the focus of the research and this literature review, and the most common theories of leadership are examined. I used Herzberg's motivation theory to explore motivation and hygiene factors and uncover what does or does not motivate coaches to be satisfied or dissatisfied with their work. Much of the research presented in the literature review is quantitative in nature. Yusof (2002) stated that there was a need for qualitative exploration to be conducted so that the leader's actual behaviors, traits, personalities, and characteristics can be recorded.

### **Bass's Transformational Leadership Model**

In this study, I used Bass's (1985) leadership style theory and Herzberg's motivation and hygiene theory as its theoretical framework. Bass built his leadership style theory on the desire to discover what is required for leaders to significantly affect their followers (Bass, 1985). Bass's TFL model expands on Burns's (1979) initial research on TFL. Bass sought to explain if there was a better way to lead than the traditional transactional approach. According to Bass, TFL focuses on a leader motivating their subordinates to rise above expectations; these types of leaders exploit the needs of their followers to achieve something higher and more extraordinary. TFL is concerned only with the problem at hand and does not motivate the employees to strive for anything more significant than the task in front of them. Bass's (1985) TFL theory consists of four parts: "idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration" (p. xv).

Inspirational motivation plays on the employee's emotions to arouse motivation greater than self-interest (Bass, 1985). Intellectual stimulation refers to the awareness of the problems and the concepts of the department's problems. Idealized influence describes a leader who is a role model for the organization, develops trust, and instills loyalty and the devotion of their followers. Individual consideration is the idea of considering each person and treating them according to their needs and capabilities (Bass, 1985). Bass (1985) also described leaders as charismatic, capable of rallying people around their cause, and encouraging them to follow their ideas and vision for the organization. Charisma is a characteristic that is inherent or God-given, which can exhibit an influence that is transformational.

Leadership style can have a significant effect on the job satisfaction of subordinate employees. TFL has a direct influence on workplace satisfaction (Kim et al., 2012). The results

from a study by Kim et al. (2012) revealed a negative effect of TFL on job satisfaction.

Theoretically, this style of leadership should increase job satisfaction, because it focuses on motivating employees internally.

### **Herzberg's Motivation and Hygiene Theory**

The study used Herzberg's motivation and hygiene theory as a foundation. Herzberg sought to explain why people are either satisfied or dissatisfied with their work as jobs generally define a large portion of an individual's identity. It is vital to examine the factors that motivate employees and to work on improving factors that might serve as hygiene factors. Herzberg developed the theory based on a lack of information on a person's attitudes regarding their employment. According to Herzberg's motivation theory, there are two sets of needs that should be met: hygiene and motivation factors (Herzberg et al., 2008). Hygiene factors are considered lower-order needs, "including supervision, interpersonal relations, working conditions, salary, company policy and administration, benefits, and job security" (Herzberg et al., 2008, p. 113). Motivation factors are higher-order needs, including achievements, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and personal growth. Motivation factors are intrinsic needs that need to be met to feel a purpose and internal drive at work. In contrast, hygiene factors are external and can inhibit productivity and cause dissatisfaction. Employee motivation is key to optimizing the efficiency of their work (Herzberg et al., 2008). If a person is satisfied with their job, they will be more motivated to work.

Herzberg's and Bass's (1985) theoretical frameworks to explore the role of athletic directors' leadership styles in influencing motivation and hygiene factors among coaches, administrators, and selected employees. These theoretical frameworks informed the research questions and the interview questions. Bass's leadership style theory informed the specific

leadership styles that influence workplace satisfaction, and Herzberg's theory identified the specific factors which motivate coaches, administrators, and selected employees, as well as factors that might serve as hygiene factors at a private religious-affiliated university in the Southwestern United States. Study participants were asked about their perception of athletic director's leadership style and various hygiene and motivation factors related to their employment in their athletic department. I explored whether or not employees at a Christian-affiliated athletic department are motivated by leadership style or intrinsically motivated by the institution and the athletic department's religious factors.

### **Leadership Style and Workplace Satisfaction**

Leadership plays a critical role in the success of an organization (DeLay & Clark, 2020). A positive relationship between leaders and their teams is crucial to minimizing employee discontent and increasing employee workplace satisfaction (Chang, 2017). The style of a leader plays a significant role in the level of employee satisfaction. The most common styles of leadership exhibited are TFL, transactional, laissez-faire, and servant leadership. TFL is a leadership style that motivates employees to do more than what is expected (Bass, 1985). This leadership style is often seen in a leader with a grandiose vision for the organization and who motivates employees to buy into universally existing motives and ideals. Transformational leaders seek to connect with their followers' at a deep level by providing a vision of the organization through charismatic leadership (Lee et al., 2018).

Conversely, a transactional leadership style is described as an exchange between the leader and their followers. If the follower does their job, they get a promotion, more money, and prestige (Bass, 1985). Transactional leadership is not concerned with the leader-follower relationship but merely the interaction between the leader and subordinate. Transactional leaders

are not concerned with the higher-order needs of subordinates, only the task at hand. A transactional leader is concerned with the immediate work in which the subordinate would find gratification with completing a task assigned to them.

Laissez-faire leadership is characterized by the absence of a leader leading in any form (van Dierendonck et al., 2014). This leadership style is passive leadership: There is no action by the leader but rather inaction (DeLay & Clark, 2020). Such leaders do not give their employees any guidance and seldom make decisions (Chang, 2017). Laissez-faire is not genuinely leading because the leader is does very little leading. Those who have this leadership style are often seen as the figurehead of a company.

Servant leadership is drastically different from other forms of leadership, because this leadership style explicitly focuses on the followers' needs (Burton & Peachey, 2013). For example, servant leaders are not concerned with garnering prestige; instead, they are concerned with the employee or subordinate and their growth. All of these leadership styles are unique and are the most prevalent styles of leadership.

There is some evidence that leadership style is a predictor of workplace satisfaction. For example, van Dierendonck et al. (2014) studied servant leadership and TFL and how these leadership styles affect followers to determine if there were any similarities between servant leadership and TFL, and also what made these leadership styles effective. Research has found a positive correlation between leadership and job satisfaction (Chang, 2017). Van Dierendonck et al. (2014) articulated that each leadership style had different effects on employees, but that both "servant leadership and TFL are related to organizational commitment and work engagement" (p. 555). Servant leadership works through follower-need satisfaction and seeks to enhance the well-being of the employees. Although both of these leadership styles work effectively, they

focus on different aspects. TFL works through perceived leadership effectiveness and has more to do with the leader versus the employee, whereas servant leadership focuses on the employee's well-being.

Suryanto et al. (2019) examined work-life balance and TFL-style and its relationship to employee satisfaction by assessing the strength of the employees' connections to their job. Suryanto et al. (2019) hypothesized that a positive work-life balance increased employee engagement. With an appropriate leadership style applied, employees perform better and are satisfied with their work (Chang, 2017; DeLay & Clark, 2020). TFL and transactional leadership both increase employee job satisfaction as well as job performance, while laissez-faire leadership seems to have no effect on either job satisfaction and or job performance.

Chang (2017) explored how leadership styles affect job satisfaction and job performance, focusing on three main leadership styles: transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire. Chang surveyed 200 participants employed at the top 20 companies in Indonesia seeking to determine how to improve a company's human resource assets by examining leadership style, job satisfaction, and job performance. A multifactor leadership questionnaire was used to measure leadership style. The results concluded that leadership style is a benefit to job satisfaction and job performance. Both male and female participants had a statistically significant correlation of transactional- and TFL-styles in reference to job satisfaction. However, the laissez-faire leadership style did not produce any statistical significance to job performance. Furthermore, this study established that job satisfaction can make a connection between the relationship of leadership style and job performance.

Bayram and Dinç (2015) conducted a study to examine the importance of TFL-style on employees' job satisfaction among 150 employees from two private universities in Bosnia and



Herzegovina. Their findings showed that a positive relationship exists between TFL and employees' job satisfaction. Bayram and Dinç further noted that leaders at private universities should be role models for their employees and encourage them while considering their ideas (2015).

Naidoo et al. (2015) conducted a more recent study that explored different leadership styles used by sports administrators at a higher education setting in South Africa to ascertain the relationship between leadership styles and organizational effectiveness. They collected data from 300 sports coaches and 140 sports administrators, both male and female. The results revealed that sports administrators were more likely to use TFL; there was a positive correlation between TFL and organizational effectiveness for male and female coaches and administrators. Naidoo et al. concluded that there is a need to provide sport administrators with training and resources to develop their leadership styles to benefit both administrators and the organization where they are employed. They also examined the type of leadership that works best in an athletic department. Leadership style has been extensively explored in business settings (Chang, 2017; DeLay & Clark, 2020; Heimann et al., 2020; Suryanto et al., 2019), but it has also been explored in the context of an athletic department setting (Northington, 2016).

### **Athletic Department Workplace Satisfaction**

An athletic department is a complex organization with many different staff roles. Many athletic departments require their employees to facilitate many different roles and responsibilities. Workplace satisfaction is an important phenomenon to study because it can mitigate turnover intent, thereby saving the athletic department costs associated with productivity loss in the workplace (Peachey et al., 2014). Athletic departments in higher education settings are a significant business (Baghurst et al., 2014; Branch, 1990). A college-level athletic

department can employ anywhere between 50 people at a smaller institution, and upwards of 250 for a larger higher-level football (FBS) program (C. Hairston, personal communication, September 20, 2021; University of Missouri Athletics, n.d.). At an FBS, more money is allocated to the athletic departments to hire more employees to carry out departmental work. At the institutions participating in lower-level football championship divisions (FCS), the same level of funding is not available, requiring employees to do more than they would at a higher-level institution due to fewer staff available for the same amount of work. Athletic departments at the higher-education level offer a unique setting to examine leadership styles and behaviors.

