Changing Team Culture:
The Perspectives of Ten Successful Head Coaches

Peter J. Schroeder
University of the Pacific

Coaches are under increasing amounts of pressure to succeed and are constantly looking for ways to improve their teams. One tactic for improvement that has received little attention is the development of team culture, or a team's social and psychological environment (Martens, 1987). While it has become a common term in the coaching lexicon, team culture is not well understood (Anderson, 2007; Thamel, 2005; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Whiteside, 2004). Therefore, this study used the organizational culture perspective to investigate the degree to which team improvement featured a change in team culture. In addition, the study sought to identify the leadership behaviors used by coaches to change team culture. Ten NCAA Division I head coaches were interviewed. Each guided a previously unsuccessful team to championship levels within five years. A qualitative analysis indicated that these turnarounds featured changes in team culture. Coaches started the cultural change process by creating core sets of values specific to their teams. To ingrain these values, coaches taught them with several tactics, recruited athletes who would embrace team values, and punished and rewarded consistent with the values. These actions were taken with respect to the unique environments of each team. The results were generally consistent with the literature on organizational culture change. However, the speed of culture change was more rapid than previously reported due to the environment of intercollegiate athletics. Additionally, the findings may offer coaches new means for team improvement by focusing on the symbolic and interpretive elements of team membership.

Address Correspondence to: Peter J. Schroeder, Ed.D., Dept. of Sport Sciences, 3601 Pacific Avenue, University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA 95211. Email: pschroeder@pacific.edu.

In the last five years, head coaches' salaries in college athletics have increased significantly. In many cases head basketball and football coaches earn more than faculty members, university presidents, and are often the highest paid public employees in their respective states (Des Moines Register, 2007; USA Today, 2007). In part, this is due to the amount of revenue and notoriety successful coaches can generate for universities through ticket sales, post-season appearances, and donations. However, as coaches' salaries and institutional rewards have increased, so has the pressure on coaches (Curtis, 2003; Simers, 2007). Prior to the explosion in coaching salaries, most institutions followed the model articulated by former University of Notre Dame president Theodore Hesburgh (1990) that provided coaches with a five-year window to achieve success. However, that window was effectively shut in 2003 when Notre Dame unprecedentedly fired its football coach after three years of a five-year contract (Wojciechowski, 2007). Administrators, boosters, and fans now expect success in a narrow time frame, and as a result coaches are pressed for tactics to generate it (Curtis).

Research on coaching has offered many such tactics for coaches. Much of the coaching psychology literature has focused on leadership, team cohesion, communication, and motivation (e.g.,; Chelladuari, 2005; Duda & Balaguer, 2007; LaVoi, 2007; Widmeyer, Brawley & Carron, 2002). In contrast, very little research has examined the symbolic or interpretive elements of coaching. Yet Martens (1987) contends that the essence of coaching is developing a "team culture" (p. 33) or a social and psychological environment that maximizes a team's ability to achieve success. In fact, several coaches have identified team culture as a key to their teams' success (Anderson, 2007; Thamel, 2005; Voight & Carroll, 2006; Whiteside, 2004) because it creates an environment in which all members, "think alike, talk alike, and act alike so they can support and reinforce the best in one another" (Voight & Carroll, p. 324). Despite this, few studies have examined team culture nor how team culture can be changed.

There is, however, a large body of research studying the organizational cultures of large corporations and educational institutions (Dension, Haaland & Goelzer, 2004; Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Smart & St. John, 1996; Xenikou & Simosi, 2006). Many researchers are "convinced of the link between culture and performance" (Rollins & Roberts, 1998, p.6) because it improves the clarity of work and workers' self-esteem (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Kotter & Heskett; Oden, 1997). While others are skeptical that such findings can be generalized (Wilderon, Glunk & Maslowski, 2000), the research does provide a framework for investigating team culture and how team culture might be changed. Thus, this study used the organizational culture perspective to examine the degree to which team improvement featured a change in team culture. In addition, the study sought to identify the leader actions that facilitated team culture change.

Organizational Culture Perspective

While there are many ways to examine organizational behavior, the organizational culture perspective focuses on the symbolic and interpretive elements of organizations (Morgan, 1997). It has become a popular way to assess organizations, but "like so many concepts, organizational culture is not defined the same way by any two popular theorists" (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1992, p. 675). Although Martin (2002) has identified integrative, differentiation, and fragmentation models of organizational culture, Schein's (2004) integrative, leader-centered model is most commonly accepted and is best suited to the coach-centered model of intercollegiate athletics (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Hatch, 2000; Morgan, 1997; Sathe & Davidson, 2000). This conception views organizational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions that guides behavior in an organization. The perspective assumes that organizations are ambiguous and unpredictable entities that exist in open environments. This uncertainty leads organizations and their members to develop ideologies and assumptions. These are then subconsciously accepted and ultimately enable organizational cultures to guide members' behaviors. However, because organizations exist in open environments, these assumptions are always subject to change, making their cultures very dynamic (Bolman & Deal; Hatch; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

According to Schein (2004), organizational cultures are comprised of three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions. Artifacts are the most evident component of culture, which one can see, hear, or feel. Although artifacts are easy to perceive, the underlying meanings are not always clear and thus offer an incomplete picture of organizational culture. Espoused values refer to the, "norms that provide the day-to-day operating principles by which members of the group guide their behavior" (Schein, p. 27). They not only indicate what the organization wants, but also the importance of those desires. Espoused values and artifacts often coincide, but may still inaccurately describe organizational culture. It is not uncommon for an organization to act in complete contrast with its stated beliefs and values (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Schein). As the deepest level of culture, basic assumptions are the true premise for organizational behavior. They provide a subconscious, almost thoughtless, guide for members to react to the environment. Ultimately, basic assumptions provide members of an organizational culture with the "mental maps" that define, "what to pay attention to, what things mean, how to react emotionally to what is going on" (Schein, p. 32).

