

Leading Together in College Athletics: An Examination of Presidential Leadership Preferences of NAIA Athletic Directors

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Abstract

"Intercollegiate athletics continue to have a significant impact on colleges and universities. The influence of intercollegiate athletics is more evident at small National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) colleges and universities where institutions rely heavily on athletics as a means of recruiting students. At NAIA colleges and universities, intercollegiate athletics are used to help recruit students to increase enrollment and contribute to the overall budget at these institutions that are heavily tuition-driven.

Since NAIA colleges and universities use intercollegiate athletics to help in the sustainability of the institution, an examination of the relationship between the athletic director and the college/university president needs consideration. As the leader of the athletic department, the athletic director works closely with the college/university president. The athletic director oversees the day-to-day operations of the department but the college/university president, as Chief Executive Officer, has final authority in dictating how the athletic department will operate.

Limited research has been conducted to examine this relationship. LeCrom and Pratt (2016) discuss the relationship between athletic directors and presidents in their research and examine the relationship between athletic directors and college presidents at National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions, but their research was limited to a qualitative study examining a small sample size. Seidler, Gerdy, and Cardinal (1998) examined the relationship of college presidents and athletic directors regarding how much authority a president should have on the athletic department. The research examining the relationship of athletic directors and college/university presidents is limited and therefore more studies are needed. The leadership dynamics involved in this relationship need to be studied further to provide a better understanding of the types of leadership styles that are preferred by athletic directors when dealing with their presidents.

Since NAIA college and universities place significant importance on intercollegiate athletics for the sustainability of their institutions, a better understanding of what leadership styles athletic directors prefer in their college/university presidents could be beneficial not only to the working relationship between the two individuals but also for the livelihood of the institution. The purpose of this study was to identify the preferred leadership style of athletic directors in the NAIA regarding their college/university president.

While identifying the overall preferred leadership style of NAIA athletic directors, the study also sought to identify preferences that are based on years of experience. The information gathered through this study will be of interest to athletic directors and college/university presidents by

identifying what leadership styles are preferred of athletic directors and how both individuals can fashion their leadership styles to work in the most efficient and effective manner on their institution's campus.

To determine the preferred leadership style of NAIA athletic directors, a quantitative study was completed. In this study, a survey was emailed to athletic directors within the NAIA. A causal-comparative design was used to explore the cause of existing differences in groups of athletic directors. An online Vannsimpco Leadership Survey (VLS) was conducted to determine athletic director leadership preferences. The VLS uses a Likert scale of one through five to measure the preference for leadership styles. On the scale, one represents strong disagreement and five represents strong agreement. Surveys were divided into demographic categories which included educational level, gender, and years of experience in five-year groups. An overall mean score was produced for the sample population as well as each demographic and cross-demographic category. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between each demographic subgroup. The designated significance level was .05. When a statistically significant difference was found among groups, independent t-tests were performed to identify the significant differences in leadership preferences between the groups. The sample population consisted of athletic directors in the NAIA.

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