Yusof (2002) was one of the first researchers to explore the leadership behaviors of athletic directors and coaches in intercollegiate settings. Yusof examined the relationship between athletics directors' leadership-style behaviors and the job satisfaction of coaches at NCAA Division I and III institutions in the United States. He surveyed 618 coaches at the Division I and III levels using a tool that measures TFL developed by Podsakoff et al. (1990). The results indicated that coaches evaluated their directors higher in terms of TFL behaviors in comparison to Division III. Division I coaches also reported a higher level of workplace satisfaction in comparison to coaches from Division III. Yusof (2002) noted the discrepancy and was puzzled as to why there was a difference between Division I and Division III coaches. He referenced that there could be possible differences in working environment and professionalism between Division I and Division III coaches. Furthermore, a significant relationship was found between TFL behaviors of athletic directors and coaches' job satisfaction at both NCAA Division I and Division III institutions.

The benefits of transactional leadership in the athletic department setting have been highlighted (Andrew et al., 2011; Baghurst et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2018; van Dierendonck et al.,

2014; Wells & Peachey, 2011). In other studies (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof & Shah, 2008), researchers examined the relationship between coaches and the TFL style. Yusof and Shah (2008) examined which variables moderated the connection between TFL behaviors and job satisfaction at NCAA Division III institutions. The most common leadership styles studied within athletic departments and athletic directors are transactional, transformational, and servant leadership. Burton and Peachey (2009) explained that TFL was the preferred leadership style of the athletic director as opposed to transactional leadership at the NCAA Division III-level. Kuchler (2008) also researched this behavior at the Division III-level. Kuchler (2008) observed a positive connection between coaches' perceptions of the athletic directors' leadership and coaches' satisfaction. Kuchler concluded that there is a need for athletic directors to become more familiar with how their coaches perceive leadership.

Servant leadership is another style of leadership that has been studied within an athletic department. Burton and Peachey (2013) made the distinction that servant leadership was needed in the context of athletic departments due to an employee-first focus. Servant leadership is different from other leadership styles, because the leader's primary focus is the employee and their well-being. Achen et al. (2019) studied servant leadership in a collegiate setting and confirmed it to be a positive factor in terms of employee satisfaction. Intercollegiate athletic departments can benefit from a leader who exhibits the traits of a servant leader because of their focus on putting the employee first (Burton & Peachey, 2013). Servant leadership in athletic departments aided in employees' trust within the organization and establishing an ethical climate throughout the organization (Burton et al., 2017).

Servant leadership is a relatively new style of leadership. This leadership style is still being examined within the context of the athletic department and coaching. Servant leadership,

however, has been examined in the context of the coach-athlete relationship. Hammermeister et al. (2008) studied college coaches and the athletes within an athletic department. These researchers explained that student-athletes preferred a coach who paid attention to their feelings and opinions about the program. The athletes are no longer satisfied with a traditional autocratic, dictator-like leadership model. When their feelings and considerations are considered, the student-athletes feel seen and heard. When the needs of the subordinate are first, a deeper, more intrinsic motivation is formulated within the subordinate (Hammermeister et al., 2008). Hammermeister et al. concluded that effective leaders place others' needs ahead of their own power and control (2008). Placing the needs of others first is in stark contrast to that of TFL, where the primary focus is for the leader to motivate the employees to execute their grandiose vision for the organization.

Research has been done at the NCAA Division I-, Division III-, and junior college-level of sport competition. Several analyses highlight the difference in demands, depending on the level of competition that Division I, II, III, or junior colleges placed on employees, coaches, and athletic directors (Baghurst et al., 2014; Burton & Peachey, 2009). Yusof and Shah (2008) and Kuchler (2008) established a significant relationship between the TFL of the athletic director and the job satisfaction of coaches at the Division III level. Many inquiries have also analyzed the benefits of transactional leadership in an athletic department setting that aided in employee satisfaction (Kuchler, 2008; Wells & Peachey, 2011; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). TFL was beneficial in increasing employee satisfaction amongst athletic department employees. Some research reported that transactional leadership aided in employee satisfaction but within only one facet of transactional leadership—intellectual stimulation (Andrew et al., 2011). Another study

remarked that only one facet of TFL improved employee satisfaction—organizational commitment (Kim et al., 2012).

Yusof and Shah (2008) highlighted variables that were directly related to coaches' job satisfaction within an organization. Organizational formation, rewards, cohesive workgroups, and subordinates' abilities also contributed to job satisfaction. If these variables are in place within a department, they may magnify or lessen a transformational leader's effect on subordinates. Yusof and Shah stated that this study helped bridge the gap between business and intercollegiate athletics departments and that TFL is valuable outside of business settings.

There has only been one study that did not align with the notion that TFL was beneficial to an athletic department. Kim et al. (2012) examined the direct effects of TFL on sports employees' job satisfaction and levels of commitment to the athletic department and athletic director. Participants of the study were 325 athletic department employees in an NCAA FBS conference. Little evidence showed a correlation of TFL on job satisfaction, yet the study revealed that TFL directly influenced commitment at the organizational- and individual-level. Commitment to the athletic department, not the director, made a difference in the TFL–job satisfaction relationship. However, Kim et al. noted that should theoretically have supported workplace satisfaction within their study.

Many studies concerning athletic director leadership have examined leadership from subordinates' points of view, not the athletic directors' actual leadership behaviors. Most research on TFL of college athletic directors have been quantitative in nature. Northington (2016) and Baghurst et al. (2014) conducted qualitative inquiries that examined college athletic directors' actual lived TFL behaviors. Both of these investigations used a qualitative approach to explore collegiate athletic directors' actual leadership behaviors from the perspectives of athletic

directors. Three themes that Northington (2016) revealed through these studies were taking care of student-athletes, supporting coaches, and adhering to NCAA and National Association of Intercollegiate Athletic rules. Baghurst et al. (2014) reported similar results, with the three main themes of leadership, roles and responsibilities, and student-athletes. The central leadership style noted in both of these qualitative analyses was transactional leadership. The most significant difference in these two investigations was that Northington's study examined Division I athletic directors, whereas Baghurst et al.'s study interviewed junior college athletic directors. Baghurst et al. (2014) stated that it takes leadership to manage the budget of an athletic department.

Managing the budget of a department falls under the roles and responsibilities an athletic director. It is noted that there is a stark difference and contrast in the budgets and resources of Division I institutions versus a junior college. A key difference from the results of the studies of Northington (2016) and Baghurst et al. (2014) is notable—the behaviors of athletic directors exhibiting transactional leadership in an athletic department. Northington (2016) explained that the athletic directors in Division I supported coaches by encouraging them to have ownership over their programs and personal and professional development while encouraging them to be creative in their sport. The junior college athletic directors felt more pressure to deal with budgetary concerns more than any other item. In terms of following and adhering to the rules, most of the interviewed athletic directors desired to set a good example and be a role models for their coaches; if the athletic directors followed the rules, then this behavior would be expected of the coaches as well. In terms of taking care of student athletes, both studies highlighted that the athletic directors ensured that the student athletes were appropriately treated and had a positive, full experience, both athletically and academically.

Transactional leadership was also studied within the organization of an athletic department. The main idea behind transactional leadership is an exchange between the leader and the employee or follower. If the employee executes their job, they are compensated by salary, bonus, or promotion. There was a negative correlation between workplace satisfaction and transactional leadership in the athletic department (Burton & Peachey, 2009). Another study by Wells and Peachey (2011) established that it did not matter what type of leadership was exhibited. Both transactional leadership and TFL were beneficial in mitigating turnover intention, indicating good job satisfaction (Wells & Peachey, 2011). Some coaches in the department may actually prefer organizational structure with transactional leadership due to the competitiveness of the job. Transactional leadership may be a more suitable context in the world of collegiate football (Orlando, 2012). In fact, Wells and Peachey concluded that leadership style was not important as long as the subordinate employee was satisfied with the leader. Kent and Chelladurai (2001) posited that transactional leadership is just as viable a leadership style as TFL. They also explained the importance of researching transactional and TFL at different organizational levels.

Workplace satisfaction in the athletic department has been studied extensively (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kim et al., 2012; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). TFL has been shown to be positively correlated with workplace satisfaction (Bayram & Dinç, 2015; Burton & Peachey, 2009; Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996; Suryanto et al., 2019; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). Conversely, one study, Kim et al. (2012), did not show TFL to promote workplace satisfaction. Many studies have quantitatively captured the perceived effects, while few (Baghurst et al., 2014; Northington, 2016) captured the actual behaviors of athletic directors utilizing TFL in the workplace. Although only two athletic departments were examined; the

departments were on opposite sides of the spectrum. One of the athletic departments was an NCAA Division I program and the other was a junior college.

### **Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory and Workplace Satisfaction**

Herzberg first developed the two-factor theory in 1959. The theory posits that there are specific factors that contribute to satisfaction in the workplace (i.e., motivators) and factors that contribute to dissatisfaction (i.e., hygiene factors). Satisfaction and dissatisfaction are two distinct constructs; motivators and hygiene factors contribute to these constructs. Motivators contribute to satisfaction, but the absence of them does not create dissatisfaction. In terms of hygiene factors, having decent working conditions and appropriate supervision would not necessarily lead to employee satisfaction; it simply seems to prevent dissatisfaction (Dixon & Warner, 2010). Those who have studied Herzberg's two-factor theory have shown that it is still relevant today (Bassett-Jones & Lloyd, 2005). Workplace satisfaction is an important in mitigating turnover in an organization (Wells & Peachey, 2011). This is certainly the case in collegiate athletics where coaches put in years of work to advance their careers. This is a costly investment including, time, money, and psychological toll placed on the coach. It is indeed intriguing why turnover is so common in coaching (Cunningham & Sagas, 2004).

