

Leadership, Management, and Organizational Culture in High School Athletic  
Departments from the Perspective of Athletic Directors: A Thematic Approach

by

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## ABSTRACT

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This study examines four high school athletic departments in the middle Tennessee area in order to address two questions: What are the cultural values that drive high school athletic departments, and what leadership and management-related attitudes and behaviors emerge from those values? After careful consideration of the interviews and literature review, the researcher determined there were three main pieces that were relevant to high school athletic departments today: conflict surrounding sport specialization, communication, and the importance placed on winning. Those main topics emerged from the nine subthemes discovered in the interview process. By having a mission statement and managing those three aspects of today's high school sports culture, the researcher believes that current and prospective high school athletic directors can learn from these lessons about how creating a strong culture can lead to positive results.

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## INTRODUCTION

“Ask a group of healthy college students in their 20s if they know what they had for lunch three days ago and you’re not likely to see many hands go up. But ask them for memories of competitive sports they played when they were younger and suddenly you’ll hear stories about when they pitched for their school baseball or softball team. Sports offer formative and life-long lessons that stick with people who play,” said Kevin Kniffin, professor at Cornell University (Kniffin, 2014). According to a study Kniffin did with two colleagues, people who play high school sports get better jobs and are paid more, resulting in lifelong benefits (Kniffin, Wansink, & Shimizu, 2014).

The National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) boasts more than 19,000 member high schools and 7.6 million high school student athletes (NFHS, 2017). The NFHS is the national authority regarding high school athletics and is the parent organization for state high school athletic associations in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, including the state of Tennessee.

The Tennessee Secondary Schools Athletic Association is the primary governing body for high school sports in the state of Tennessee. The TSSAA breaks down into two divisions, Division I and Division II. Typically, Division I is made up of public high schools, and Division II is made up of private high schools, though there are some private schools in Division I. From there, the TSSAA breaks high schools into classifications based on school enrollment. After classifications are determined, schools are organized into regions, based on geography. Today, the TSSAA estimates 110,000 student athletes who are involved in junior and senior high school sports, 426 schools, about 6,000 coaches and around 5,000 officials (TSSAA, 2017).

In addition to doing the tasks necessary for the job of athletic direction, including game supervision and administration as well as hiring and firing coaches, 45 percent of athletic directors surveyed by the National Interscholastic Athletic Administrators Association in 2005 said they had additional duties (Kalahar, 2011). It is expected that that number has risen nationally since the date of the survey. Most athletic directors have the title of assistant principal, and some athletic directors teach classes as well.

All those aspects of the task of being a high school athletic director coupled with the fact that high school sports has become big business can add to the stress of those high school athletic directors. "It's an economic juggernaut," Fordham University school of business associate professor Mark Conrad said of high school sports. "If you think about where people are on Friday nights in areas like the South and Midwest, they are at their local high school football game. It's no wonder the market for high school sports has expanded," (Koba, 2012). From nationally broadcasted games, to naming rights for high school stadiums, to athletic apparel deals, keeping up with the financial demands of being a high school athletic director while keeping the student athletes as a primary focus is a challenging aspect of the job.

Given these factors, it is important to understand more about how current high school athletic directors lead their athletic departments and on what task they focus. In the current study, four high school athletic directors from the middle Tennessee area were selected by the researcher for interviews. Their athletic departments were analyzed and matched with the leadership types and cultural breakdown studied in the literature review. Finally, suggestions were made to current and future high school athletic

directors as to what they should take from the four ADs interviewed for this study and apply to their athletic department to drive results.

Previous studies of leadership, management and culture have been combined to provide background for this study in hopes that the reader will better understand the conditions related to the position of high school athletic director. Simply put, leadership is doing the right things, and management is doing things right (Drucker, 2000). Culture, in regards to this study, is the environment an athletic director creates in conjunction with the leadership and management functions of the position.

### **Problem Statement**

The central focus of this study was to determine what values were existent in high school athletic departments in the state of Tennessee and what leadership and management-related attitudes and behaviors emerged from those values. The researcher sought to determine if and how high school athletic directors use culture as a competitive advantage as they lead their athletic departments, and if current and future athletic directors could learn how to use culture as a competitive advantage in their athletic departments.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Leadership Approaches**

Two approaches to understanding leadership in organizations are to examine leader's traits and a leader's style. Study of trait theories of leadership began in the 1940s, with Stogdill's (1948) five factors that predict effective leadership, including

capacity, achievement, responsibility, participation, and status. Those five factors of effective leadership were then turned into five major leadership traits by Northouse (2012), which include intelligence, self-confidence, determination, integrity, and sociability. Starting in 1945, studies at Ohio State University determined there were two dimensions of the behavior of leaders, including initiating structure and consideration. In the 1950s, a similar study at the University of Michigan insisted there was a range of behaviors regarding leadership with two major ends of the spectrum: employee orientation, or relationship building with employees, and production orientation, or focusing on tasks (Borland, Burton, & Kane, 2014).

As for a leader's style, much research can be found to assist with this study's evaluation of the high school athletic departments. Kurt Lewin (1939) listed three main leadership styles, including authoritarian, democratic and laissez-faire. Authoritarian-led organizations are based on the leader making decisions, generally on his or her own. The democratic leadership style is also called the participative leadership style, since democratic leaders rely on the members of the group to come up with creative ideas in order to make decisions. Laissez-faire leaders are the exact opposite of authoritarian leaders in that they are completely hands-off when it comes to making decisions. Lewin's study found that the most productive style was authoritarian, followed by democratic and laissez-faire, in that order, even though the quality of work was higher with democratic leaders.

Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) take that study into leadership styles even further by discovering seven different styles that leaders use, including: "tells," or communicating directly to the team; "sells," or providing a justification of the decision;

“suggests,” or recommending several different options to the team; “consults,” or discusses and suggests a certain path; “joins,” or working together to solve the problem; “delegates,” or letting the team decide; and “abdicates,” or helping the team fully understand better before making a decision.

Robert Blake and Jane Mouton (1964) defined various leadership styles on a grid format, with the X axis standing for “concern for results” and the Y axis standing for “concern for people.” Impoverished leadership is defined as a leader having very little concern for results or people. Authority-compliance leadership is when a leader is very concerned with results but not about the people in the organization. Country club leadership is when the organization is a comfortable environment for employees and the leader cares very little about results. Middle of the road leadership is when the leader maintains an average amount of concern for results and people. Team management is the desired leadership style, which is where the leader is aware of emotional needs of the team and knows how to best motivate the team to get the best results.

