

# Dynamic Duos: An Analysis of the Working Relationship of Athletic Directors and Athletic Director Reports

Kelly Elliott, Coastal Carolina University

Beth Johansen, Coastal Carolina University

Amanda Siegrist, Coastal Carolina University

## Abstract

The campus administrator to whom the athletic director reports to is known as the athletics' director report (ADR), the roles and responsibilities of which are not clearly defined for NCAA member institutions. The absence of clear guidelines creates the opportunity for differences in the relationships between the athletic director (AD) and the designated ADR between peer institutions. Previous research indicates that AD/ADR relationship is strong, but there are varying views on the management style of the ADR specifically in regard to rubber-stamping and micromanaging (Elliott et al., 2023). The research presented in this presentation builds upon a pilot study related to the AD/ADR relationship. This study attempts to dive into the relationship between ADs and ADRs in regards to the communication between the two groups, particularly their perspectives regarding micromanagement and rubber-stamping. Furthermore, this study examines whether those practices could be a reflection of perceived differences in the prioritization of stakeholder groups. Stakeholder theory, as proposed by Freeman (1984), asserts that organizations are not only accountable to their shareholders but also to a broader range of stakeholders who can affect or be affected by the organization's actions. In the context of intercollegiate athletics, stakeholders encompass a diverse array of individuals such as student-athletes, coaches, university administrators, alumni, governing bodies, sponsors, and fans (Mitchell et al., 1997). Research from Elliott et al. (2023) identified the presence of both managerial rubber-stamping and micromanagement in the AD/ADR Relationship. Having a better understanding of the prioritization of stakeholders may reduce the need for ADRs to feel the need to micromanage. Additionally, a policy or procedure related to stakeholder management or a better understanding of expectations regarding stakeholders could also alleviate the need for ADRs to rubber-stamp documents related to needs involving stakeholder groups if there is a better articulation of stakeholder prioritization. This study will help identify any significant difference in the priority given to various stakeholder groups between ADs and ADRs. If no significant differences are identified, it may indicate ADs and ADRs are on the same page regarding the priority of stakeholder groups and there may be less of a need for ADRs to micromanage. No significant difference may also indicate the removal of policies related to ADRs feeling the need to approve decisions related to stakeholder groups reducing the opportunity for the practice of managerial rubber-stamping. Method and Analysis Participants in this study were recruited from athletic department websites at NCAA member institutions. ADs and ADRs identified on the NCAA directory were solicited to participate in this study via email. To assess the participants' perceptions of the relationship between ADs and their ADRs, a Likert scale questionnaire was used. The questionnaire included items designed to measure various aspects of this relationship, such as communication, micromanagement, and rubber-stamping. The survey items were informed through an exploratory study conducted by Elliott et al., (2023) that identified perceptions of both ADs and the ADRs observations of their relationship. This study employed two

statistical tests. First the independent t-test to determine if there were statistically significant differences in their perceptions, which were measured using Likert scale data. Second, the Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyze differences in how participants in both groups ranked the importance of stakeholder groups. Results and Discussion Overall, results indicated that related to the AD and ADR relationship, there was a significant difference in three areas: communication, sponsorships/partnerships and enrollment. The results indicated that there was a significant difference in the perspective of the importance of regular communication between ADs and ADRs. Additionally, there was a significant difference in perspectives related to sponsorships/partnerships discussions requiring a discussion between the AD and the ADR. Regarding the importance of stakeholder groups, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test, which was conducted to assess whether there is a significant difference in the rankings of stakeholder group importance between ADs and ADRs, revealed a statistically significant difference in the rankings of stakeholder group importance between ADs and ADRs related to enrollment. The results indicate there may not be a strong need for ADRs to micromanage the decisions of ADs as it appears there is a similar prioritization of stakeholders between the two groups in most areas. However, the results indicate the two groups differ on their perspectives of prioritizing enrollment. An analysis of the data indicated that there was no significant difference related to the two groups regarding perspectives on issues related to personnel, the participant's designated conference, budget allocation, and student-athlete well-being should require a discussion between the AD and the ADR. A more developed conversation related to enrollment and the overall strategic plan of the university may help both groups gain a better understanding of the stakeholder group and how ADs should make decisions related to prioritizing enrollment.