Workplace satisfaction is important, especially in intercollegiate athletics. When a coach decides to leave, the team is left without a leader, which negatively affects team performance (Dixon & Warner, 2010). The organization must then spend time and money conducting a search for a new coach. It is in the organization's best interest to retain coaches to mitigate the negative effects of a coaching change (Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003).

The motivation factors of Herzberg's two-factor theory are achievements, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and personal growth. In comparison, the four main tenets of TFL



are charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Northington, 2016; Wells & Peachey, 2011). Many of the factors in Herzberg's theory also exist in TFL and servant leadership. In the two-factor theory, personal growth is listed as a motivation factor that is responsible for satisfaction. Servant leaders emphasize the personal growth of their followers first (Burton & Peachey, 2013). Therefore, utilizing the two-factor theory and applying servant leadership, TFL, or both as the chosen leadership style could make sense as to why servant leadership mitigates turnover intention when utilized as the preferred leadership style of the supervisor. Transformational and transactional leadership have been studied in terms of turnover intention. Wells and Peachey (2011) confirmed that TFL reduces the turnover intention of employees in a sports management setting.

Recognition is one of the motivation factors as described by Herzberg. As he explained it, both TFL and servant leadership have facets that cover this motivator. One of the main tenets in TFL is individualized consideration, where a leader recognizes employees individually and shows respect and care for the employee (Bass, 1985; Lee et al., 2018). Servant leadership is similar; a servant leader designates their time first and foremost to developing their employees (Burton et al., 2017).

At a Christian institution, the work itself has meaning to the employees and can be the primary reason for an employee's choice of employment at those organizations. The employees may be working at a particular organization because they deem it a calling to work in a Christian higher-education organization (Forward et al., 2007). The people at a Christian-affiliated university deem that one of the main foci of their job is to grow young athletes, not only in sports, but in life and spirituality (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006). Christian higher education has been closely related to the need to find one's calling and serving something greater than oneself.

Higher education in a Christian organization is more than a job; it is about developing a whole person (Waalkes, 2015). The work itself is tied to a motivation factor, which is profoundly ingrained in those who choose to work at a Christian university. Coaches are purposeful about integrating their faith and carrying out the university's mission (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006). The work itself is one of the many motivating factors that could increase employee satisfaction.

There are also hygiene factors that may increase dissatisfaction in an organization. Salary could also be a hygiene factor at a lower-level Division I FCS institution. Employees of a Division I FBS institution earn significantly higher salaries than those at lower-level institutions (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). Larger institutions, like Division I FBS schools, have a hierarchal structure that allows for promotion and advancement and better salary compensation, while smaller schools operate on a much smaller scale. There are fewer employees, and the positions are limited (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). Herzberg et al. (2008) inferred that salary is a hygiene factor, or a way to be dissatisfied. Weaver and Chelladurai (2002) found that coaches that earned much higher salaries reported higher levels of satisfaction with their employment. Salary is considered to be an extrinsic reward.

Comradery is also a hygiene factor; an athletic department can be like a family. In a workplace setting where interpersonal relationships are strong, comradery does not assuage dissatisfaction, but employees are not dissatisfied. They can have individual relationships with many individuals throughout the department. In one study, friendship was found to negatively correlate with workplace satisfaction (Weaver & Chelladurai, 2002). This could be due to the fact that this study examined mentorship. The employees perceived less satisfaction from their work group because they had a closer friendship with their mentor than with the group.

According to Herzberg et al. (2008), a hygiene factor is something that can increase dissatisfaction. At a Christian institution, there are policies in place that are not in place at other larger secular institutions. At a Christian institution, the moral and spiritual development of the student-athlete is paramount (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006). In Christian institutions, it was affirmed that student athletes were required to attend chapel on a weekly basis (Nite et al., 2013; Schroeder & Scribner, 2006). Chapel attendance was recorded by the university and had possible ramifications for eligibility if the student did not meet the requirements. Herzberg et al. (2008) explicitly stated that applying and following policy is a clear dissatisfier or that workplace policies are denoted as a hygiene factor for the workplace. In contrast, a coach working at a Council for Christian and College Universities (CCCU) does not have to address chapel attendance by students. Nite et al. (2013) further reported that because of the importance of chapel to the rest of the university, practice schedules were often disrupted or coaches had to work around the university chapel schedule. The teams were also required to host team chapel services weekly, consisting of their sports team members and coaching staff.

There are many facets of job satisfaction. Herzberg has defined them as motivation and hygiene factors. Leadership styles, specifically TFL and servant leadership, share many factors with Herzberg's two-factor theory. There are also many facets at a Christian organization that fall into both factor categories. Overall, at any organization, there will be both factors—motivators that increase satisfaction and hygiene factors that lead to dissatisfaction.

### **Christian-Affiliated Institutions**

Of the 353 NCAA Division I athletic programs, only nine are listed as having a Division I basketball program and are participating in the CCCU (George Fox University, n.d.). That means only 2.5% of the athletic departments operating in the country are participating in the

CCCU. The other 344 division I programs are secular and are not governed by a Christian-affiliated institution.

Christian-affiliated institutions generally operate on different morals, ideals, and values than their secular counterparts (Di Meglio, 2007; Nite et al., 2013). Forward et al. (2007) suggested a link between leadership style and religiosity. Christian-affiliated institutions represent a niche that warrants further investigation. There is a relationship between leadership and spirituality, which represents a topic that warrants empirical study (Forward et al., 2007; Sass, 2000). There has been a limited amount of published research related to leadership and athletic directors at Christian-affiliated institutions.

One study that explored leadership at these types of institutions was conducted by Nite et al. (2013), who examined a faith-based university and its potentially competing institutional logics of its athletic department at the NCAA Division II level. The study by Nite et al. was a case study that collected data from athletic department members, university administrators, and faculty. The findings indicated that the university's religious culture clashed with the athletic expectations of winning, which aided in the marketing of the university. The outcomes also revealed that certain approaches were effective for resolving conflict within the department. Specifically, athletic department employees carried out their jobs in a way that aligned with the university's religious culture. The ability to incorporate their daily faith-based practices into their employment may encourage the idea of vocation as a calling for those employed at a Christian-based institution (Forward et al., 2007).

It is easier for employees to live out their faith at Christian institutions, because they can practice their spirituality daily. The CCCU is an organization of faith-based institutions of higher education. In order for an institution to be a part of CCCU, they must meet certain criteria,

including having a Christian mission, employees must profess their faith, and the institution must align with the Christian beliefs of CCCU (Council for Christian Colleges & Universities, 2020).

The institution that is the subject of this research is a member of the CCCU.

Leadership has also been studied within the context of a Christian higher-education context, and specifically in a university that is a part of the CCCU. A combination of leadership styles, both transformational and transactional, were successful when carried out by leaders (Webb, 2009). Utilizing a combination of TFL and transactional leadership styles in higher education can increase workplace satisfaction, which directly influences absenteeism, tardiness, and turnover (Webb, 2009). The employees are more motivated and possess greater satisfaction from a leader who puts their needs first.

Schroeder and Scribner (2006) determined how religion influenced an intercollegiate athletic department's culture. Their study was conducted at a Christian college's athletic department. The study utilized a qualitative approach, and data were collected through interviews with 19 campus leaders, observations of cultural events, and document analysis. Many articles have concluded that spirituality and leadership have a positive correlation (Forward et al., 2007; Sass, 2000). The results revealed that Christianity played a significant role in the athletic department's culture by regulating its membership and guiding decisions. As a result, the athletic department's values and guiding principles were consistent with the rest of the campus. It is possible for an athletic department to be in line with a sponsoring institution's cultural-religious values. This relationship between leadership and spirituality deserves exploration (Sass, 2000).

An organization's leadership is important as it can ensure the success or failure of a business or athletic department. If the leadership is not functioning optimally, it can lead to unhappy, unmotivated employees. Transformational and servant leadership in an athletic setting

has proven to be a useful strategy for increasing workplace satisfaction (Forward et al., 2007; Webb, 2008). While leadership, leadership style, workplace satisfaction, and Christian-affiliated institutions have been examined (Forward et al., 2007; Sass, 2000; Webb, 2008), no study has yet to uncover what type and style of leadership are best suited for an athletic department of a Christian-affiliated institution.

There are many different leadership styles that a leader may choose to enact while they are in a position of leadership. What type of style the leader chooses has a direct effect on organizational effectiveness and employee job satisfaction. There is a well-established connection between leadership style and workplace or job satisfaction (Chang, 2017; DeLay & Clark, 2020; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). There is also a connection between religiosity and spirituality and leadership style (Forward et al., 2007). The study by Forward et al. (2007) connected job satisfaction with religiosity and spirituality. Athletic directors are the leaders of athletic departments, which are large-scale organizations employing upwards of 250 employees at some institutions. At smaller FCS institutions, these numbers could be as low as 70. The espoused values that are a part of a Christian institution do not always fit the athletic demographic.

### **Summary**

Most of the research that examined athletic department leadership used quantitative approaches centered around collecting data from subordinates regarding their superiors' perceived leadership. There has been only one study that has been qualitative in nature; Northington (2016) captured athletic directors' actual leadership behaviors. TFL has been shown to increase workplace satisfaction in athletic departments (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). Yusof (2002) stated that there is a need for more

qualitative research to discover leaders' behaviors, traits, and personalities. While there has been an increase in the number of inquiries exploring leadership style in college and university athletic departments, there is a dearth of studies that have examined leadership style at Christian-affiliated colleges and universities (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kuchler, 2008; Northington, 2016; Peachey et al., 2014; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008).