Other studies have been done that look at the relationship and interaction between a supervisor and subordinates, such as the transformational leadership theory by Bass (1985). Transformational leaders inspire others to see the vision of the organization and strive to achieve goals. Four characteristics of transformational leadership include: intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and idealized influence. This is often contrasted with the transactional leadership model, which says that the relationship between a manager and an employee is based on some sort of exchange (Bass 1985).

A widely growing style of leadership is servant leadership. According to Spears (2010), the ten characteristics of a servant leader include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community. Some claim servant leadership is weak, but some believe servant leadership leads to more collaboration and production in the organization.

### **Management Approaches**

The classical approach to managing organizations focuses on specialization, standardization, replicability, and predictability. This framework helps understand the importance an athletic director places on relationships in the workplace, and also could influence how he or she leads the department. Two theories of classical management, Fayol's theory of classical management and Weber's theory of bureaucracy, could be used to better understand leadership and management in high school athletic departments. Fayol claims that a manager plans, organizes, commands, coordinates, and controls (1949), while Weber places more focus on the division of labor, closed systems and a defined hierarchy (1946, 1947).

Management theorist Douglas McGregor (1960) recognized, like Maslow, that employees have needs, so he developed Theory X and Theory Y to describe the different sets of beliefs held by managers about their employees. Theory X managers believe their employees must be controlled and motivated, as opposed to Theory Y managers who believe that their employees naturally commit to their roles, invite challenge and want to give effort at work (1957, 1960). A Theory X athletic director might either take on the

vast majority of the work to be done in the daily operations of the athletic department, or manage coaches in a heavy-hand and controlling manner. A Theory Y athletic director, on the other hand, might work to capitalize on the strengths of his or her coaches, while providing them with opportunities to exercise creativity and innovation in their daily work.

It is possible that athletic directors could determine that healthy workplace relationships are what drives their athletic departments. These types of organizations may best be understood from a human relations or resources perspective, which both emphasize the value of recognizing people's feelings and needs, as well as their abilities to make worthwhile contributions to the organization. Managers within these organizations might follow the example of Pfeffer and his seven practices of successful organizations, which include employment security, selective hiring, self-managed teams and decentralization, comparatively high and contingent compensation, extensive training, reduction of status differences, and sharing information (1998). Pfeffer's work is related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs regarding interest in employees, which involves meeting their physiological needs, safety needs, affiliation needs, esteem needs, and the need for self-actualization (1943, 1954).

### **Organizational Culture**

Clifford Geertz and Michael Pacanowsky are often regarded as experts in regards to understanding organizational culture. This study will follow Geertz's suggestion of providing thick description of the interview data in order to "discover who people think they are, what they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it,"

(Geertz 1999). Pacanowsky's approach breaks down three types of stories that summarize organizational life: corporate stories that enforce company policy, personal stories that are told by employees to put themselves in a favorable light, and collegial stories that are positive or negative anecdotes about others in the organization (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo 123).

Edgar Schein (1992) takes this idea of organizational culture and breaks it down into three levels: artifacts, norms and values. Artifacts are the most visible of the three, and they include the physical makeup of the workplace, language and symbols that are existent. Less visible but still very existent are the norms of the organization, including the words employees are taught to use with clients or customers and how to dress at work, among other things. Finally, values are less visible and potentially tough to pin down with language from the perspective of the organizational member. However, by asking questions about artifacts and discovering norms, the values of the organization will become more evident.

Contrary to Geertz's belief that culture emerges from the organization and cannot be replicated, R. E. Quinn and M. R. McGrath (1985) developed the Competing Values Approach (CVA), which names four cultural archetypes: consensual culture, developmental culture, hierarchical culture, and rational culture. A consensual culture is a place where the workers feel free to share a lot about themselves and look up to the leaders as mentors. A developmental culture encourages employees to take risks and be creative. A hierarchical culture is based on a system of regulations that direct the workers. Finally, a rational culture focuses on winning and results. Quinn and McGrath say that most organizations reflect all four cultural types to some extent, but this material

gives the current study a framework with which to categorize the culture of the high school athletic department.

Again, in *Good to Great*, Collins (2011) and his team of researchers looked at 11 companies that made the move from good-to-great thanks to the culture created by the leadership in those companies. Collins details six key factors in his “flywheel” that cause the breakthrough, including: level five leadership, first worrying about “who,” then “what,” confronting the brutal facts, using the hedgehog concept, having a culture of discipline, and technology accelerators (Collins 2001). Collins refers to level five leadership as being compellingly modest and having unwavering resolve. He then says that it is imperative to get the right people in the organization and the wrong people out of the organization to create cohesion before tackling the organization’s problems. On the topic of confronting the brutal facts, Collins says to engage in dialogue and debate, not coercion, as well as leading with questions and not answers in order to lead with the best possible insights. The hedgehog concept is described as a chart with three dimensions: what you are deeply passionate about, what you can be the best in the world at, and what drives your economic engine; he says that the “great” leaders find themselves in the middle of the three circles. He argues for building an organization teeming with self-disciplined people. Finally, Collins advises leaders to use technology to their advantage in order to advance their brand. The current study will also attempt to discover and understand the transitions and breakthroughs experienced by athletic directors in their own departments.

As suggested by Geertz (1999), part of understanding culture will involve locating the motivation of the athletic director and his employees. The February 2007 edition of

Coach & Athletic Director featured an article that included 15 motivation tips for the administrator — including initiating conversation with employees, getting to know them personally and respecting their differences, and understanding what motivates the leaders themselves, among others (Skemp-Arlt & Toupençe 2007). It will be worth noting in the results whether participants in the current study engage in these practices in their workplace relationships. Understanding these theories will help to uncover trends while comparing and contrasting the two interviews.

## **METHODS**

This study has been approved by the Middle Tennessee State University Institution Review Board. The researcher employed one-on-one interviews to get the necessary qualitative data for this study. The researcher sought to capture a variety of perspectives in this study, so to achieve diversity among participants, potential interviewees were selected by the researcher based on the type of school, location, gender of its athletic director, and ethnicity of its athletic director.

### **Procedure**

Upon IRB approval, potential interviewees were sent an invitation via email, which can be found in Appendix A. All four initial potential interviewees agreed to participate in the study. Once they replied and agreed to assist in the research as a participant, a meeting time was set up and took place between the months of May – August 2017.