Leadership and Organizational Culture Change

The integrative model of organizational culture is leader driven (Martin, 2002). Schein (1992) contends that "neither leadership nor culture can be understood by itself. In fact one could argue that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is create and...change

cultures" (p. 5). To create cultural change, leaders must take organizations through three phases: unfreezing, cognitive restructuring and refreezing. Unfreezing begins by acknowledging the status of an existing culture (Hatch, 2000; Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1993). In young or rigid organizational cultures, only incremental leader actions may be needed. Declining or damaged cultures often require revolutionary tactics to complete a wholesale turnaround (Hatch; Schein; Trice & Beyer). Whatever the level of cultural dysfunction, leaders must demonstrate it to the culture's members. Only when members believe that the organization's culture is causing its problems will they become open to cultural change (Schein). Schein contends that this "unfreezing" (p. 320) process is best accomplished by presenting enough "disconfirming data" (p. 320) to create anxiety or guilt in members.

Once a dysfunctional culture is exposed, a leader begins cognitive restructuring by establishing a vision. Visions are symbolic and idyllic statements for the future condition of organizations and are a vital element of organizational culture for several reasons (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Trice & Beyer, 1993; Yukl, 1998). First, they provide members of the culture with the "psychological safety" (Schein, 2004, p. 322) that enables them to overcome the fear of change created by unfreezing. Second, visions help "people understand the purpose, objectives, and priorities of the organization" (Yukl, p. 342). Third, visions increase motivation and commitment among followers by providing a common purpose and a sense of importance to their work. Finally, visions promote consistent actions and decisions in an organization.

In cognitive restructuring, leaders use a variety of tactics to create a true shift in an organizational culture's values and assumptions (Major, 2000; Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Schein identifies six primary mechanisms used to create deep cultural changes. A first powerful way for leaders to change culture is to change what they pay attention to, measure and control. The extent to which leaders become involved in, ask questions about, or comment on certain aspects of the organization provides a strong indication about the leader's values. Second, role modeling and teaching can be used to alter cultural values and assumptions. Formal means (i.e., orientations, trainings, handbooks) can change values and assumptions, but informal techniques (i.e., dress, language, demeanor) are often more potent. Third, leaders' reactions to crises can change culture because the heightened emotions created by such situations increase, "the intensity of learning" (Schein, p. 254). Changing resource allocation is a fourth means for conveying new cultural assumptions. Leaders frequently indicate what elements they feel are important through the degree to which they fund them. Fifth, altering an organization's personnel can change culture rapidly and visibly. Hiring individuals who embody new cultural values creates consistency in the culture and conveys a clear message about the organization's direction. Lastly, leaders can reward behaviors consistent with new cultural assumptions or punish contrasting actions. In administering such feedback, the mag-

nitude and consistency of the feedback carry significant cultural weight (Sathe & Davidson, 2000).

Leaders can use secondary change mechanisms that are less drastic. These can be used to alter newer and less-established cultures or can reinforce the above primary mechanisms. One such means of culture change is to alter artifacts (Hatch, 2000, Schein, 2004). New slogans, symbols, rituals and stories provide a tangible signal to members about new cultural assumptions. Yukl (1998) also recommends that leaders use empowerment to change culture. Giving members a stake in the new culture makes them more apt to believe in and role model the new assumptions. Technology can also be used to help change culture (Schein). Introducing a new technology can change the way that members complete their work, and, in a subtle process, they may learn to think differently about the organization.

Often both primary and secondary mechanisms are used together in a "turnaround" (Schein, 2004, p. 314). In some cases cultural turnaround can be lengthy and contentious, so it is imperative that the leader complete the change process by refreezing the new culture. Refreezing necessitates that the leader reinforce the new assumptions and demonstrate clearly that the new culture has succeeded. Usually this is accomplished with confirming data from the environment or external stakeholders but can be demonstrated qualitatively by internal sources as well (Schein).

In sum, the organizational culture perspective provides a holistic way to examine symbols, values and assumptions in organizations. In addition, it is intricately linked to leadership by focusing on how leaders establish the interpretive elements of organizational life and how they guide change processes. Given the highly symbolic nature of intercollegiate athletics (Beyer & Hannah, 2000), the purpose of this study was to use the organizational culture perspective to determine the extent to which rapid team improvement featured a change in team culture. With its leadership focus, the perspective was also used to identify the coaching behaviors that changed team cultures.

Method

Due to their complexity, organizational cultures are not easily revealed (Martin, 2002; Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Therefore, this study used a qualitative approach since it provides the flexibility and depth needed to uncover dynamic phenomena (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 1998). In particular, this study relied on semi-structured interviews because a wide range of topics can be covered, questions can be catered to participant responses, and comparable responses result (Bogden & Biklen; Merriam). Furthermore, other studies of expert coaches have relied on interviews (e.g., Vallee & Bloom, 2005).

Selection Criteria & Participants

Coaches who met four criteria were identified for the study. First, coaches were sought who had been hired to rebuild an unsuccessful program as evidenced by a poor record. While a poor record was not necessarily indicative of a poor team culture, it was assumed that the preceding team culture was partially to blame for a lack of success. Second, coaches were to have five or less years of experience in their current position to improve the likelihood of recalling their change efforts. Third, coaches were required to have led their teams to the National Collegiate Athletics Association's (NCAA) playoffs in their first five seasons (due to the lack of an NCAA playoff football, a bowl game and top 25 ranking were the criteria for football coaches). Finally, coaches had to be employed at NCAA Division I institutions. This is the highest level of intercollegiate competition in the United States and is also the level at which the coaching salaries and subsequent pressure to win are the greatest (Curtis, 2003; 2004).

Fifteen coaches were contacted via phone or email to participate in the study. Of those, ten agreed to be interviewed. The coaches represented five different sports, and there were an equal number of coaches from men's and women's programs: softball (4), football (2), men's basketball (2), women's basketball, men's volleyball. Seven coaches were male and three were female. The coaches represented programs from across the country and all had guided their teams to the NCAA tournament or bowl games/top 25. Five had led their teams to multiple NCAA tournaments or bowls and three had teams finish as quarterfinalists or better in their respective NCAA tournaments. Each football team finished a season ranked in the top-ten.