In addition to the primary purpose of examining the preferred leadership style of the athletic director at a Christian athletic department, this study sought to fill the gaps in the literature related to leadership style in athletic departments at Christian-affiliated colleges and universities. While Nite et al. (2013) and Schroeder and Scribner (2006) investigated a Christian-affiliated institution's culture, they did not examine if the leadership was different because of the religious constructs involved. The research is a qualitative case study in order to seek the actual behaviors, traits, and personalities of the leaders.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

A qualitative approach examines what individuals say, do, and feel; it seeks to provide the context of a person's experiences and perception and record their responses in their own words (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). A case study allows the researcher to gather data from several participants on the actual behaviors and shed light on the leadership within the organization. In this study I employed a qualitative case study research design. There is a dearth of studies that have explored this topic from a qualitative perspective (Northington, 2016; Yusof, 2002). Using a qualitative approach, I uncovered deep meanings, interpretations, and lived experiences of employees working in a collegiate academic department (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). I sought to answer how and why questions using a case study approach (Yin, 2015). A case study allows research into the most straightforward and most complex problems. An organization like an athletic department is highly complex; there are several employees, multiple head coaches, numerous assistant coaches, and support staff. Many of the studies up until now have been quantitative in nature. This study was purposefully designed as qualitative inquiry to examine the perception of the leadership in this type of department.

#### **Research Design**

I chose a case study research design because this Christian university merits a complete study, because the setting—an athletic department and university that are participating members in the CCCU—is unique (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018; Yazan, 2015). According to Yazan (2015), “A qualitative case study is a holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, institution, or person” (p. 148). For this case study, an athletic department at a private Christian university in the Southwestern United States was the unit of analysis. I used a case study for this research because of the university's athletic department's uniqueness being a



Christian, faith-based NCAA FCS university. Extant research related to leadership styles and workplace satisfaction has mainly been conducted using a quantitative approach (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Doherty & Danylchuk, 1996; Kim et al., 2012; Kuchler, 2008; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008). There has been a dearth of qualitative studies related to the relationship between workplace satisfaction and leadership style (Northington, 2016; Yusof, 2002). Yusof (2002) specifically stated the need for qualitative research to record the participants' actual responses to gain rich data.

In addition, I used an intrinsic case study design to help uncover and explain the leadership style within the athletic department at this selected university. An intrinsic case study is used when there is interest in the case itself, is noteworthy and exploratory; it does not seek to further or deepen the theory on the subject (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Mills & Boardley, 2016). The purpose of this study was to see if there was any difference in the leadership styles of athletic directors at Christian universities and if the styles affected workplace satisfaction. I did this by comparing perceptions of leadership style within the athletic department at the study site's university with leadership styles as reported in the literature and with participants' perceptions of athletic department leadership styles at other Christian universities they had worked at.

### **Researcher Context**

I chose the university in question because of my personal history of employment at the leadership position. I have been familiar with the institution, for the last eight years. During that time, the athletic director changed four times. Each athletic director showcased a different style of leadership during their tenure.

## **Population and Sample**

The target population was athletic department personnel employed at a Christian-affiliated university in the Southwestern United States. There were approximately 13 athletic department personnel identified for the study, including associate and senior athletic directors, administrative assistants, and head coaches. I chose these participants because of their regular interaction with the head athletic director. They are the most appropriate individuals able to give testament to the athletic director's behaviors vis-à-vis leadership style. Of the 13 participants identified for the study, nine volunteered to be included. Through the use of snowball sampling an additional participant was added bringing the total number of participants to 10. In Yusof's study (2002), a future recommendation for further study was qualitative research due to the capacity to record the rich data from actual perceived experiences of those around a leader.

### ***Sampling Technique***

I used a nonprobability sampling approach and purposive sampling to select participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Purposive sampling is also referred to as *judgmental sampling*. Participants are deliberately chosen because they are most likely to provide insight into the problem being investigated based on their position, experience, and/or identity markers (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Purposive sampling facilitated the identification of athletic department personnel who could give the most significant amount of insight into the athletic director's leadership style and how it has influenced their workplace satisfaction. In Northington's (2016) study of actual behaviors of athletic directors, the sample size consisted of 20 participants. Northington reported that data saturation occurred before all 20 participants could be interviewed.

While there were approximately 70 subordinate employees within the athletic department, not all would qualify as having regular interaction with the athletic director. The participant pool began with the 13 aforementioned personnel indicated as the sample, which includes head coaches, assistant, associate, and deputy athletic directors, as well as any administrative staff that report directly to the athletic director. Data saturation was reached with a specified number of 10 participants, so I employed a snowball sampling technique to recruit more participants to reach this point of data saturation (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Data saturation occurs when additional information from participants does not add anything new to the already gathered research. Saturation occurred when I established common trends and the interview process began to affirm other participants' findings (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). In this investigation, snowball sampling consisted of asking the participants of the study to recommend other employees they felt would contribute to the research.

### **Qualitative Sampling**

Although a great deal can be studied through careful observation, not all information or data can be obtained in this manner. In this qualitative research, I used an interview protocol to gather the data from the participants that cannot be directly observed (Patton, 2002). An interview protocol allows the researcher to be consistent with their questions throughout the interview; the protocol guides the researcher throughout the interaction with the participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). I used semistructured interviews to inquire about specific topics and give me latitude to ask follow-up questions or probe deeper into certain answers (Patton, 2002). Appendix A contains the interview protocol. A panel of experts evaluated the questions to ensure that they addressed the study's research questions and were appropriate. Participants on the panel were purposefully sampled who had knowledge of or had worked within an athletic department.

## **Field Testing**

I conducted field testing with a select few participants to ensure that the questions were appropriate and valid to the research in question. Field testing, or a pilot study, aims to increase the quality of the research as well as increase the reliability and validity of the instrument. The purpose of field testing is to ensure that the questions are collecting the data intended (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Field-test participants were also utilized to refine the verbiage or wording of the questions. There were two participants selected for field testing (neither were included in the study). One was an athletic director at another local university, the second was an employee who had worked in an athletic department setting for more than 15 years and was well-acquainted with how the leadership structure of an athletic department functions. Both employees had worked in an athletic department and met the criteria to be included for field testing and understood a private Christian university's morals, values, vision, and mission and those of the athletic department.

## **Data Collection**

This study's data collection method was semistructured interviews with head coaches, administrators, and selected employees using a semistructured interview protocol. The study interviews were 60 minutes or less in length and conducted either using Zoom video conference technology or in person, based on the participant's comfort level with meeting in person. I conducted a pilot study in the same manner, including 60-minute interviews either by Zoom video conference or in-person interviews. Interviewees were conducted in a location that was private and convenient for interviewees.

## **Data Analysis**

I transcribed the interviews and quality-checked them against the audio recordings. The transcripts were also member-checked by sharing them with each of the study participants once I completed and transcribed the interviews. Data were analyzed using Dedoose, an online qualitative software conducting thematic analysis using the six steps developed by Braun and Clarke (2006): (a) become familiar with the data, (b) generate initial codes, (c) search for themes, (d) review themes, (e) define themes, and (f) write-up. Dedoose is a web-based software system that allows data analysis from anywhere a Wi-Fi connection is available. Dedoose has a secure server that protects the data and keep all participant information private. Dedoose is a software program made for researchers, not programmers, making it user-friendly. Because of the extensive nature of data that this qualitative study produced, this software assisted me in coding and analyzing common themes within the data. With the participants' permission, I recorded the interviews via Zoom or via phone and transcribed them verbatim using Google Otter. The transcripts were reviewed for clarity and accuracy by the participants themselves. I created general codes and assigned themes to the transcripts as needed. Interview condensation was performed to reduce the interview into more manageable data. Then I used in vivo coding passes to extract keys words and phrases (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Themes were generated from the participants' responses.

## **Methods for Establishing Trustworthiness**

There are four criteria for establishing reliable, valid qualitative research. They are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Credibility seeks to establish the truth of the data. I established credibility by familiarizing myself with the most apparent and significant leadership styles, the types of leadership used by

athletic directors within successful athletic departments, and which leadership style the participants preferred. I also described in detail my experience as a researcher and the interactions that occurred throughout the research, maintaining an audit trail in order to preserve credibility (Cope, 2014).

In terms of transferability, I have described my methods, research, and data so they could be replicated. The context of this research is an NCAA Division I FCS athletic department. Transferability is the idea and hope that the study can be reproduced in another setting (Cope, 2014). I maintained dependability by reviewing the data, assuring that the transcripts were verbatim and reviewing the transcripts to ensure they were accurate. Dependability can be achieved when another researcher concurs with the details of the research process (Cope, 2014).

Confirmability was also established by recording and using exactly what the participants said during the interviews. All the data was free of any bias and only reflected the responses that the participants freely gave (Cope, 2014).

### **Researcher's Role**

My role in this research was that of the primary investigator. I interviewed the participants about the leadership style of the athletic director. I worked in an athletic department for eight years, and I have observed many athletic director's leadership styles. I have worked in both a secular athletic department and a faith-forward Christian institutions. Working at an institution affiliated with CCCU is very different from working at a secular institution. The mission, vision, and values of the department are highly regarded within a CCCU athletic department. Each athletic director has a very different leadership style; some leadership styles have been effective, and some have not. Having witnessed these leadership styles and now

obtaining my doctorate in organizational leadership, I wanted to make a contribution that honors my school and field of organizational leadership.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I completed online IRB training during the Prospectus II course in May 2021. All parameters were followed as established by the Abilene Christian University's Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix C). I introduced myself to participants and made sure that they understood the nature of the research. All participants were notified of their participation in the study. There was a potential risk that the participants' supervisor would discover their identity and responses; however, the risk was minimal. This risk was mitigated through the use of pseudonyms to protect participant anonymity. In addition, I kept and am keeping the data confidential and secure. The participants were given a consent form and confidentiality agreement outlining that all data that contributed to the study was maintained and kept secure. Any electronic data was password-protected, and any physical data, such as field notes, have been kept in a locked office in a locked cabinet.