The interview questions were printed, and notes were made as to which questions were most important to cover. The researcher relied on knowledge of the current topics related to high school athletics to sculpt interview questions (Appendix B). Biographical questions were first, and the rest of the questions included examples of certain situations, a place for the athletic directors to talk about the value system of the athletic department and how that was created, how people within the athletic department blend and agree to the values, what success in high school athletics means to them, and where their motivation comes from.

All interviews were audio recorded with an Olympus recorder and were conducted by the researcher. All four interviews were done in person, on the campus of each athletic director, in the office of each athletic director. Once the interviews were complete, the audio files were deleted from the recorder and returned to the study's faculty advisor to comply with IRB protocols. The transcriptions have been secured on the author's personal laptop, and hard copies are locked in the faculty advisor's office. The transcriptions were completed within a week of the interviews with the participants.

## **Analysis**

A thematic analysis approach was employed by the researcher to organize the data from the four interviews. According to Krippendorff, a theme must be frequently mentioned, and similar verbiage must be used (1980). The researcher constantly had the research questions in mind as the transcriptions were read to determine a series of themes. When reviewing the transcriptions to draw conclusions on the two sets of interviews, trends and themes were found along the way, which directed the writing of

the discussion portion of the thesis. To do this, the researcher used an iterative approach to analyzing the data, which includes alternating between emic (emergent) readings of the data and the etic use of existing theory (Tracy, 2013). The researcher read and re-read transcripts, coupled with meetings with the faculty advisor to discuss data and any continually emergent findings.

Next, the researcher organized the data by assigning initial words or phrases that describe the meaning of the participants' words. The researcher continually made notes to keep track of the repeated concepts, and careful thought was given to how those concepts related to the research questions. The next cycle of organization includes categorizing the data results into higher-order concepts (Tracy, 2013). Patterns or groupings of concepts within the data were identified. From there, the most impactful quotes were set aside and used to connect the data with the emergent themes.

## **FINDINGS**

After four interviews, the researchers discovered two major themes with nine subthemes and grouped the data accordingly. The subjects of these major themes are building culture and athletic department values.

### *Participants*

The four participants were all high school athletic directors from the same major metropolitan area. AD1 and AD2 are white males, AD3 is a white female, and AD4 is an African-American female. Two are public high school athletic directors and two were private high school athletic directors. Two schools would be considered large, one would

be considered an average-sized school, and one would be considered a smaller school. Despite a small sample size, there is a variety in the demographics and school types of the athletic departments in which these athletic directors work. However, these were not meant to be representatives of all types of schools or athletic director perspectives.

## **Building Culture**

The first major theme deals with the ways athletic directors use a variety of resources and practices to create a cohesive culture within their athletic department. The subthemes falling under building culture are: hiring and firing, facilities, and communication.

### *Hiring and Firing*

There are many factors that go into the decision to interview and hire. Decisions are in part shaped by regulatory bodies such as the TSSAA, as well as the school board or board of trustees. According to the TSSAA, there are four types of coaches who can be employed by schools (TSSAA, 2017). A full-time certified teacher with a valid Tennessee teaching license or the equivalent is the first option. Coaches can also be retired educators with a valid Tennessee teaching license or the equivalent. Also, many schools bring in non-faculty coaches, which is anyone approved by the school and school board within state laws. Finally, a coach can be a classified employee, which means the individual must be employed 30 or more hours per week in a non-coaching setting outside of the school. There is a system of fines in place for schools that hire coaches who do not meet these criteria.

All coaches hired by every athletic director interviewed must meet requirements held by the TSSAA. Those requirements of coaches include an orientation that involves several online courses from the NFHS website, including “Fundamentals of Coaching” and “First Aid, Health, & Safety for Coaches.”

In addition to the requirements of the TSSAA, public school athletic directors must comply with their school board’s rules for hiring coaches. Likewise, private school athletic directors must comply with their board of trustee’s rules for hiring coaches. AD1 said, “That orientation is partly [County] policy, and part of it is TSSAA policy. We basically have two governing bodies that we have to adhere to depending on the hire by title — meaning head coach, non-faculty coach, or just strictly a volunteer coach — that our county recognizes.”

In regards to the applicants for open coaching positions, AD1 constantly has the school’s values in the back of his mind while sorting through applications. “There may not be as many applicants (for tennis) as — let’s say — when there’s a position open for head football coach. That can be a little overwhelming and extensive.” However, he says even though they receive applications from all over the state and across state lines, they never bring someone in for an interview unless it’s a serious interview. “We don’t want to waste someone’s time,” he added. He states that it is a good idea for an athletic director to keep in mind a short list of potential replacement coaches in case an emergency situation arises. That way, if a coach walks in unexpected with a resignation letter, the AD won’t be caught off guard and without a plan.

AD3 said that the interview process is the premier way to weed out potential coaches. The interviewers ask a series of situational questions that interviewees must

respond to, and if the athletic director sees that the response matches the values of the athletic department, that would be a great fit and a great hire. The athletic department continually reminds its applicants for teaching and coaching positions that they deal with kids and not professional athletes. They recognize that “it’s going to be different every day, and we as a school will treat kids as individuals in the whole.”

AD2 said the hiring pool for open positions – which are very rare – is typically small. Most people know the values of the school and know the chances of getting hired with a different worldview is slim. Ultimately, AD2 says hiring people who agree with the mission statement of the athletic department makes his job easier. If a coach’s position has been terminated, AD1 says the school will “pursue someone that can fulfill the needs of that program within our core values and our philosophies.” Most open positions, AD2 said, are usually applied for by someone who graduated from this particular school or someone the athletic department has seen come through its doors and knows well. As far as the application process goes, AD2 said an essay-type written application and a few minutes in an interview is all they need to determine whether an individual is genuine or not. AD2 said his athletic programs play larger schools that have more student-athletes to choose from for their sports teams. A big question must be: How do you combat that issue and prevent it from having disastrous effects? He said, “For us, it’s making sure in the hiring process that the basketball coach isn’t going to be selfish about our basketball girls or with his basketball boys. ... The culture is built in, but it’s constant.”

AD1 said the most unpleasant part of the job is terminating a position. Although open positions at AD2’s school are rarely found, he said the most difficult thing to do on

the job is let someone go. Sometimes, though, AD2 is able to give opportunities to a specific coach in order to prevent letting someone go. “I think it’s fun to mentor and guide them and help fix a situation. But when it’s not flexible, you have to make the best decision for the kids in your school and for the culture of your school,” he said.

Firing a coach in an athletic department is often a situation that leads to conflict. These are handled on a case-by-case basis, depending on the culture of the athletic department and the situation that arises. In some cases, a coach may be terminated totally from the school, and his or her role as a teacher or administrator could also be stripped. In other cases, however, that individual may stay on the school’s staff as a teacher, despite the fact that their coaching duties were relinquished.