Procedures

An interview guide was developed based on Schein's (2004) conceptualization of the cultural change process. Questions centered on the coach's vision for the program, how coaches got their players to embrace the values underscoring that vision, and how coaches overcame opposition to the team's values (see Appendix). To assess the quality of the questions, pilot interviews were conducted with two Division I coaches who had turned around programs in the past ten years. Following those interviews, the coach's tenure criteria was reduced from ten to five years because it was clear that coaches who had held their jobs longer than five years had difficulty recalling the details of their initial change efforts. In addition, questions about the external environment were broadened to account for the wide array of entities (i.e., media, school type) that could influence team culture.

Using a semi-structured format, I interviewed each coach at the location of their choice. In five cases, I traveled to their offices and two coaches invited me to their homes. Two interviews were conducted in hotel lobbies during team travel and another was completed in a

luxury box during a tournament. While the interviews were based on an interview guide, every interview featured numerous probes often eliciting lengthy responses. The recorded interviews ranged in length from 45 to 100 minutes and extensive notes were taken during each interview. Audio files of the interviews were transcribed. Coaches were assured of anonymity and given a pseudonym.

Some coaches supplied additional materials to further illustrate their ideas. A football coach provided a packet that he used for senior leadership training and a transcript of a speech he gave on leadership. Another football coach presented two rewards his players could earn. The women's basketball coach provided a tour of his practice facility to illustrate some teaching tools. The men's volleyball coach presented copies of essays he assigned his players and minutes and diagrams from a team meeting. These materials were also incorporated for analysis.

Data Analysis

A four-phase process of theorizing was used to analyze the data (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). First, in perception, transcripts, field notes and other materials were scanned for meaning units. A memo was then created for each transcription listing its major ideas and the meaning units underscoring that idea. Second, categories were developed. The 75 major ideas that emerged from perception were listed on a matrix. The matrix was then used to determine the frequency of major ideas and the depth with which the ideas occurred (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Ultimately, the ideas were classified into six high-order categories, each featuring two to four sub-categories. Third, these categories were then linked using relationship diagrams (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In developing category relationships, one high-order category was reclassified as a sub-category. Finally, the linkages and relationships were then interpreted using the literature on organizational culture as a basis.

When using qualitative methods and analysis, the researcher becomes the primary tool of investigation. Therefore, it is important to establish any of my biases and experiences that could influence the interpretation of data. First, I was a student-athlete and have worked in intercollegiate athletic departments. Second, my wife was a Division I coach for ten years. Finally, I currently consult with intercollegiate athletic teams and coaches.

Several recommended steps were taken to account for any resulting biases and to meet the qualitative standards of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To secure credibility, I obtained a category check from an emeritus sport psychology professor who was former Division I head coach and current coaching consultant. He reviewed 100 meaning units and placed them in my speculative categories with a 92% consistency rate. His analysis also revealed two new links

between subcategories. I attempted to facilitate transferability by providing the coaches' backgrounds and experiences, and detailing the interview methods. To establish dependability, the criteria for selecting the coaches were presented. Finally, I provided my experiences and kept an extensive audit trail of notes, transcripts, diagrams and articles for confirmability.

Results and Discussion

The objective of this study was to determine the degree to which team improvement featured a change in team culture and how coaches led that process. While it was not possible to establish causality, the results do indicate that culture change was a component in the turnaround of these college athletic teams. Evidence of cultural change emerged in three ways. First, coaches were all attuned to the concept of team culture and guided their teams through modified cultural change processes. Second, coaches spent considerable time developing and using a variety of tactics to facilitate this change process. Third, culture change seemed to be accelerated by the unique nature of the intercollegiate athletic environment. The following section will present these themes and connect them to the literature on organizational culture and leadership.

Coaches' Perceptions of Culture and Cultural Change

While only one coach referred to the concept of culture, all regularly referred to "the way we do things here," a "mindset," or a "philosophy." Such terms were used as a global reference for the core sets of values that coaches had defined for their teams. Virtually all coaches believed that the values had been adopted by their teams within the first three years of their tenures. Some coaches even felt that players embraced the values within the first year while others believed complete culture change took at least two years of coaching and three years of recruiting to establish culture. Two coaches noted the fluidity of team culture, having to tweak it every year or two as new players and events influenced the core values.

While coaches did alter cultural elements on every team, they did not consciously follow the recommended change process (Schein, 2004). None of them focused on the first and last phases of cultural change. However, the public and finite nature of sport essentially provided these phases. Losing was the disconfirming data needed to unfreeze old assumptions, and winning provided the confirming data to refreeze new cultures. Therefore, coaches concentrated on the second stage of culture change: cognitive restructuring. The restructuring that occurred in this study corresponds well with what Schein describes as cultural turnaround. Turnarounds require the application of several change mechanisms throughout the organization to develop a new culture.