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that the participants in the research were knowledgeable and truthful in their responses. I further assumed that the participants provided responses that are meaningful and give insight into the perceived leadership of a CCCU athletic department. Based on the literature, a transactional leader would be effective. However, a transformational or servant leader would most likely be the leadership style used by an athletic director in a private Christian athletic department (Burton & Peachey, 2013; Northington, 2016).

**Limitations**

There may be potential bias in the study as I work closely with the athletic department identified in this study. If a participant did not feel comfortable with the interview, I had a separate interviewer available to conduct the line of questioning. Limitations to this study were that this is only one small Christian university in the Southwestern United States, and the sample size is small. Measures were put into place to provide anonymity to the participants and pseudonyms were used. The findings in this study may be useful to other CCCU institutions but are not generalizable. Some of the responses from the participants may not be entirely truthful due to fear of being discovered. Privacy for the participants was protected and their responses were anonymous and pseudonyms were used in the study.

**Delimitations**

A delimitation of this study was only using the participants that interacted directly under or with the athletic director within the athletic department. A delimitation of this study was that it is one of nine Division I FCS CCCU institutions in the country. A second delimitation of this study may be that the participants willingly chose to be employed at an organization that is a participating member of the CCCU.

**Summary**

The leadership style of the athletic director can be vital to how successful they are in the success of an organization. Conducting an intrinsic qualitative interview with employees closest to the leader can give a real insight into how the organization is being led. This case focused on the uniqueness of this Christian athletic department, and its unique challenges, problems, and weaknesses. An instrument was derived and field tested to increase the quality of questions and increase the validity of the questions. Much of the research to date has been quantitative in



nature. Qualitative interviews from the employees allowed retrieval of rich data of the actual experiences of the subordinate employees (Yusof, 2002). Interviewing employees at this organization allowed me to generate rich responses from the participants (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018).

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of the leadership of the athletic director at a religiously affiliated athletic department of an NCAA Division I FCS-level university. This is a case study of leadership style of an athletic director at a private Christian university. I conducted semistructured interviews of employees in the department that had regular contact with and worked directly under the athletic director. I collected qualitative data to answer the research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to report the results of the study from 10 semistructured interviews and the field notes I took during the interviews. I recorded the participants' actual responses from the interviews.

**Primary Research Question:** How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the leadership style of the athletic director at a private Christian university influence their workplace satisfaction?

**Secondary Research Question 1:** How does the perception of the athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university influence their perception of hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work) related to their employment?

**Secondary Research Question 2:** How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university influence their motivation factors (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) related to their employment?

In this study I used purposeful sampling in conjunction with snowball sampling to elicit responses from 10 participants in total. Participants were solicited via their university email; a second email was sent out one week later. I chose the participants selected because of their

regular daily interaction with the athletic director. The resultant sample included head coaches and administrative staff. I took all precautions to ensure privacy and anonymity for those that volunteered for the study. I recorded the interviews via Zoom, and gave the participants pseudonyms. Ten participants in total were selected for semistructured interviews. For the sake of preserving the participants' identities, I recorded no identifying information. The participants were both male and female. The length of their employment at the university ranged from a few months to 18 years. The interviews lasted anywhere between 20 minutes and 45 minutes depending on the responses given by the participants. I also took field notes during the interviews. The interviews were then transcribed using an online transcription service, Transcription Puppy, and then cross-checked for validity by the participants. Dedoose was then used to help me develop themes and codes from the raw interview data.

### **Presentation of the Findings**

According to Saldaña and Omasta (2018), if researchers want to understand the human experience fully, words rather than numbers give a more accurate representation. Qualitative analysis seeks to derive meaning and interconnectedness through the data collected. Analyzing the experiences of collegiate head coaches and administrators on the leadership style of the athletic director was carried out using semistructured interviews.

I used Dedoose to highlight key passages during the interview process, noting 225 excerpts from 10 different interviews. Twenty codes were generated during analysis, and of those 20 codes, five themes emerged: communication, vision, recognition/growth, autonomy/micromanagement, and leadership style (transformational, servant, and situational leadership). I used in vivo coding to initially examine the entirety of the interviews as well as produce a list of key words and terms from the field notes I took. In vivo coding uses the exact

words of the participants as a way to produce qualitative data. Themes are extended phrases that identify and function to categorize a set of data, in this case, codes (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). Field notes were also used during the coding process. While analyzing the field notes I used different color highlighters to accent the words commonly written down from the interviews. Motivators and hygiene factors from Herzberg's two-factor theory were coded using the same color, so further analysis was necessary for that code.

From the field notes I was able to draw upon the specific questions during the interview to look at the relevant data from the participants. Through systematic data analysis of the qualitative research, five themes emerged: (a) Communication, (b) Vision, (c) Motivators – recognition/growth, (d) Autonomy/micromanagement, and (e) Leadership style – transformational, servant, and or situational. I highlighted recurring themes throughout the interviews and these key words came up the most often. Appendix B reports a coding matrix compiled using Dedoose of the codes and key words reported by participants.

The main leadership style of the athletic director as reported by participants was communication. Eight of the 10 participants referenced communication during the interviews about the athletic director. The main antecedent adjective before communication was good, thorough, or a strong communicator. Two of the participants mentioned a negative experience with a supervisor. Most of the participants noted that something that the athletic director did benefitted them was communicating well and often about the direction and vision of the department. Participant 1 indicated this by saying that

I also would like to be communicated well with as far as what's happening in the athletic department as a whole, in the university as a whole, that we have a good direction, that

we're communicated with, in the direction that the athletic director wants our department to go.

When talking about the characteristics that make a great athletic director, Participant 4 stated, "[The athletic director is] a strong communicator. I really believe that the best leaders or the trustworthy ones are humble and communicate well."

On the other hand, two participants spoke about some hazards of not communicating that can or did happen while highlighting the importance of communication from leadership.

Participant 6 said the following:

One of the greatest things I'll say is open communication. I think, there's been some, you know, things in the past, with different athletic directors that there was kind of a communication barrier or gap and, you know, a lot of times as coaches, you're last to know. So, I think communication and open communication, asking coaches' opinions about something that particularly influence or impact their sport. With the decisions that the administration may make, valuing their opinion, valuing their inputs and insight, I think is very critical. So, good healthy communication, I think, is probably the greatest thing, too.

Participant 10 recalled, that

I know that one complaint that has happened previously with a former AD was about the lack of communication style, the lack of transparency. They had a very limited senior staff of just two people plus himself. And so a lot of things were kept really close to the chest. When I've also been with ADs, like the one that I have currently, who really emphasizes inclusiveness and being transparent where possible; obviously, he can't let us know everything that's going on.

Participant 10 went on to describe the importance of communication from the top down:

I'd say that's probably the second most important thing that an AD can have is just being able to communicate well enough and if you don't have that open line of communication and with the people within your department, it can create issues.

Many participants had very vivid recollections from their experiences with poor communication, and they highlighted it as an important issue to bring to the forefront.

On the other hand, Participant 1 talked about some of the good leaders, including athletic directors, that the participant worked for:

So, in my experience, the good athletic directors that I've worked for have the ability to cast a great vision for what they expect their athletic department to look like. And have some specific areas in which they want to see growth and progression to move forward.

They are very communicative and clear in their communication skills and expectations.

Communication from their superiors was mentioned by eight of the 10 participants involved in the study. It is evident that communication from their superiors is something that is important to employees. It is evident that subordinate employees do not want to be kept in the dark and want to hear from their leadership. Many of the responses from the participants regarding communication was in reference to what they want or need from a leader and how they like to be led. Also, they were asked what qualities they thought were good or appropriate from their ideal leader.

### **Vision**

The next theme that was prevalent was the participants' want or desire to know their supervisor's vision for the organization. Five of the 10 participants used the word *vision* to help indicate what they wanted the athletic director to communicate to them. The participants needed

to know what direction the organization was headed. One of the main tenets of TFL is for the leader of the organization to broadcast their vision to the organization as well as carry out and model their vision to the organization (Yusof & Shah, 2008). Many of these responses discussed how the athletic director ideally would lead the athletic department.

Participant 4 discussed why it was important to know the athletic director's vision:

I think that the biggest areas for an athletic director are to set the vision, and, set the vision and, then really hold the people accountable to that vision. Yeah, I just think you wouldn't do this job for someone that you didn't believe in and what their vision was, because this job asks too much of you as it is, which I'm sure a lot of people feel about their job.

Participant 5 remarked on why the leader promoting their vision is so important to the athletic department staff:

I think that an athletic director has to clearly define the vision of the entire athletic department. I think there has to be goals within, within that vision. I think the goals need to be clearly defined, because I think there's a pulling power toward that. I think that the goals and everything are clearly stated. I think everyone knows the direction on where we're headed. And then I think that the way that you met, I think there just has to be powerful accountability once you have clearly defined those within the athletic department. So, I think defining the goals, spreading the vision for the entire department, setting goals for each and every athletic team [is important], and then making sure we stay on track with accountability within each and every sport.

Being clear with the vision leads to accountability of the leadership and allows everyone in the department to be on the same page. Many of the participants echoed this sentiment. They

wanted to know what direction the department was headed, so they too could gauge the direction of their department accordingly.