AD1 told the story of two occasions that he had to deal with turnover in his athletic department. First, the decision was made to fire a coach with whom he had a great relationship. “That was a painful meeting, and the reason behind that was it wasn’t the best fit for that particular program,” he said. Also, he had to let go a coach in a high-profile sport, and the [head] coach disagreed with that decision. “That did not end well, so I have experienced both sides of the coin.”

### *Facilities*

A school’s athletic facilities are the face of the athletic department and can be seen as tool for building a cohesive culture in a number of ways. AD1 suggested the following: “I think you can always look and see someone else’s facilities might be a little better, but I don’t think there’s a school in the middle Tennessee area that couldn’t respond that way.” He reiterated the pride the coaches have for their facilities and

programs, and that the upkeep and improvements of the facilities are due in large part to parent-driven fundraisers.

Facilities at AD2's school are superb, and the coaches at this school take great pride. The facilities are what he calls a business decision. "When people come through here, there's got to be some 'wow' factor. You're asking them to pay a quarter of a hundred-thousand dollars a year. By the time they go here from sixth grade through 12, you can do the math. That's an awful lot of money. For us, it's almost like a college thing. We're trying to sell it. We want them to come through the doors and be impressed, so then hopefully the product and what we're about will encourage them to come."

The institution that employs AD4 plans to finish up a building project on campus that will house the majority of outside sports. This is something brand new to the campus and will be the first time in a few decades that outdoor sports are played on campus. Although practicing and playing off campus in the meantime is a potential challenge, she says "Everybody works together. That's understood when you interview for the job."

### *Communication: Meetings and Rituals*

In 2015, AD4 had a meeting with the executive principal to create the defining document that includes the values of the athletic department. The reason noted for doing so is that the athletic department representatives can be on the same page and use the same language when dealing with student athletes and parents. The athletic department wanted to make sure the expectations were known to anyone who takes on a coaching position, from inside or outside the school: "Nowadays we prefer to have on-staff people

coaching, but because of the number of sports and athletes and constant change in dynamics of teaching, we get a few volunteers and others we have to pay,” she said.

In regards to organization culture, the researchers inquired about specific bonding moments between coaches across all sports in order to increase positive relationships across the board. AD1 replied, “First, obviously, we want it to be a professional comradery and friendship, and then it grows from that point over the time and years of experience.”

Communication is the key to how AD2 builds the culture of his athletic department. He calls a meeting with the head coaches for breakfast before school once a month to map out the big issues that the athletic department will face in the few weeks after the meeting. At that meeting, many topics are discussed, but AD2 was quick to uncover what the biggest cause for conversation was in the athletic department: the problem of sport specialization. Sport specialization happens when a student-athlete — typically at the high school level — chooses to compete in only one sport year-round.

Non-faculty coaches are something that is seen often in high school sports, and AD2 has some on staff as well. It could potentially be challenging to coordinate every coach, faculty and non-faculty, to go in the same direction on most every topic, but he again relies on strong communication skills to prevent any of his coaches from straying. “We meet once a year to establish the culture and what we’re about,” he said about communication with non-faculty members. Being on the same page was obviously a big emphasis for AD2, as he said, “I think when [the coaches] understand what you value and that you value their sport, they buy in pretty quickly and they want to follow you.”

In regards to the importance of communication, AD4 said, “In a society now that is built on instant feedback, instant gratification, putting the phones away and having conversations, which we do as an athletic department, helps tremendously.”

## **Shared Values**

Shared values are the patterns that reflect what is most important to the participants and their athletic departments, and emerge from interpretations of the mission, relationships, and organizational identities. The subthemes for shared values are: mission statements, winning, interpersonal relationships, the teacher/coach role, visibility and availability in private schools, and conflict management.

### *Mission statements*

Mission statements are explicit statements written down for all those involved about a school’s values and guide the experience of all participants. AD2 said the mission of the school is marked in numerous places and serves as a continual reminder. “For us, that mission statement is spoken consistently at every meeting, at every parent meeting. It’s on the back of our nametags. It’s everywhere. It’s in every room. You have to have something that people can identify with.” He said the headmaster created the mission statement of the school, and the athletic director tries to keep that message relevant in all that goes on in the athletic department, especially hiring people. AD1 said the core values of that school’s athletic department came straight from the executive principal. “It’s values we share and agree upon 100%,” he said. AD3’s school had an athletics mission statement in play before this individual was hired. She noted that a mission statement has to be simple enough for everyone to understand and be able to apply it to any situation.

When asked what the most important thing she does on the job, AD4 said, “I teach kids. Regardless if it’s in the classroom, basketball floor, softball field, wherever. Creating an atmosphere where children are safe but have boundaries to do everything they possibly can, athletically and academically.” The goal, according to AD4, is to create well-rounded young men and women who can be successful in life, and she uses both academics and athletics to do so. The mission statement that AD4’s athletic department lives by states that the “whole student body” is the most important thing and that a focus on winning doesn’t supersede the development of a student in the classroom.

Since that first iteration of the handbook to coaches, AD4 has asked for feedback in order to refine the handbook. No one in the athletic department disagrees with the mission statement, according to AD4. “It does put academics first because it allows for the coaches to make the kids responsible for their behavior in class and grades in class. I think ultimately it works out for the kid.”

### *Winning*

An often unspoken part of the athletic department’s mission is the prioritization of winning opposed to the welfare of the whole student. Although sometimes coaches and athletic directors focus mainly on winning and seeing money roll into the athletic department, AD3 said: “Our coaches try to have that balance of fun but respectful and impactful. You don’t get into coaching just to win. You get into coaching to impact lives. I think most of our coaches see it from that lens, so that makes the relationships fun.”

Others acknowledge that focusing too heavily on winning can be costly, especially for the student athletes. According to AD1: “If you do things right, then

winning will take care of itself. There's not a point of emphasis placed on winning at cost; it's do it right, take care of the little things, and be fundamentally sound." AD2 explains that while winning is the goal, it can't be the only goal: "We don't shy away from the fact that we want to win," he said. "How you balance that all that stuff is a big deal." When asked to define what success looked like in high school athletics, AD2 stressed the importance of the values that are taught to the student-athletes, such as work ethic, responsibility and consequences. Even though a team may win a lot, AD2 said "That ain't the most important thing. People aren't going to remember that. Those rings are nice. The kids think they're cool. The valuable things are the relational things and that there's something that they're going to get out of this."

Similarly, AD3 says that the athletic department continues to ask itself one question when dealing with student athletes, coaches and parents on a day-to-day basis: "Yes, we want to win. Who doesn't want to win? You don't play the game to just play it, especially at a certain point. But, at what cost? That was the constant conversation, at what cost?" AD4 was asked to define success in the realm of high school athletics. She responded, "Building upon what you have and the culture that you have as a school makes athletic departments more successful. We never talk about championships. Never talk about winning championships. Talk about being the best you can right now in this room and time."

### *Interpersonal Relationships*

In regards to relationships between the AD and coaches, AD4 stated that the first responsibility is to protect the school and coaches from anything that might reflect poorly

on the school. It is a relationship that requires mutual respect and one in which she works to have everyone on staff on the same page. She also said that the student athletes were owed some responsibility as well. “My job for the student-athlete is to make sure that the athletes’ best interest is at heart, to make sure there’s someone to support them and look out for them maybe when their parents aren’t there.”

“With the number of programs that we have, and with the position that I’m in, I cherish those relationships,” AD1 said of his relationships with the student athletes in his school. The relationships with the student athletes is the reward, he said. He says success in high school athletics “is never [determined by] wins and losses. It’s those relationships. It’s the preparation for that student athlete to go to the next level, whether it’s just to continue on as a student or to continue on as a student athlete.”

Arguably the biggest takeaway from the interview with AD3 was when she said the athletic department tries to focus on the “whole child.” They want to keep the main focus on academics while balancing a sport or multiple sports. Part of that balance act includes coaches of different sports that have to share players over the course of the school year.

### *The Teacher-Coach Role*

While AD4 would love to hire coaches that have come prepared and have a coaching philosophy of their own, she realizes that this does not happen often and that most coaches start off as teachers only. However, AD4 doesn’t see it as a hindrance, but rather a way to mold that young coach into seeing the total vision of the athletic department, not just wins and losses. Even though this school has done its fair share of

winning recently, she noted, “there is no exception to kids doing what they’re supposed to be doing in the classroom and behavior-wise.”

Most athletic directors are charged with hiring teachers that also coach sports, not hiring strictly coaches. AD2 said, “Most of our teachers are coaches in some capacity. At a small place like this that plays big time athletics, that’s a big deal.” Most coaches are also teachers at AD3’s institution, and she talked about how being a teacher on the court has an impact on how students perform in the classroom. She said if a teacher reports to the athletic director with an issue from a student athlete, the coach has a better way of communicating to the student due to the emotional connection sports offers. AD4 echoed those sentiments when she said, “Here, we do not hire coaches first, teachers second. We hire teachers first, coaches second.” She also noted that the majority of her coaches are multi-sport coaches, with the exception of football. AD1 agreed with the others in saying “Our coaches know that they’re teachers first and coaches second, and they have a job to do, and they’re expected to do that job in that order.”

#### *Visibility and Availability (Private Schools)*

Perception is reality, and that is no different in the realm of high school athletics. AD2 hired a girl’s athletic director in order to help the athletic department even more. This is so the administration is heavily involved in all sports in order to support the student-athletes and coaches as they compete. “Somebody administratively is always involved, and that keeps people understanding that you’re interested, and it makes the coaches feel supported,” the AD said.

AD3 also is part of a dual-AD type of situation at her institution. “We balance each other out really well,” she said in regards to working alongside the boys’ AD. “The things I got heated about, he was calm, and vice versa, so that kind of helped us maintain a level of calm in the department, which we needed because we grew very quickly.”

That two-AD dynamic can be a tricky one, but AD3 said the pair worked things out well. “Early on, our biggest thing was that we were going to be at as many things as we can and be visible and listen to people and do an inventory.” She went on to say, “When I was coaching, he wasn’t coaching. When he was coaching, I wasn’t coaching. We tried to make sure that we weren’t coaching at the same time so one of us was always available.” She noted that the boys’ counterpart helped with the administration side of things. AD3 was a volleyball coach and didn’t quite realize some of the things that were required of other sports because it was just done as part of the head coaching duties in volleyball.

### *Conflict Management*

Balancing multi-sport athletes is a constant challenge, and one that often demands conflict management on the part of the AD. Sport-specialization happens when a student-athlete — typically at the high school level — chooses to compete in only one sport year-round. AD4 said the biggest problem they ran into as an athletic department was student athletes who would use a spot on the track team to prepare for spring football. Then, when spring football came around, they quit the track team and started working with the football team full-time again. That problem was put to a stop when the athletic department put a clause in the handbook saying quitting a sport to join another sport was

not allowed under any circumstances. It isn't fair for the students or the coaches who work hard to coach their sports, according to AD4.

One of the first lessons AD4 learned as an athletic director was not to get involved with a fight between coaches that was based on personality. Instead, focusing on issues that pertain specifically to the welfare of the student athlete should be at the forefront of an athletic department, AD4 said. Most of the coach versus coach conflicts involve sharing players, due to a certain student athlete performing better and getting more accolades in one sport over another. "There's been a couple of conversations where we talk about sharing athletes and where sometimes that's mediated, when we get the two coaches in a room and let them talk about it after making reference to our mission statement and what we believe in as a unit and how it works itself out," she said. As for her personal philosophy, AD4 said "My [student athletes] are always urged to play multiple sports. It gets them used to different coaching styles, different regiments, and I think there's nothing that can prepare kids more except for change and understanding how to adjust."

Conflicts over multi-sport athletes and how coaches deal with that situation was also a topic of discussion for AD3. Sometimes, students are in middle school in the fall semester and then become freshmen in the spring semester, so the institution runs into a problem athletically. "That's hard because you want to keep them on your team. Those kids tend to be the best athletes in the building, so you're trying to find that balance."

Conflict also arises when dealing with the parents of student athletes. AD1 says "If it is in the heat of the moment, what I always try to do is be professional and be the adult in the heat of the moment, whether I'm directly involved or indirectly involved. I

want to diffuse a situation because it's based on emotion at first." If a situation gets heated, AD1 says he'll ask parents to reschedule a meeting for a later date so that a direction can be reached. This is so that meetings will remain under control and emotions do not dictate how the conversation goes. He said that a trend he has seen in later years is that parents will go to the school board or superintendent if the parent doesn't get his or her way with the coach or athletic director.

AD4 said a very explicit strategy helps to deter conflict with parents:

"We try to do a 24-hour rule with the parents. The 24-hour rule is after a game and after a practice, the coach needs to wait 24 hours. We have a mandatory parent meeting before every sport begins where the coach and athletic director and athletic principal meet the parents, try to get an eyeball on who's who, tell them our mission statement, guidelines and expectations and move on from there. You'd be surprised the transparency. The parents want their kids to be successful. We want their kids to be successful. Working together beats us trying to conquer and divide any day of the week."

AD3 also talked about the somewhat-frequent occurrence of parents reaching out to the ADs without first consulting the head coach of their student athlete's sport. They stress to parents to wait until their child has calmed down to see what they actually heard, not what they thought was said.

## **DISCUSSION**

This study was focused on two research questions: 1) What are the cultural values that are present in high school athletic departments? and 2) What are the leadership and

management-related attitudes and behaviors of high school athletic directors based on those values? To answer these research questions, the literature review was revisited to see which theories were most prominent in the high school athletic departments studied.

The first research question deals with the emerging cultural values from the management-related ideals and behaviors of the athletic directors. These items are more implicit in some areas and often do not get covered in the mission statement of the school in certain aspects. However, the accounts of the athletic directors indicated that sport specialization, communication and the importance of winning were three important factors in determining the emergent cultural values.

As previously stated, the issue of sport specialization among high school student athletes is persistent. While the athletic directors noted that this has been a challenge in their athletic department, they had the same outlook on dual-sport students. They all encouraged their student athletes to play multiple sports, and one of these athletic departments offers an incentive for all student athletes who compete in multiple sports throughout all four high school years. The reasons given for allowing students to compete in multiple sports range from physical health reasons to reasons involving emotional growth. Research has shown it's detrimental for students to specialize in a sport due to the potential dangers of over-stressing a student athlete's body before it fully develops (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013), and one of the athletic directors in this study says she encourages her students to play multiple sports in order to get used to the different leadership styles and coaching styles that a head coach of another sport could have in order to bolster her students' ability to adapt to change when they leave high school and play sports in college or get into the workplace.

From communication strategies to ensure every coach is on the same page in regards to the direction of the athletic department to the communication strategy used to eliminate any potential conflicts that would arise between parents and coaches, it was obvious throughout this study that communication was a major talking point for the athletic directors. Virtually every high school in the state uses a non-faculty coach, retired educator, or classified employee to fulfill the role of coach in a sport, so it is crucial for athletic directors to make sure those coaches have a copy of the mission statement and meet with the athletic director prior to the season, and maybe even regularly, in order to ensure that the program is moving in the direction that the athletic director is aiming. In regards to eliminating potential conflict with parents before it starts, AD4's strategy of a preseason mandatory meeting is an invaluable tool that has freed her from having any problems with parents during the season. This communication event is important so that the parents know what the expectations of their kids will be, and so that the parents know what the coach's expectations for them is.

Each athletic director stressed that their athletic department strives to take care of every aspect of a student athlete, not just the athletic portion of the high school experience. AD3 offered a perspective that was not heard elsewhere, when she said that she has communicated that a coach should compare the workload of practice and competition in consideration with an upcoming exam schedule or increased amount of schoolwork at the same time. If a student has already played a sport earlier in the school year and is preparing for an upcoming exam, AD3 said she's talked to coaches about potentially dialing back the amount of repetitions a student athlete will see in practice.

Several of the athletic directors used the term “whole child,” meaning they are aiming to see improvement in every aspect of their student athlete’s lives, not just athletics.

The second research question addresses the management-related attitudes and beliefs of high school athletic directors. The main topics used to answer this question is hiring and firing of coaches, communication, leadership styles, and cultural types of the athletic department. The best way to determine the attitudes of these athletic directors is to examine their behavior in dealing with situations.

Topics such as hiring and firing, a mission statement, and availability and visibility in private schools were examined through the lens of Schein’s work (1992). The researcher looked at the artifacts, norms and values of each athletic department to determine if there were any emerging themes. The researcher found in most cases that the application process is the quickest way to get a first glance at who a person is and what they believe before bringing them in for an interview so they can see if it matches their existing values. Athletic directors who pay close attention to how applicants’ values align with the athletic department’s before considering the résumé credentials had the most successful hires. All four athletic directors said that the mission statement came from one person, a headmaster or executive principal. AD4 noted that she requested edits from coaches within her athletic department over the last couple years, which the researcher believes could add to the motivation of coaches due to the potential that they would feel more valued and appreciated. The dual-AD role in both private schools in this study was a topic the researcher did not initially expect to discover. That topic, however, adds to the values of the athletic department in that, in both situations, the ADs were aiming for more availability and visibility to give them the ability to solve any problems that could arise.

AD3 noted that her semester to coach was different than her counterpart's semester to coach, and AD2 said that at least one person administratively is at every sporting event now with the addition of the second AD under his tenure. This ties back into Schein's idea of organizational culture being organized into artifacts, norms and values (Schein, 1992) in that the artifacts are the facilities and people in the athletic department, the norms are strategies such as a dual-AD role so that an administrator can be at every athletic event, and the values would be that they are all aiming to better every aspect of their students, not just athletically.

The communication rituals (Geertz, 1999) that each athletic department undertakes are an important portion of this study. Whether an AD meets with parents at the beginning of a season, staff members and coaches at the beginning of the season, or monthly breakfast sessions with head coaches, it is clear the athletic directors would agree that face-to-face communication is the best way to get on the same page as an organization. These communication rituals fulfill what Geertz suggested in 1999 and Skemp-Arlt and Toupenca found in 2007. Part of understanding the culture of the athletic department involves locating the motivation of the coaches, and the 2007 article by Skemp-Arlt and Toupenca said that a great way to motivate employees is to initiate discussion and get to know them on a personal level. The communication rituals found in the study would suggest that most of the athletic directors in this study have a hand in further motivation of the coaches in the athletic department.

As noted in the findings, the issue of dealing with multi-sport athletes is one of the most hot-button topics in high school athletics in regards to conflict. In every athletic department, the ADs wanted the head coaches of the sports that an athlete played to speak

about how they would share the student athlete. In those meetings, they not only consider the physical toll that could occur, but also the impact that all those sports and events has on their school work. Many times the term “whole child” was used in reference to what the ADs were looking after and trying to build up, not just the athletic side of the student’s high school experience. While the issue of over-involved parents is also present in virtually every high school athletic department, AD4 uses a proactive approach that seems to eliminate conflict before it becomes a problem. The preseason meeting with every parent and coach to go over the rules and objectives of the season as well as the mission statement has eliminated many issues in that athletic department.

As for leadership styles, most athletic directors in this study would fall under the category of either democratic or laissez-faire (Lewin 1939). The communication rituals help the coaches to have a say in the day-to-day operations of the athletic departments, and AD4’s approach to allowing the coaches to add edits to the mission statement would be an example of laissez-faire. Blake and Mouton’s grid (1964) would chart all of these athletic departments as high on the Y axis, which is concern for people. Most of the athletic directors could be deemed as having the team management leadership style, which is where the leader is aware of emotional needs of the team and knows how to best motivate the team to get the best results. Many aspects of servant leadership (Spears, 2010) is found in the athletic directors studied. Several of those ten aspects that are especially observable are building community, commitment to the growth of others, foresight, and listening.

Quinn and McGrath listed the four cultural archetypes as consensual, developmental, hierarchical, and rational (1985). All four athletic departments have

aspects of several of these types of culture. Consensual culture is present in that the athletic directors have communication events, such as monthly meetings and meetings with parents prior to a sport's season, in which they discuss topics of interest regarding the athletic department. The researcher would say that a couple of these athletic departments employ a bit of developmental culture in that the coaches help to edit and work on issues regarding one of these school's mission statement. It appears the athletic departments in this study do not use the hierarchical culture framework, in that the athletic directors all treat their coaches and staff members as people with influence and useful ideas. The final type of culture according to Quinn and McGrath is rational culture, where the focus on winning and results is ever-present. Due to the amount of times each athletic director said that the importance on winning and results was secondary to the development and growth of students in all aspects of their lives, the researcher would suggest that none of these schools could be considered a rational culture.

### *Limitations*

There were two potential limitations in this study: generalizability and social desirability. It could be said that four athletic directors would not be a representative study size. It is true that it would be incorrect to generalize while only interviewing four athletic directors about their athletic departments, as opposed to a much larger study with different sized schools in different locations with athletic directors of different demographics. However, generalizability will not be an issue in the current study because qualitative research is rooted in particularity, not generalizability (Greene and Caracelli, 1997). It is possible that social desirability was at play from the athletic directors in the

interview. When in the interview, the athletic directors chosen for research may have potentially given an answer that is less rooted in his/her actual experiences or feelings, and more based upon professional norms. They may have invented or omitted information, or they may have given what they consider to be the “right” answer. They potentially gave answers that would make themselves or their athletic departments look much better than they actually are, or they could have completely missed the question and had their focus elsewhere. Therefore, the potential for social desirability was reduced by attempting to make the interview more of a conversation than a formal questioning.

### *Conclusion*

After interviews with four high school athletic directors, the researcher believes that the most effective way to lead an athletic department starts with communication. First, it is important to have the values of the athletic department and school on paper. To reinforce the mission statement and the vision of the athletic department even more, it would help to have that mission statement posted everywhere throughout the facilities, like AD2 discussed. Once one has a vision and clear direction, it is vital to meet regularly with coaches to ensure the staff continually enforces the philosophies of the athletic department. Preseason mandatory meetings with parents, such as the one AD4 was describing, is also vital to eliminate potential conflicts with parents that could arise in the season. Using intentional communication events (Geertz, 1999) seems to give these athletic directors an advantage in providing direction and leadership to others in their athletic department.

Once an athletic director has a vision, direction and communication plan, the AD needs to hire the right people that fit with the organization's values and mission statement. It was noted several times throughout the four interviews that hiring the right people can often eliminate trouble before it could grow into something even more damaging. To hire the right people, athletic directors need to be self-aware about the values of the athletic department and attempt to match the values of the applicants to the cultural type of the athletic department (Quinn & McGrath, 1985).

Finally, the researcher would suggest, as the athletic directors in the study have, that student athletes at the high school level should be encouraged to play multiple sports and not be specialized in only one sport to be played year-round. By encouraging multi-sport participation, student athletes get the chance to learn how to work in many different types of leadership, as AD4 stated, and also eliminate any potential injuries that could occur from only using one muscle group year-round by only playing one sport. In a 2013 study, 77.7 percent of athletic directors surveyed said there was an increase in sport specialization at their school. In that same study, the researchers found that the risks of higher rate of injury, increased psychological stress, and quitting sports at a young age was not worth it to the student athletes (Jayanthi, Pinkham, Dugas, Patrick, & LaBella, 2013). Athletic directors can anticipate that conflict will arise from this hot-button issue of sport specialization that potentially leads to conflict among coaches and tense interactions with parents, so athletic directors should have protocols in place for how to handle these conflicts, should they arise.

Ultimately, the focus of the athletic director should be on the students who come through the doors of the school. Every decision that is made and every problem that has

to be solved should be looked at through the lens of protecting the welfare of the student athlete. This should affect how athletic directors articulate and enforce the mission statement, hire coaches, and deal with coaches and parents in conflict management situations. At the end of the day, athletic directors are there to facilitate the education of student athletes in ways that they would have otherwise not been taught strictly in a classroom setting.

## APPENDIX A

### Informed Consent Form

**Principal Investigator:**

**Study Title:**

**Institution:**

Name of participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

The following information is provided to inform you about the research project and your participation in it. Please read this form carefully and feel free to ask any questions you may have about this study and the information given below. You will be given an opportunity to ask questions, and your questions will be answered. Also, you will be given a copy of this consent form.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You are also free to withdraw from this study at any time. In the event new information becomes available that may affect the risks or benefits associated with this research study or your willingness to participate in it, you will be notified so that you can make an informed decision whether or not to continue your participation in this study.

For additional information about giving consent or your rights as a participant in this study, please feel free to contact the MTSU Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918.

**1. Purpose of the study:**

You are being asked to participate in a research study because the investigator is seeking to determine what leadership and management theories are at play in high school athletic departments.

**2. Description of procedures to be followed and approximate duration of the study:**

The investigator will interview you, which will last approximately 30-45 minutes. The investigator will transcribe the audio recording. The recording will then be deleted from the recorder.

**3. Expected costs:**

None

**4. Description of the discomforts, inconveniences, and/or risks that can be reasonably expected as a result of participation in this study:**

Given the nature of your responses and the steps being taken to ensure confidentiality and protect the information you provide, participation in this study carries minimal plausible risk.

**5. Anticipated benefits from this study:**

a) The potential benefits to science and humankind that may result from this study is that I'm building a tool for prospective and current high school athletic directors for them to follow to improve their athletic department.

b) The potential benefits to you from this study is reflecting on what it is that you do to make your athletic department successful.

**6. Compensation for participation:**

None

**7. Circumstances under which the Principal Investigator may withdraw you from study participation:**

If the interviewee or the interviewee's institution are involved in illegal or unethical acts of any sort, or if the interviewee contacts the primary investigator and requests for his or her information to be deleted from the study.

**8. What happens if you choose to withdraw from study participation:**

Your information and interview answers will be immediately deleted from the study.

**9. Contact Information.** If you should have any questions about this research study or possible injury, please feel free to contact **Matt Posey** at **931-993-9179** or **mdp4x@mtmail.mtsu.edu** or my Faculty Advisor, **Dr. Betsy Dalton** at **615-898-2275** or **elizabeth.dalton@mtsu.edu**.

**10. Confidentiality.** All reasonable efforts will be made to keep the personal information in your research record private. Your institution will be referred to as "Athletic Department A" or "Athletic Department B" throughout the thesis process. Within 48 hours of your completed interview, the recording of the interview will be transcribed to the primary investigator's personal laptop, kept under the investigator's watch at all times. The audio file on the recorder will then be immediately destroyed upon transfer to this computer. Once transcription is completed, any hand-written notes, any hard-copy transcriptions, and informed consent forms will be locked in Dr. Betsy Dalton's office (311 Jones Hall, Middle Tennessee State University). Only the researchers will have access to material. Your information may be shared with MTSU or the government, such as the Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board, Federal Government Office for Human Research Protections if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

**11. STATEMENT BY PERSON AGREEING TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

**I have read this informed consent document and the material contained in it has been explained to me verbally. I understand each part of the document, all my questions have been answered, and I freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of volunteer

Consent obtained by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of primary investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Questions

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Do you have any siblings?
4. Are you married?
5. Do you have children?
6. Where are you from?
7. How long have you lived in this area?
8. Where did you attend college?
9. What did you study in college?
10. How did you reach the point in your career that you're at now?
11. Who were the mentors or heroes along the way that you looked up to and helped you to this point?
12. Describe for me a typical day in the life of an athletic director at [school].
13. In your opinion, what are the most important things you do at work?
14. Tell me about the core values of this athletic department.
  - a. What is said in the mission statement?
  - b. Who came up with the mission statement?
15. Give me an example of a time when a big decision had to be made?
  - a. Who made the decision?
  - b. Do you often make decisions, or do the coaches have some freedom to make decisions?
    - i. Why is that?
16. Give me an example of a recent change in the athletic department of any sort.
  - a. How does that tie into the values of the athletic department?
17. What is the physical makeup of your office like?
18. What is the physical makeup of your coaches' offices like?
  - a. Are they allowed to decorate their offices so they can make it more comfortable?
19. Do you feel as though your athletic facilities are up to par?
20. Do your coaches feel as though your athletic facilities are up to par?
21. Are there any current plans to build on or renovate current facilities?
22. How do you think the facilities and offices tie into the job satisfaction of the coaches, if at all?
23. What are the relationships like in the athletic department between you and the coaches, as well as just amongst the coaches?
  - a. Are there get-togethers like Christmas parties or family gatherings like bonfires or anything else outside of the office?
24. What are the relationships like between coaches and their players and between you and the student-athletes?
25. Tell me about a time when an employee left the athletic department.
  - a. What is the "letting go" process like?
26. How often do you experience turnover within your athletic department?

27. How do you feel when an employee quits or moves on?
28. If I was a coach or if I wanted to be part of the support staff of your athletic department, how would the interview and recruiting process go?
29. Once hired, what types of orientation would new employees have to be involved with?
30. Does that orientation seem to help your athletic department grow?
31. Give me an example of a time where there was conflict in your athletic department between you and an employee.
  - a. How was that resolved?
32. Give me an example of a time when you had a conflict with a student-athlete.
  - a. How was that resolved?
33. Give me an example of a time when you had a conflict with a student-athlete's parent or guardian or grandparent.
  - a. How was that situation resolved?
34. How do the outcomes of those situations of conflict tie into the values of the athletic department?
35. What motivates you to do your best work?
36. What kinds of things motivate your employees to do their best work?
37. What do you think makes a good leader?
38. How do you define success in the realm of high school athletics?
  - a. Do you feel as though you and your athletic department have reached that success?
39. How would your coaches and other employees describe you?
40. How would your coaches and other employees describe their jobs?
41. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**APPENDIX C**

IRB Approval Letter

IRB  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Office of Research Compliance, 010A Sam  
Ingram Building,  
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd Murfreesboro, TN 37129

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Friday, February 24, 2017

Principal Investigator **Matthew D. Posey** (Student)  
Faculty Advisor Elizabeth Dalton  
Co-Investigators NONE  
Investigator Email(s) mdp4x@mtmail.mtsu.edu; elizabeth.dalton@mtsu.edu  
Department Communication Studies & Organizational Communication  
Protocol Title *Understanding which theories of management are at play in high school athletic department*  
Protocol ID **17-2150**

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) through the EXPEDITED mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior A summary of the IRB action and other particulars in regard to this protocol application is tabulated as shown below:

IRB Action	APPROVED for one year from the date of this notification
Date of expiration	2/28/2018
Participant Size	2 (TWO)
Participant Pool	Adult athletic directors
Exceptions	Permitted to record participant information for administrative purposes only
Restrictions	1. Mandatory informed consent 2. Destroy/delete identifiable information
Comments	None
Amendments	Date
None at this time	Post-approval Amendments

This protocol can be continued for up to THREE years (2/29/2020) by obtaining a continuation approval prior to 2/28/2018. Refer to the following schedule to plan your annual project reports and be aware that you may not receive a separate reminder to complete your continuing reviews. Failure in obtaining an approval for continuation will

automatically result in cancellation of this protocol. Moreover, the completion of this study MUST be notified to the Office of Compliance by filing a final report in order to close-out the protocol.

The investigator(s) indicated in this notification should read and abide by all of the post-approval conditions imposed with this approval. Refer to the post-approval guidelines posted in the MTSU IRB's website. Any unanticipated harms to participants or adverse events must be reported to the Office of Compliance at (615) 494-8918 within 48 hours of the incident. Amendments to this protocol must be approved by the IRB. Inclusion of new researchers must also be approved by the Office of Compliance before they begin to work on the project.

All of the research-related records, which include signed consent forms, investigator information and other documents related to the study, must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol application. The data storage must be maintained for at least three (3) years after study completion. Subsequently, the researcher may destroy the data in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity. IRB reserves the right to modify, change or cancel the terms of this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board  
Middle Tennessee State University

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