Four such mechanisms were used by coaches to alter and institutionalize their teams' core values. First, coaches spent significant effort defining and articulating desired team values. Second, coaches utilized a number of teaching tools to help their athletes understand and assume the team values. Third, very specific recruiting profiles and scouting techniques were developed by coaches to recruit players who embodied the team values. Fourth, rewards and punishments were used to further communicate the importance of specific cultural values. All of these were carried out with an acknowledgement of the environments in which they were coaching (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The relationship of the elements involved in changing team culture.
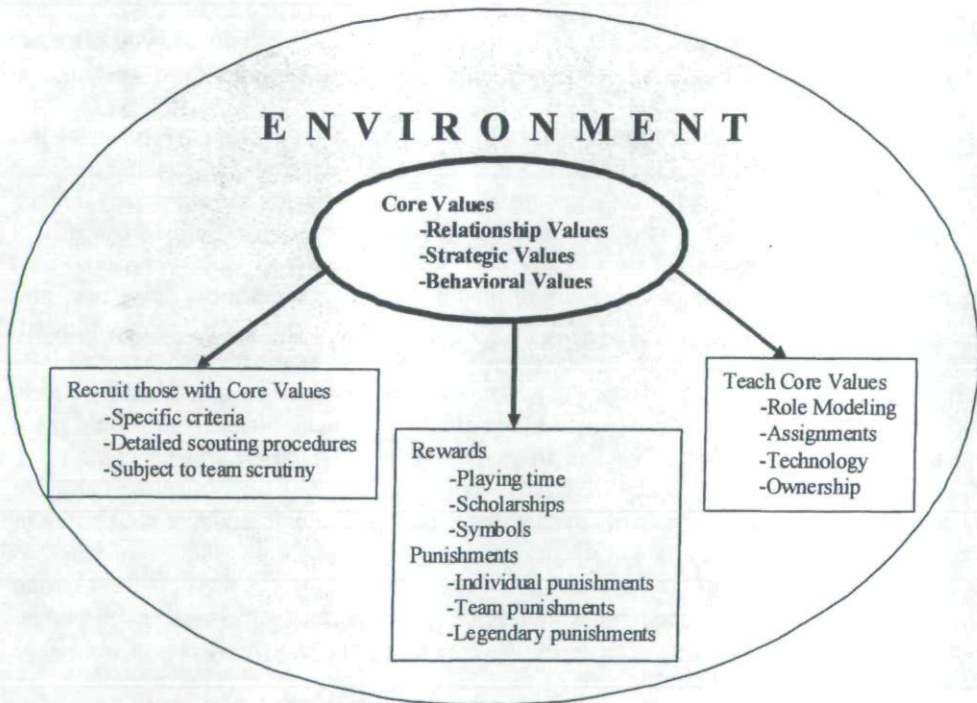
Defining Values

At the core of every turnaround was a clear set of values stemming almost entirely from each head coach. Most of the coaches brought a clear set of values to the job, but three younger coaches admitted, "it was really difficult for me to determine that" and ended up "changing the assumptions." While the values differed by sport and institution, each coach articulated clear ideas about what actions would lead to success in their respective sport. Three types of values emerged: relationship values, behavioral values, and strategic values.

Relationship values were a foundation for the way that coaches interacted with players and the way that players interacted with each other. Often these were the first values that coaches attempted to establish due to the initial lack of trust athletes had for each other and their coaches.

> I'll never forget the first time you know we're running sprints and somebody jumped off-sides and everybody yelled at the guy and cussed at the guy, and I said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on a second here. We're going to run into a lot of adversity and you know, we have to treat all setbacks as temporary, and we can't do it by yelling and screaming at one another." (Football coach A)

> The players had had three head coaches within the year, and the original head coach had been let go because the players had felt that there had been some betrayal. So they had actually been very, very active in getting him removed. And you had a group of seniors, very, very strong-willed, who just basically felt they were victims. (Softball coach X)

To create environments of trust and respect, communication became very important. Coaches communicated through a number of mediums to give athletes the sense that, "we really do care about them as a person as opposed to just an [athlete]." The men's volleyball coach held four individual meetings a year with his 24 players. Two other coaches met athletes at off-campus coffee shops to change the communication dynamic of individual meetings. Coaches also built trust by acknowledging their mistakes which, "makes you a little more human. ...more approachable." Coaches provided forums in which the athletes could share with each other to build what coaches referred to as a "family feel." Thirty minutes of practice time each week was used by softball coach X for "team talk" about anything not related to softball. Football coach A held two unity meetings per year in which the team was divided up into small groups to discuss issues and, "put their own feelings out there in front of the group." Once trust was built, communication remained important but it was less sensitive. Coaches and athletes were more direct with each other permitting the feedback needed to develop strategic and behavioral values.

The importance of strategic values was communicated directly, repeatedly, and through the way coaches paid attention to these values. Such attention commonly manifested through

the amount of time spent on sport-specific elements like serving, blocking, pitching, hitting, fundamentals, protecting the ball, fitness, and turnovers. The men's volleyball coach indicated,

> I have a list of six absolutes about the skills of volleyball, ...and I realized that if I was going to be satisfied with the way we play the game then I had to make sure that my team handled those aspects of the game. ...So I had to re-evaluate the way I taught the game, and I actually changed the way I ran practices at the end of January. I set up practices designed around those six things.

Some coaches relied on simple statistics to determine how well a team's members were exhibiting a strategic value. Statistics were not only tracked during games, but also during practices. Videotapes and practices logs were common ways to highlight strategic values. Coaches also devised unique ways to measure subjective values like intelligence. Softball coach Y, who valued a cerebral hitting approach, used:

> Q.A.B.s, quality at-bats to evaluate hitting instead of just focusing on batting average. Because if they had good strategy, good pitch selection and swung hard at the ball and hit the ball hard, then that would be considered a quality at bat. You can't control whether somebody on defense makes a great play, but you can control those things that give you the best chance to get a hit.

Perhaps most important for culture change were the behavioral values that coaches established. Coaches wanted values like hard work, attitude, discipline, effort, maximizing potential and intelligence exhibited at all times in their programs. However, defining these values for their players, and on occasion assistant coaches, was a significant challenge. There was frequently an initial gap between the coach's definition of a value and their athletes' perception of the concept.

> The first group, they worked pretty hard. Now you have to explain to them what they think is a hard enough work ethic and what really is are two different things. So they have to learn one, how to put in the time, and two, they have to learn how to do the right things. There is a big difference between going to the gym for an hour and going to the gym and working for an hour. (Men's basketball coach M)

> Yes it was very hard in the beginning because they didn't know. They had never been there. They did not even know what coaching was about. So we had to explain to them what we were trying to get to, and when you're talking about it and actually doing it those are two completely different things. ...Our first season we had to do a lot of the showing. (Softball coach W)

Researchers have indicated that establishing a vision is a key starting point for culture change (Ashkanasy, Wildreon & Peterson, 2000; Schein, 2004; Yukl, 1998). While these coaches

did not convey singular visions, they established core sets of relationship, behavioral and strategic values that clarified how success would occur. While these values may not have been initially clear, as athletes began to comprehend those value sets, culture change seemed to commence. The relationship, behavioral and strategic values appeared to provide the psychological safety net that Schein believes is necessary to begin team culture change.