Participant 8 answered a question about satisfaction in correlation to the athletic director's leadership style. They were then asked a follow-up question regarding what leadership style they felt they connected with the best. Participant 8 answered, "I think people that see big vision want excellence and they're solution-based and creative thinkers with really good communication and high energy." Participant 8 continued: "I'd like the athletic director to be a mentor to the coaching staff, communicate vision, expectations, and give guidance and support".

Every participant wanted to know the vision of the leadership and thought that it was helpful for the leader to be able to cast their vision to give direction on where the department was headed.

### **Motivators: Recognition and Growth**

According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, there are motivators and there are hygiene factors. Motivators are things that would lead the employee to be satisfied with their work. Hygiene factors, on the other hand, are variables that would lead to dissatisfaction of the employee at their place of employment. Throughout all the interviews one theme emerged that was related to motivators and that was the need for recognition and growth opportunities at a place of employment.

Eight of the 10 participants included growth and recognition in their responses; they wanted or needed to be recognized for their work or accomplishments that they garnered while performing their role. The participants defined recognition as acknowledgement from their superior that they are performing satisfactorily or exemplary at their role. The participants also wanted room to be able to grow as a person and employee in their job. Participant 10 noted that



at this level—NCAA Division I FCS—employees that are not head coaches have to move around to different schools to get promoted and gain more responsibilities. Participant 8 spoke on the benefits of receiving motivators like recognition and growth throughout the duration of their employment as an athletic department employee:

I would say I'm in year three right now and so if you asked me that question in 10 years? If there's no growth and no pouring in from leadership, the burnout rate is probably pretty high. I think it's a pretty taxing career and mentally exhausting and so I'm still in my infancy as a coach here. I think it's easier with internal motivation right now. And as the time goes along, the external. It probably becomes more critical to keep people on board and satisfied at their job.

Participant 10 speaks about the positive benefit of motivators that come from the leader: "I think one thing that I really enjoy from managers and leaders that I've had is also the recognition when you're doing a good job and when you are accomplishing and making progress towards stuff." Participant 5 spoke about recognition of the value a winning program may bring to a university:

I mean if someone doesn't value someone and in today's, there's just the reality of it in this market, when you look at the amount of money that a winning program brings into a university, to me that is nothing more than respect and valuing what someone brings to a university. I was speaking to a coach just the other day about who-, they had won a national championship. And you're talking about the three championships that they had won in a period of five years that it had brought in 30 to 40 million dollars into that university. So, I just think it speaks to just recognizing the value.

Participant 6 also commented on the value of teams, and the equality of each team being valued:

I think the biggest thing is making sure that each sport is valued. I understand that there are certain sports that are going to get great recognition. You know, being a revenue sport really helps out our program. You know, if certain teams are doing well, then, it helps everybody. I think it's really important to make sure that every athlete here is valued equally. Sports, let's say, is fair but not equal. I think that's an important thing. And so I really, I feel that it's important for the athletic director to invest in his coaches, know them personally, know their hearts, and, you know, really be able to understand.

Many of the employees within the athletic department are internally motivated to be the best at their jobs and many of them thrive on that internal motivation.

Nevertheless, many of the employees still needed or wanted the external motivation from recognition and opportunities for growth. This was evident in my interview exchange with Participant 8:

Participant 8: I think I'm internally motivated. However, I really appreciate external motivation with having good leadership to affirm decisions and pour, pour into me while I'm here; but I would say its internal motivation.

Interviewer: So, [you are] internally motivated, but the recognition is nice as well as the opportunity for growth.

Participant 8: Yes.

Of all the participants, only one remarked that they did not need any affirmation at all from a superior. Participant 5 stated that

I don't rely on other people to motivate me or to even inspire me, honestly. So, that's it really, I don't depend on, need anyone to inspire me to want to achieve or accomplish goals that I have set personally. Ah, again, I've always tried to take great pride in making

sure that no one's expectations for me are higher than my expectations are for myself. So, again, I don't depend upon other people to try to motivate or inspire me.

Many of the employees were internally reliant and regulated when it came to motivation on their job. Conversely, these employees are the heads of their teams or the leaders in their department, so they still wanted affirmation and recognition from their superior that they doing a good job.

### **Autonomy and Micromanagement**

Another theme that emerged during the interviews was the need or desire for autonomy and not to be micromanaged by their supervisor. When discussing their supervision or how they liked to be led, many participants, without prompting, said that they preferred not to be micromanaged by the athletic director. They wanted to be able to run their team or department how they saw fit. They wanted the ability to have the autonomy and trusted as a part of the staff to carry out the management of their team or department. In Herzberg's two-factor theory, supervision is a hygiene factor and something that can aid in dissatisfaction. Many of the participants spoke about it two-fold. They spoke about the negative effects of having someone, a supervisor, who was a micromanager, and they also spoke of it because they wanted the autonomy to be able to manage their program the way that they saw fit.

Participant 7 remarked that

I think the athletic director would provide a framework of expectations, standards to be met, not just through coaches and staff but administrative support, as well. Make it pretty clear what the expectations are and then-and then give them the freedom to meet those standards or exceed those standards in their own individual way while keeping tabs on their progress, not from a micro-manager standpoint, but just checking in frequently with

all departments in the athletic department and being able to keep fairly accurate tabs on how different areas are doing within the athletic department.

Many of the coaches understand that there is a necessity of having a leader or a supervisor of the entire athletic department, but they wanted to be able to run their programs as they saw fit. Participant 7 answered that

I think any coach wants to know that the athletic director has your back, supports you. And if you're in a similar mindset about how things should be conducted within the athletic department, I think you have the freedom to manage your team, lead your team without hesitation, and it's pretty clear.

Many referred to micromanagement by a superior as something that would detract from the overall environment. Participant 7 noted the following:

I guess if the athletic director was an overbearing micromanager that would probably not motivate me much at work, so I guess that would be a definite negative downside and I would not be as motivated at work; but that's a worst-case scenario.

Participant 1 remarked about the leadership style of the athletic director and how that pertained to their motivation at work:

On the flip side of that, if they are an over-communicator or a micromanager-type of a leader, then that can also diminish feelings of worth and not feeling confident in what you do in your job and not having the ability to make decisions on your own.

Participant 6, "I definitely don't want to be micromanaged because that's me as a person. I don't want to micromanage people. So, I think we have great freedom here."

Participant 3 affirmed this opinion:

Well, I like to be led. I like to be trusted knowing that I like more of a hands-off approach, where I can work and trusted to do my job and not be micromanaged and then that person, is just kind of being there for support and guidance. That's kind of more of a real dream realization of how I like to be led with my current job that I have in last 15 or so plus years.

It was clear with almost all participants that there can be too much supervision. Most of the participants wanted to lead their own teams and run them their own way. They did realize the necessity for leadership and oversight, just not too much of it.

### **Leadership Style: Transformational, Servant, and Situational Leadership**

I asked the participants about their preference of leadership style of the athletic director; and three main styles emerged. Several of the participants expressed main tenets of TFL: the necessity that the athletic director cast a great vision or make clear the vision for the department and some also mentioned the need for inspiration. Others expressed that the athletic director should be there to serve the coaches and staff in some capacity, a central tenet of servant leadership. Some discussed that the leader of the organization should be able to lead each person differently because each person's needs are different, so there needs to be different leadership styles to suit those needs. A few participants remarked that they wanted a leader to lead by example. They wanted a leader that would be capable of working alongside them. When asked what leadership meant, Participant 7 stated, "Leadership . . . is bringing a person or group to a level that that person or group wants to achieve or it doesn't even know that they can achieve giving them avenues to achieve that success." The simplest definition of TFL is leading people to accomplish more than what is expected by inspiring and pushing them beyond their limits (Bass, 1985).

Participant 4 discussed what the ideal leadership style for an athletic director would be: “I think that the biggest areas for an athletic director are to set the vision and then hold the people accountable to that vision.” Transformational leaders are often characterized by the leaders presenting a grandiose vision to be carried out by subordinates. Participant 8 described the leadership style of the athletic director: “Yeah. I think people that see big vision want excellence and their solution-based and creative thinkers, with really good communication and high energy.” When asked how the athletic director would lead ideally, Participant 3 stated, “I think that an athletic director needs to kind of be a similar kind of a servant leader.” As the interviews went on it was clear that the kind of leadership each participant wanted was personal and each had their own need for each style of leadership mentioned here.

When asked about the leadership style of the athletic director, Participant 2 explained the following:

I personally believe the athletic director position starts by leading, preparing, serving, and being there for the coaches. I think that should be the number one priority. That’s a great question, you know. I think that a major component for leadership for me is authenticity, somebody who can really be authentic in who they are, somebody who has a serving heart who understands that maybe they’re there to lead and help other people, shine in different ways in their talent areas. And having a serving heart. And again, making sure that you’re getting to know that person. That person knows that you’re invested in them. I think that to be a good leader and to have good leadership, you really want someone who can be dependable and reliable, who could really help you become a better person.

Situational leadership describes a leader who uses different styles based on what is necessary for each situation and each employee involved. If one employee needs to be inspired,

then the athletic director would utilize TFL with this employee. If another employee needed a servant leader, then the athletic director would change his leadership style based on that employee and be a servant to them to help them grow. If an employee needed no external motivation, then it may be as simple as a transactional approach. The transactional approach is the leader asking the subordinate to complete a task for a reward, a type of transaction. The reward can be as simple as the salary that the employee is making. There is no need, external drive, or motivation.

Each participant conveyed what they wanted or needed in a leader. It was reflected in each of the participants, their personalities, their own personal leadership style, and their own experiences with leading others and how they have been led in the past.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 began with a discussion of the study and the semistructured interviews that occurred. I reviewed the research process and presented an in-depth analysis of the participants' responses to the questions that were asked of them. I derived major themes from the interview data and the field notes I took. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for future study, and a conclusion to the study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to inspect the perceptions of the leadership style of the athletic director at a private Christian university. The driving motivation for this research was personally witnessing four different athletic directors within the athletic department within a span of eight years. Each one had a style that may or may not have worked. I used a case study to gain rich data from the participants' actual lived experiences. It was beneficial to record the interviews and then have them transcribed. Using this method, I was able to analyze the data with several coding passes. The field notes from the interviews proved to be a valuable resource as well. I examined what effects Herzberg's motivation and hygiene factors had on the employee's workplace satisfaction. Not everyone in the athletic department had daily interaction with the athletic director, so I collected data from those who worked closely with the director so that I could get an accurate representation of the leadership style. I collected data and analyzed it using semistructured interviews, and field notes using in-vivo coding and thematic analysis. Through analyzing the data several themes emerged.

I kept the anonymity of the coaches and administration, the only employee specific information that was collected was length of employment at the current university. The length ranged from a few months to 18 years. All five themes represented the rich data that can be recorded through conducting qualitative research and recording the participants' actual lived responses.

### **Discussion**

#### ***Primary Research Question***

How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the leadership style of the athletic director at a private Christian university influence their workplace satisfaction?



For many of the participants, the leadership style of the athletic director did matter. The preferred leadership style was based on the preference of the participant. Many of the participants indicated that the way the athletic director leads the department has a direct effect on the participants' everyday ability to run their programs. Only a few said that the leadership style of the athletic director did not matter to them because of their internal motivation and drive to succeed.

I asked the participants a question about the leadership style of the athletic director and whether it affected their workplace satisfaction. The answers from eight of the participants were that the leadership style of the athletic director influences their workplace satisfaction. Only two participants out of the 10 interviewed stated that the leadership style of the athletic director did not have any effect on them in the workplace whatsoever.

## **Themes**

### ***Vision***

Several participants remarked on the necessity of knowing the vision of the athletic director and that it was important that the director have a similar vision for the department that coaches and assistants had. They also wanted to know what that vision was. Many of the participants wanted a leader that they could rally behind and that could cast a vision of what the university athletic department should be like. This description of leadership from the participants is synonymous with TFL. The leader is a charismatic type of person that can inspire those employees around them to do more than what is expected (Bass, 1985).

This coincides with some of the current research on athletic directors' leadership styles. There should be an emphasis on a vision for the department and that the director is energetic and eager to lead (Kuchler, 2008). While none of the participants specifically stated that they wanted

the director to exercise TFL, they repeatedly described the current director's style as embodying the qualities or tenets of TFL. Yusof (2002) was one of the seminal studies on investigating TFL in a collegiate athletic setting and he found that TFL was supported and increased subordinates' job satisfaction. There has yet to be a significant finding of what the outcome is or if there is a difference in a Christian university athletics department.

### ***Leadership Style***

It was clear that each participant had a preferred leadership style. Several were mentioned or described—TFL, servant leadership, leading by example, and situational leadership styles. The leadership styles that the participants preferred were as unique as the participants. The participants answers had no set variables or patterns for the type of leadership style they preferred. Each participant wanted a different leadership style solely based on the experiences that they had had. Some mentioned their own need for external motivation or that they relied heavily on their own internal drive. Some of the participants wanted the leader to be a servant that was there to meet and serve the needs of the coaching staff and administration.

Baghurst et al. (2014) found that the leadership styles most attributed to athletic directors are TFL and situational because of their flexibility and success. Burton and Peachey (2013) studied the need for servant leadership in athletics because of the more relational nature and focus of the leader and follower.

### ***Communication***

Most participants, eight in total, referred to the communication of the athletic director and how important it was to maintain a homeostatic environment in the workplace. Many commented on the negative effects of a lacking or nonexistent communication with leaders they had experienced. All eight participants wanted to be communicated with well and often. A few of the

participants answered that it could have negative effects if the athletic director kept the participants in the dark, withheld communication, or did not communicate appropriately. A descriptor that came up quite often when asked about attributes of an ideal athletic director was a good communicator.

Building on the previous theme of many of the participants, they wanted a charismatic or transformational leader. According to Forward et al. (2007), TFL is communicative in nature, has a spiritual component to it, and implies that the leader has the moral character to maintain effective, harmonious relationships with subordinates. Everything described seems to be in alignment with a typical NCAA FCS Division 1 private Christian athletic department. Forward et al. (2007) stated that effective communication both facilitates job satisfaction and aids TFL. So long as the athletic director is a good communicator, then their perception as a trusted leader will be upheld. Forward et al. (2007) concluded in their study of leadership, religion, and higher education that Christians should motivate, communicate, and lead in a way that honors God while facilitating personal growth.

### ***Motivators***

According to my understanding of Herzberg's theory, the two motivators that pertain to the participants in this study were growth and recognition. While there is a possibility for growth, one participant in the study mentioned that, in their experience, the best way to move up the ladder and get promoted is to transfer into a lateral position at a different institution, because it is difficult to be promoted within the department at a midsized institution like the one in this study,.

At an NCAA FCS institution, such as the one being studied here, the employees are asked to carry out multiple jobs or tasks that may be carried out by several employees at larger

institutions. Another employee specified that it is easy to burn out working in collegiate athletics. Motivators could be a key way to prevent this type of burnout. Herzberg et al. (2008) highlight that supervisors are the most frequent source when divvying out compliments or recognition to employees. An important aspect of recognition from the supervisor is for achievement of some kind. The ultimate achievement in sports is winning and very easy to gauge. The highest achievement can be winning a national championship. Winning is seen as the only tangible way to gauge success. Because of this, athletic staff members may feel this is the only way their effectiveness is being gauged (Achen, 2019). While it may be easy for the athletic director to give recognition and affirmation to the employees that are coaches, it may be more difficult when it comes to the recognition of administrative staff. Since they are not the ones out there coaching and winning the games, so it is more difficult to gauge performance. Like any other business, recognition could come from long hours put toward a fundraising goal or a new building project approved and or finished or from a student-athlete goal that was acquired for the year. Recognition from leaders and achievement are among the top two factors that are associated with job satisfaction (Herzberg et al., 2008).

### ***Micromanagement and Autonomy***

Autonomy as a theme was supportive of the initial research question. The participants wanted to be able to conduct their programs as they saw fit. Many participants labeled the idea of micromanagement as something that would lead to a negative perception of the leadership of the athletic director. This was immediately mentioned with a statement about how important having autonomy at their job was. A few of the participants did mention that they expected to have supervision from the athletic director but wanted a healthy amount of supervision. The

participants that commented on healthy supervision knew that they had to be supervised or that there was a superior overlooking what they were doing.

At Christian institutions, there are rules and regulations that secular schools might not have. The purpose of this case study was to examine leadership at a private Christian-affiliated university to see if there were differences when compared to their secular counterparts. The athletic director is responsible for enforcing these rules for the coaches and then ultimately the student-athletes. It is up to the athletic director to find a healthy dose of supervision and keeping these rules in place at this type of institution.

According to Herzberg, supervision is considered a hygiene factor that could contribute to the dissatisfaction of an employee in the workplace. The employees stated that they all wanted autonomy in their positions. Supervision would affect their perception of leadership if the athletic director was a micromanager, which fits with Herzberg's theory.

**Secondary Research Question 1.** How does the perception of the athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university influence their perception of hygiene factors (i.e., policies, supervision, work) related to their employment?

### ***Micromanagement and Autonomy***

All of the participants, except for Participants 5 and 9, had something to say about supervision or autonomy. The idea of micromanagement came up often in the participant interviews. The participants did not want to be micromanaged by their superior or the athletic director, and micromanagement would be a detractor from their overall work experience. Micromanagement on the part of the athletic director was seen as negative, but was not the case for all supervision. Some even discussed the athletic director checking in regularly from time to time.

The theme was not that they did not want supervision or leadership; the participants simply wanted good supervision.

The participants all wanted to be trusted or have the autonomy to run their programs as they saw fit. Many of the participants wanted to be seen as trustworthy or have the confidence of the athletic director. Herzberg et al. (2008) argued that a supervisor who is able to keep a tight ship around the office space is able to elicit strong feelings from the employees about their job. The role of the supervisor, in this case the athletic director, is to plan and supervise the work of his staff. In this study, the staff under consideration was the coaches and administrative staff that the director interacted with on a daily basis.

**Secondary Research Question 2:** How does the perception of athletic department personnel of the athletic director's leadership style at a private Christian-affiliated university influence their motivation factors (i.e., achievement, recognition, growth) related to their employment?

### ***Recognition or Growth***

The interviews revealed two factors that support this theory. The employees wanted to receive recognition from their superior that they were doing a good job in their current role. They also wanted an opportunity for growth as an employee, and spiritual growth as a person. When prompted about growth, many participants referred to their own personal growth and/or spiritual growth. They wanted the athletic director to help them grow in their positions both as people and as coaches or administrators.

Herzberg et al. (2008) labeled growth as a motivator, a factor that would likely aid in job satisfaction. He defined growth as either moving up in the company, getting a promotion, or

increasing a person's skillset. Reiterating Forward et al. (2007), growth can occur at the personal level in the setting of religion and higher education.

### ***The Work Itself: A Calling***

Although it was not initially listed as a theme, something else that was mentioned frequently by the participants was the work itself. When asked why they did what they did, some explained it as a calling. Others alluded to the fact that it was what they loved to do. Some described their calling as a calling to the university, or it seemed as if their employment at the university was a part of God's plan or reflected divine timing. One participant referenced working at this institution as a "needle in a haystack," commenting on how special and unique this place of employment was. The work itself was often characterized as something deeply innate to who they are. Many participants discussed that they felt it was by divine intervention that they were in their current role and place of employment.