Teaching tools

In order to "mend that bridge" or "paint that picture" of understanding values, coaches relied heavily on a variety of teaching tools. While significant time was spent teaching, each coach did so in a manner that best suited his or her desired values and individual style. The teaching actions generally fell into one of four categories: role modeling, assignments, technology, or ownership. As indicated below, many coaches felt role modeling was a critical first step because it was a quick and indisputable way to convey key cultural desirable values.

> ...all of our coaches are fairly young, so we could get out there and take ground balls. And they are like, "Are you kidding me? You guys are doing this?" And their eyes are open. We have a volunteer coach who is a slapper who ran bases. He was really aggressive on the bases. He would run into the players, and they got pissed. But then they realized, "Wow, that looks pretty good." (Softball coach W)

In addition, role modeling earned the respect and trust of their players. When coaches demonstrated those values, they believed players were more apt to buy into the team's culture.

> I think you have to model it for them. If we're going to be lifting at eight in the morning, if we're going to have open gym at six thirty, and even though I can't be around them, I can't be in there coaching (due to NCAA rules), I'm going to be out there. So that's number one. You're going to do your part modeling. They're looking at you, especially in that situation there. Just like a little kid, they're watching every move you make. "Is this guy practicing what he preaches?" I think that's one of the biggest parts of the leadership: you better model the work ethic. (Men's basketball coach M)

Coaches who emphasized behavioral values like intelligence and strategy spent time "hammering that home" with a variety of traditional pedagogical tools. Lectures, stories, scenarios, examples, or professional guest speakers were commonly used by coaches to convey a particular value's relevance. Several assigned articles and books to their athletes. To reinforce the readings' morals, some coaches had group discussions, and two required athletes to submit typed essays and then provided feedback. Women's basketball coach O required athletes to, "keep a notebook throughout the year on everything we talk about" and subsequently gave, "them tests...to see how they are paying attention." Four coaches required players to plan and execute a practice session to improve their teams' understanding of fundamentals. Coaches found such strategies beneficial for coaches and athletes.

> I made the guys do a paper and a presentation to the team on each individual system. I assigned the system, and they had to write it out and give the presentation. The guys loved it. They want to do it again. I think that made it really easy for me to teach. Because once they established, "Okay this is what we're doing and why," all I need to say is, "Did you run [the play] here?" The guys knew it. (Men's volleyball coach)

Technology was another way coaches were able to provide visual evidence of values. Sport-specific software programs helped athletes see ways to improve particular skills or strategies. Coaches also conveyed visuals through practice and game videotapes, "to show this is why I say you are not going as hard as you can. Watch yourself." To provide more immediate feedback in practice situations, some coaches used digital video recorders to record practice. Then during practice they created video stations so athletes were forced to review certain skills. The men's volleyball coach used technology even more immediately.

> We have a Tivo that's on the court. Right there. [Points to it.]...So literally while its recording on the hard drive, I can pull a guy out of a drill and show him something and then stick him back in.

A final teaching tool that seemed to cement a program's culture was ownership. Many coaches found ways to give players input, leadership opportunities and responsibility because, "when we get out [on the field], there is nothing I can do to help them. They are either going to be able to do it or not." Athlete input was most often sought about game strategy and during the process of recruiting. Many coaches gave their athletes "a stage to lead." These stages included allowing a player to address the team before or after team events, naming someone to a leadership council, or putting them in charge of team building activities. Once leaders emerged, they were given responsibility for a variety of things. Some responsibilities were seemingly common like uniform selection and pre/post-game meals. More significant examples included line-up decisions, play calls, and freshmen mentoring. Football coach B explained his rationale:

> When I call a defense, I do not know what the splits are going to be like, what their stances are going to be like, how the back is going to lean, what backfield set they're going to be in. I don't know if the tight end is going to be weak side or strong side. Is he in the shotgun? All those things, I don't know that when I call a defense. But before the snap of the ball, we have got a bunch of guys on defensive side of the ball who know all those things. We need to let them use that information, communicate that information to one another, and make that part of the decision process in what we are doing out there.

When the players' leadership in such situations began to reinforce a program's values, coaches felt like their cultures were beginning to shift. As these instances became common, coaches believed the team's cultural foundations had been established.

While Schein (2004) contends that leaders, "know that their own visible behavior has great value for communicating assumptions and values," (p. 258) the levels of teaching and role modeling in this study exceed what has been reported in the corporate literature (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Muratbekova-Touron, 2005; Wren & Dulewicz, 2005). Coaches clearly understood this power as evidenced by the extent of role modeling they provided and the variety of teaching tools they used. Their regular, visible examples of desired values helped athletes grasp the intangible elements of a new culture. Consistent with the literature, coaches also used several teaching tools (e.g., ownership) that forced athletes to learn cultural values, gave them a say in the values, and created buy-in for those values (Chelladuari & Trail, 2001; Murray & Mann, 2001).

Recruiting

All coaches used the process of recruiting new players to change their team cultures. Specific criteria were set by virtually every coach to ensure that players coming into their programs were very likely to enhance their team cultures. Finding and attracting such players was arduous, so these coaches used detailed scouting procedures to find the right type of athletes and subjected recruits to the scrutiny of their current team. As a result of these tactics, coaches felt a clear difference in the cultures of their programs.

Coaches started by defining what attributes they sought in recruits beyond talent, as it was rarely the sole criterion. As men's basketball coach M indicated, "Obviously we want talent. We need talent. We need good athletes and all that. But there are some guys that aren't going to buy in." To find athletes who were willing to buy in to their programs, coaches developed specific profiles. "Passionate," "high self-esteem," "intelligence," "maturity," "character," "low-ego," "coachable," "team-oriented," and "into winning" were all examples of attributes sought in addition to talent. However, there were differences in the way coaches weighed these ideal attributes against talent. Softball coach W said:

> …you still have the business side of it—keeping your job. I'm challenged right now because I'm in a position where I lost a pitcher I was really excited about to another school. So now I am in a position where I don't just want to get a pitcher to get a pitcher. But I'm going to have to go to a [junior college] to get a kid that I'm not excited about as a person, but I have to have a pitcher. So you get kind of [making a gesture of balancing scales with her hands]— your morals and ethics get caught.

While some coaches indicated that a couple of "red flags" could be integrated into a team, most felt similar to the men's volleyball coach.

There's a guy who is going to be one of the top five recruits in the America next year. I'm not even going to call him. He's an asshole. I saw him a couple of weeks ago yelling at his coach, and I thought I'm not bringing that in. And I don't care how good he is. I know there are other schools that are desperate for him. He may be great. He may be a turn-around kind of player for them, but I'm not willing to sacrifice what kind of environment we have here.

To find and attract the type of recruits capable of enhancing a team culture, coaches established detailed scouting procedures. Often they established geographical parameters for recruiting. Coaches also devised tactics for assessing a player's potential cultural fit. Those with large staffs contacted, "people on the periphery around a player," talking not just to parents and coaches, but to opposing coaches, officials, and teachers. Several coaches also paid special attention to body language and the way recruits dealt with their parents. Observing athletes in dismal competitive circumstances was another way softball coach W assessed cultural fit.

I love to see kids fail. I want to see them in losing situations …I guess losing games and how they respond to those kinds of things. Because part of building this program is we are going to take some losses, and we are going to have to be really, really tough and strong to turn around and get after the games we need to win. The heartbreakers, those are tough to ride out. We've got to be able to have some tough skin. I'm looking for tough-skinned kids that love to play the game.

If a recruit passed the coaching staff's assessment, they were almost always subjected to the scrutiny of the current team. Every coach, like football coach B, relied on his/her players to determine whether or not a prospective recruit was worthy of joining the team's culture. "I also give our current players right of refusal. If I get Eddie Haskelled [fooled], it's on you. You have to call it. You have to be tough enough to come in and say, 'Hey, he doesn't fit.'" For many coaches this was the most vital determinant and a no confidence vote was final.

One guy—they were out on a Friday night and this kid was just disrespecting our players. Just saying things to them like, "Well, I'm going to go to [conference rival]," something like that—just totally disrespecting our players. The next morning I got a call from one of our players, and he said, "Coach I don't think this guy is going to fit in here. You know, he was totally disrespecting us all night." I went over, called him and said, "You're done. Your trip is done. Thanks for coming." Sent him home right then. (Football coach A)

Finally, many coaches were patient recruiters. Rather than pressuring players to commit early, three coaches, were adamant about waiting for those who fit in with their programs.

The way men's college basketball is set-up, you get so much attention for signing a kid early. It's on the internet, "Hey here's this commitment!" It does you no good. You need to get the right players. You need to get good players. So we would hold out. We took one of our starters in August of that year. (Men's basketball coach M)

Patience and strong recruiting philosophies created teams that were very apt to buy into the values and teachings of a particular coach. Coaches also felt that as players began to embrace the program's values that those values would begin to perpetuate. Differences in discourse were one signal. Team attitudes also began to change visibly with an infusion of newcomers, especially in crisis situations.

...we got swept on the road at the northern schools. The seniors for the most part were saying, "Well that's the way it is. That's the way we do it." And the younger players were saying, "No, no no, no. We are going to compete every day." (Softball coach X)

I'd say in critical situations we had some young guys that stepped in and made plays and held it—basically you could see the look on the older guys' faces "Oh shit." It was a habit. It was a habit they had that the younger guys did not. (Football coach B)

As appropriate values began to permeate their teams, coaches reported that recruiting became easier. Recruits with the desired profile were attracted to their programs, and the teams' members facilitated that process. Some high-profile recruits gave programs "instant credibility".

I think it's interesting to see the type of player we're getting in here. I can't entirely explain it....The same kind of quality character, quality personality kind of guys. I don't know. I think it's how I recruit and how we interact as a staff. And then there are the players themselves. When I inherited the guys that were juniors and seniors, they were great guys. They helped recruit,...and its become apparent to me that we get a certain type of guy. (Men's volleyball coach)

Schein (2004) contends that manipulation of personnel is often a subtle, almost subconscious, way to change culture because leaders are not aware of the values they seek in new members. However, for these coaches, personnel change was a very overt and pointed way of altering culture. They knew exactly what values they sought in new recruits and spent significant time searching for athletes with those attributes. Instead, they capitalized on what Schein terms an "infusion of outsiders" (p. 306). These coaches recruited numerous young athletes who embraced the desired team values and allowed the recruits to demonstrate and shape these values. When newcomers have success, they gain the credibility from others that enables them to push cultural values in a new direction (Schein). In this case, newcomers not only rapidly reshaped their cultures, but facilitated future cultural development via their input during next cycle of recruiting.

Punishments and Rewards

A final tactic used to change team culture was the way head coaches rewarded and punished athletes for complying with a program's core values. Rewards and punishments varied by coach, but coaches consistently connected punishments and rewards to their program's values in explicit and symbolic ways.

Playing time and scholarship money were two common rewards used to reinforce strategic values. Softball coach W indicated that she determined playing time by, "who is going to earn it on the field," not seniority, or reputation. Softball coach Y added:

> I brought in [a player] on 25% of a scholarship and told her if she earned a starting spot on the team, I would bump her up. She made the starting line-up and was a key contributor, so I gave her more money. By the time she left here, she was on a full-ride. I do that with every kid that is not on a full-ride.

Coaches also used artifacts, or symbolic rewards, to reinforce team values. Helmet stickers were given out by softball coach Z to any player who, "comes up with a really key play." Hats were awarded to one football team's "legion" which was comprised of those players who, "played with perfect effort for more than 20 snaps." Softball coach Y rewarded her players with unique practice shirts for leadership, effort, and quality of play. Men's basketball coach N who stressed the importance of graduation indicated:

> Even though we're not technically supposed to do it, when we get upgrades on the plane... I tell them whoever does the best academically, if a first class seat becomes available, they are going to get that seat.

Punishments were much more frequent than rewards and were more explicitly linked to values. For regular problems like tardiness, poor grades, truancy or improper social behavior, there were often common punishments such as suspensions, early morning runs, or extra study hall hours. Team punishments, in which the offender was forced observe his/her teammates suffering consequences, were used in programs where "family" or "team" was a core value. Some coaches used a standard progression of punishments, or a "strike system," to deal with players who repeatedly failed to uphold common values. Others, like softball coach Z, eschewed a strike system and instead opted for quick, harsh punishments.

> One of our captains that started for us in the [NCAA Tournament] who was due to return went out and bought 50 bottles of beer and brought it back to the hotel room, and three of our other kids got involved. They got pretty bombed. Someone came and told me, and I went in the room and obviously I was really ticked off because we were still on a road trip. ...What I did was I took 50 percent of their scholarships, gave them a letter of reprimand, and had them do community service, and just told them I was not going to accept it. Well, two of them said they were not going to do that. And I said, "Goodbye."

For novel problems, coaches were creative in administering punishment and clear about connecting the punishments to their team cultures. The volleyball players in one program had to pick up 100 pieces of trash at five a.m. after demonstrating a "lack of responsibility" by leaving a film room full of litter. Women's basketball coach O, who was dismayed with his team's lack of fitness and toughness, subjected them to the following scenario to improve value adherence:

> We are seeing each other at 6 a.m., and we are out on the track and running. To them it was punishment. To me it was we are going to get tougher. We are going to get in better shape and be able to run hard. We got on the floor and they had to dive—two people at a time had to go for the ball. …there was also a good chance that if we survive it, we were going to dive for more loose balls. Then we drew charges at full speed. You stand there and the whole team runs you over one at a time. We did these things, and all of the sudden our mindset changed…our focus changed.

Not only did such punishments lead to culturally appropriate behavior, but they also lingered as cultural myths that were passed down between classes of players. After coaches had used a punishment once or twice, just its threat could rectify many issues. Softball coach X's team lied to her about going to a party, so she required them to roll 200 yards on the football field in five minutes, causing some to vomit. As she noted, the punishment became legendary.

> But it got out and we never had to do it again. And with the freshman now all I have to say is, "guys if this blows up, this could be a rolling day." "Oh no, not that!!" And you know it worked well.… I'm telling you, only four players on [this year's] team did that, yet they're all, "I don't want to do anything like that."

Rewards are a critical element of cultural change because they provide the motivation necessary to create it. Extrinsic rewards create the initial change momentum, but symbolic rewards appeal to athletes' intrinsic motives (Sathe & Davidson, 2000). Each coach rewarded in his/her own way, but extrinsic (e.g., scholarships) and symbolic (e.g., stickers) rewards were both evident. In addition, coaches used visible rewards that were clearly connected to cultural values. These were beneficial because they conveyed the importance of values to insiders and provided cultural signals to outsiders as well (Sathe & Davidson). Although some research frowns upon the use of punishment in culture change (Sathe & Davidson), it was more common than the use of rewards. Coaches seemed to understand that punishments were not only quick tools for changing behavior, they could also become part of the team's cultural lore (Sathe & Davidson; Schein, 2004). In sum, coaches used rewards and punishment in ways that were consistent with cultural assumptions, which is a major key for rapid cultural change (Sathe & Davidson; Schein).

Environment

Values, teaching, recruiting and rewards/punishments were the core of team culture change. However, each head coach carried out this process with a clear recognition of his or her distinct environment. Environmental factors emerged through the institutional culture, available resources, and administration. These environmental influences were not mutually exclusive and often converged to shape a leader's cultural change efforts.

The element of the environment that most influenced culture change was the culture of the institution. Many institutional aspects impeded and assisted culture change efforts; often the same element did both. For example, the athletic tradition of a university was an important environmental element for which coaches needed to account. Those with great traditions garnered significant media attention and had superb fan support. Coaches found that athletes were attracted to their schools for these attributes, and capitalized on them.

> I mean people will ask us, "How did you get [a top recruit]?" We brought her in here with [a full capacity football crowd] there and she went up to the press box, and she just fell in love with it. I mean everybody in [our state] is involved with softball. It's not like that at a lot of big schools. It's just a very athletic environment. ...Everybody, I mean they are die-hard fans, and we are big news. Our kids are on talk shows. (Softball coach Z)

While such factors heightened the program excitement, they often added pressure to athletes and coaches. After his first successful season, men's basketball coach M commented, "the next year, they had to start dealing with expectations, and that's a *whole* other level."

Similarly, a university's location and reputation were often big selling points. Some institutions were in scenic locales, others had stellar academic reputations, and a few had great social reputations. However, once recruits enrolled, some of those same factors became burdensome. The academic rigors could drain athletes, and the academic calendar wreaked havoc on three teams whose universities followed the quarter system. Softball coach Y said the social life at her school was a cultural hurdle:

> ...the culture of our school is a detriment. It really is a big party school where it is cool to be a follower and have a good time. Some of the other coaches talked about that when I first came here, but I was surprised how many athletes are more concerned about that than being good at their sport. Social life helps at most places, but not here. It's too much.

The availability of fiscal resources was certainly linked to an institution's culture. In some ways resource availability had a meaningful effect on team culture change, yet in other ways, resources merely influenced the *manner* in which culture was changed. For example, many coaches held pre-season retreats. Some programs worked on "team-building stuff" at world famous resorts or posh wilderness lodges. Those with less fiscal means accomplished

the same thing at a nearby campground or at local tourist areas. Teams with large budgets traveled lavishly across the country for games. One coach indicated that his team flew to every game, ate meals at high-end restaurants, and when, "we went to Vegas last week, we stayed in the MGM Grand which was a couple thousand a night." At the other end of the spectrum, another coach took part in this study at a Holiday Inn Express and met her team at Subway after the interview.

Resource differences provided real advantages in staffing and recruiting. Teams with more money could hire larger staffs to carry out the various facets of running a team, and consistently reinforce even minor program values. Wealthy programs had class checkers, academic counselors, sport psychologists, video coordinators, and development officers. Some poorer programs had very little help to perform a wide variety of duties.

> …I'm the only coach in the [conference] that doesn't have a full time assistant. Both of our assistants make $7500 a year, so they both have full-time jobs on the side. So, my administrative load, the day-to-day operations, the recruiting emails, the video, all of it falls on my shoulders. That prevents me from really diving into the details that I'd really like to get into. The day-to-day very detailed practice organization, I don't get to. (Men's volleyball coach)

Recruiting could be more extensive for well-funded coaches and staffs. Football coach A "saturated [his] area with eight coaches," to ensure that he was keeping the best local talent. Softball coach Z was able to "buy a $1200 ticket in two days" to watch a top recruit play, "two *basketball* games" (emphasis added). Poorer programs were forced to geographically limit recruiting efforts, and in three cases coaches did not even have the full allotment of scholarships to offer prospective recruits. Softball coach Y explained:

> We had a budget crunch one year and the one thing my athletic director cut was scholarship money. I went from almost fully funded (12) to 10. And those are in-state scholarships. I can't even look at a kid outside of [the state]. Getting resources to do the job here is…the administration makes it difficult to do everything we want to do.

Although administration was an environmental barrier above, in most cases, administrative support was helpful for team culture change. Many coaches said their administrators supported their programs with larger budgets, new coaching positions, and in four cases, new facilities. However, three coaches noted that such support was dependent upon success. One explained what his athletic director told him during the interview:

> …we're going to give you five years. If you are not in the top-ten, we're going to get a new coach. That is kind of interesting, but that is the approach they take. I like that. I like the challenge….I liked the fact that they were going to give us everything we needed to win, and then it was up to us. (Softball coach Z)

Less extravagant means of administrative support were also helpful to coaches. One coach asked his athletic director, a former coach, to scout his team for weaknesses. Another athletic director helped football coach B use his budget differently to overcome pre-season training barriers created by the late-starting quarter. Men's basketball coach M said:

> I've found that you need to have your athletic director on board with you and the president of your school. I think they can provide support that doesn't cost money. …They can help get a kid into school that you know is a good kid, but doesn't have the grades or the test scores. Or scheduling—ADs can help schedule games that improve your standing and reputation."

In sum, there appeared to be two different environmental effects on team culture change. Some environments seemed to create an aura that heightened the importance of a team's culture. In those environments, the coaches did not have to spend as much time helping athletes understand the importance of the adhering to the program's core values. The environment rewarded those values. Environments lacking resources required coaches to spend much more of their time defining, teaching, and recruiting for their core values. In such cases, the environment did not help them and occasionally diminished the importance of core values.

By accounting for their environments when changing team culture, these coaches led consistent with the organizational culture perspective (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Furthermore, this environment may account for the ability of coaches to change culture rapidly. Schein (1992) contends that complete culture, "changes require anywhere from five to fifteen or more years" (p. 317). But in this study, most coaches felt their cultures were changed by at least the third year.

This accelerated ability to change culture may be due to the unique nature and structure of the intercollegiate athletic environment (Beyer & Hannah, 2000; Eitzen & Sage, 2003). First, intercollegiate athletes are only granted four years of eligibility (Eitzen, 2003). Thus, the turn-over rate of athletes is much more rapid than turnover in other organizations. This enables coaches to use personnel changes to alter team values much quicker than typical business managers. Second, college coaches have tremendous amounts of contact with their athletes. Eitzen contends that athletes' lives are essentially centered around their teams and coaches. During the season, athletes are meeting, traveling, eating, training, and playing under the direction of their coaches for at least 20 hours per week. This gives coaches an unparalleled opportunity to inculcate athletes with team values. Third, teams are given more media attention than other types of organizations (Eitzen & Sage). As a result, athletes have a public stage to demonstrate team values and can garner significant praise and extrinsic rewards for doing so. When these rewards are consistent with a culture's values, the climate for culture change is ripe.

Conclusions

The results of the study offer exciting possibilities for coaches. While none of the tactics emerging from the study were singularly innovative, the manner in which coaches put them together can be transformative for a team. This study highlights the need for coaches to clearly establish the direction and values of their teams. By subsequently orienting *all* organizational actions and symbols toward those values, coaches can change culture. If coaches *consistently* connect their actions to team values, such change can occur rapidly. Culture change may also lead to team success when carried out in concert with the environment. It is important to note that drastic increases in resources were not required to achieve changes in culture. By simply reframing the meaning of team membership, the coaches in this study created championship-level teams in less than five years.

While these results provide another tool for coaches pursuing success, the results are tempered by three limitations. First, this study only gathered perspectives from the head coaches. Players and assistant coaches were not interviewed. Second, the study did not track the cultural changes longitudinally. It was unclear if basic assumptions, the deepest levels of culture, were reached, although espoused values clearly emerged. Third, these coaches all worked at the NCAA Division I level. These tactics may not work at the high school, professional, or even other levels of intercollegiate competition. Future research could enhance the literature on team culture change by performing long term case studies, broadening samples, and completing such studies at a variety of competitive levels.

The results of this study should not be interpreted as a recipe for team culture change. However, team culture change seems to be a fundamental premise for quick turnarounds, and these results offer coaches useful means for achieving such change. The study also opens a new vein of research on coaching. Little research acknowledges the symbolic and interpretive elements of coaching, and the preceding results suggest they might be worthwhile topics. While there is debate about the culture-performance link in larger organizations, the evidence in this study hints at a positive relationship in sport. The veracity and context of this relationship would be aided by more research on team culture. Such research may even be vital given the increasing pressures of coaching intercollegiate athletic teams.

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Appendix

Head Coach Interview Guide for Team Culture Change

When you came into this position what philosophy/vision did you sell to your team?

How did you sell your players on it early in your tenure?

What resistance arose? From whom? In what forms?

How did you overcome that?

Has that philosophy/vision stuck? How do you know it has stuck?

Have you modified it in any ways? How?

What strategies or actions do you use get them to buy in now?

> In Practice?

> Out of Practice?

> In and around competition?

What if they don't buy in?

How does the culture you've set up affect recruiting? What do you look for besides talent?

Similarly how does the culture/vision influence who you hire as assistants? Qualities?

Are there things you do outside of your team that contribute to the team's culture?

What are the biggest challenges in maintaining the successful culture that you have created?

Is there anything I have not covered that enables you to achieve your vision?