In Herzberg's two-factor theory, another motivator or factor that can contribute to job satisfaction is the work itself. Although the work itself, or the calling, does not have anything to do with the leadership of the athletic director, it still came up enough times throughout the interviews for me to mention. The work itself is an intrinsic motivator for the employee.

This research is an intrinsic case study of one private Christian institution in the Southwestern United States. It would be interesting to have a larger, broader participant base from schools that mirror the one in this study. As the researcher, I did have prior knowledge or relationships with the participants; I have been acquainted with them for several years. My knowledge of said participants and coding of the data may have been interpreted differently if it had been coded by someone who had no knowledge about the participants. Having a larger

sample size would supply more data for the study. However, it was apparent to me that an intrinsic case study was an excellent means for collecting and analyzing data.

### **Implications**

The data demonstrates that the implications for a leader are that this person needs to be invested in their organization. They need to be able to communicate well with their staff and let them know that they are doing a good job when they do so. There is not a one-size-fits-all, best approach to leadership style for an athletic director. Finding the right person for the job of athletic director is imperative for organizational success as well as keeping the employees satisfied in their current positions. Each participant's views of leadership style varied as much as their personalities. There were some common answers among them, and this study only represented a small portion of the athletic department.

The findings here align with previous research. Yusof's (2002) study on TFL and athletic directors revealed similar results and made the connection between TFL and job satisfaction of employees in an athletic department. This study further found that some employees at this university athletic department described characteristics, traits, leadership style of their athletic director as transformational. TFL has shown to be an effective tool in business settings and athletic departments (Northington, 2016), as well as in higher education settings that are coupled with a religious affiliation (Forward et al, 2002). Therefore, with all three of those contextual elements and a majority of the participants in this study describing TFL qualities, the findings of this study mirror those found in previous studies.

Communication was found to be a very important factor for all of the participants in the study. Forward et al. (2002) concluded that the most important skill for administrators was effective communication, which facilitates job satisfaction and is integral to TFL. The study by



Forward et al. (2002) is also helpful because it was conducted at a Christian-based institution of higher education, and gives context to this case study. The findings in this study coincide with Forward et al. (2002) that communication is valued highly by employees within an organization. If the leader fails to or does not communicate well it can be detrimental to the employees of the organization.

The implications of Herzberg's two-factor theory align with the research conducted. The motivation factors of growth and recognition seemed to coincide with participants' increased job satisfaction. In contrast, the hygiene factor of supervision seemed to participants to be an overall detractor that could increase job dissatisfaction. During the interviews it also confirmed that not having opportunities for growth or recognition would not decrease satisfaction, it simply would not increase satisfaction. Another prevalent factor, that is also motivator in Herzberg's scheme, was the work itself. This motivator is intrinsic to the employee and not something that can be controlled by outside leadership factors or influenced by leadership style. In terms of a private Christian university, many of the participants cited their work as a calling, that God had called them to be in this place of employment.

The research also confirmed hygiene factors in the workplace, having a supervisor that was overbearing when supervising employees would add to dissatisfaction in the workplace. If supervision was kept nominal or was not an issue then employees level of dissatisfaction would not be affected. Many participants stated as long as their supervisor was not a micromanager, they would have the autonomy, which they preferred, to perform the tasks assigned to them.

### **Recommendations**

Key findings from this study are that there is no clear-cut approach to leadership, and that the best most valuable thing that a leader can do is to know the employees and cater to their

leadership needs. A leader may have a predominate leadership style, and it is best to use that style until the leader realizes that employees need something different. Although situational leadership was not mentioned by the employees, there were at least four different leadership styles they did discuss, with TFL descriptors being the most prevalent.

When hiring a new athletic director, the hiring committee should look for someone who understands leadership as well as people. Hiring a leader who is knowledgeable of various leadership styles is the best foot to put forward when pursuing new leadership. Leadership is not a one-size-fits-all approach. In this qualitative case study, almost every participant wanted to be led differently. It would be prudent of an athletic director to realize that a multifaceted approach is necessary when it comes to leadership. Instead, the leader should take note to get to know their team and how each member prefers to be led.

A leader should be prepared to share their vision of the institution or the organization. It is important for the leader to share their vision in its entirety, early and often. Kuchler (2008) affirms that the athletic director should have a vision for the department as well as enthusiasm and a desire for leading. Participants liked it when they knew the overarching vision that their leader wanted or expected of them. One of the main tenets of TFL is that the leader is charismatic by providing vision and a sense of mission to those subordinates (Burton & Peachey, 2009). Naidoo et al. (2015) found that TFL was the dominating leadership style when it came to sport administrators. Naidoo et al. also found that in smaller institutions where the monetary and human resources are less abundant, it is vital for a leader to inspire those around them to do more with less.

The leadership style of the athletic director or the preferred style was a personal choice for each participant in the study. One recommendation for athletic directors is that they should

be well-versed in more than one leadership style. People prefer to be led in different ways, and this skill only aids the leader to be prepared and reach as many employees as possible.

Leaders should communicate frequently, and many employees stated they preferred over-communication as opposed to being left out of the chain of communication. Communication from the leader is one of the most effective things that a leader can do and it is imperative that they do it effectively (Forward et al., 2007). Naidoo et al. (2015) also found that if a leader exhibits TFL, they communicate with their follower to promote respect among the followers and between the followers and the leader, thus inspiring the leadership team.

Supervision is important, so they see this as healthy for a leader to maintain some level of supervision over employees. If there is too much supervision from a superior, it is seen as micromanagement. Employees still want to feel as if they are in control of their own jobs.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The leadership styles of athletic directors in a Christian university setting is a subject that warrants further study. It is clear from many of the participants that this setting is different than a secular school, or that Christian leadership should be different. There has been much research pertaining to secular schools and their athletic departments and leadership (Burton & Peachey, 2009; Kim et al., 2012; Naidoo et al., 2015; Northington, 2016; Peachey et al., 2014; Yusof, 2002; Yusof & Shah, 2008), but few studies have emerged about the leadership in athletic departments at private Christian organizations. Therefore, additional research could yield more data by broadening the sample and contributing to the knowledge base. Future research should examine and compare the types of prevalent leadership at secular and Christian-affiliated athletic departments.

## Summary

Qualitative analysis of an organization is a way to gain rich data from the participants' lived experiences. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to gain the actual experiences of the participants at this university, all working in the athletic department with regular interaction with the athletic director. Through responses from the participants, I was able to gain perspective on their job satisfaction as well as what aided or detracted from their overall experience of leadership. There is a need to do continued qualitative research in this area of Christian athletic departments, because the leadership style of the athletic director influences the culture of an entire department. If an athletic director does not have a leadership style that complements their employees, there could be substantial turnover in the department. This could result in a substantial investment of time and money searching for new employees. Smaller athletic departments that participate in NCAA FCS athletic programs have to operate with fewer resources than their larger FBS counterparts. The organization needs to find a leader who can inspire and serve their employees and keep them for as long as possible to minimize turnover.

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### **Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

In what ways do you lead your department? In what ways does your athletic director lead your department?

What does leadership look like to you?

How do you like to be led?

How important is it for your leader(ship) to align with the vision and mission of the university?

What traits are important in a leader?

Does the mission and vision of the school mean more to you than winning?

How important is winning vs graduating young men/women?

How does the athletic director's leadership style affect your satisfaction at work?

What motivates you to be at this place of employment?

Is it more important to work in athletics or a Christian athletic dept? Why?

How is leadership different, or is it, at a Christian university athletics dept?

Motivation factors: How does the leadership style affect your motivation at work?

Are you intrinsically motivated to be here for the mission? Or need external motivation through leadership?

## Appendix B: Coding Matrix

Media	Codes															Totals						
	Calling	Christian Leadership	Good quotes	Hygiene Factors	Leadership Style	Leadership by example.	Leadership descriptors	Autonomy	Communication	Motivators	Growth	Recognition	the work itself	Relational	Satisfaction		Secular school leadership	Servant Leadership	Situational leadership	Transformational Leadership	Vision	
Participant 9 Interview	1	3		2	3	3	3	2		8	4		2			1	2	4				38
Participant 8 Interview	1	4	6	4	7		5	2	9		3				1	3			3	2		50
Participant 7 Interview		1	2	2	3		1	4		7	1											21
Participant 6 interview	2		1	7	2		6	3	4	8		3			1							37
Participant 5 Transcribed			2	4			2	1	1	2		3						1	2	4		22
Participant 4 Interview		3	2	1	2		8		1	9	2				4				1	2		35
Participant 3 Transcribed	1	1	2	3	2	1	4			4	1	2			2		3					26
Participant 2 Interview		7	4	6	12	1	9			15					5		10	2	1			72
Participant 10 interview transcript.doc		3	5	6	2		1	2	2	2		1		1	1							26
88996Participant1Interview.doc		7	2	6	1		7	8	5	11	3					2	6		3	4		65
Totals	5	29	26	41	34	5	46	20	15	75	11	12	2	1	14	6	21	7	10	12		

*Note.* Gender, length of service, and specific job titles were omitted to protect participant anonymity.

## Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter

### ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

*Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World*

Office of Research and Sponsored Programs  
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103  
325-674-2885

March 2, 2022

Adam Ybarra  
Department of Graduate and Professional Studies  
Abilene Christian University



Dear Adam,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled "Leadership Style in A Faith-Based Athletic Department Setting",

(IRB# 22-019 ) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

*Megan Roth*

Megan Roth, Ph.D.  
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs