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Politics and Pigskins

Leader Political Support and Doug Williams's Termination from Grambling State University

B. Parker Ellen III

Abstract

Management research long has benefitted from the examination of sport teams and organizations to inform its theories. Similarly, sport management research can benefit from the investigation of business organization research concepts. In the present study, a narrative case study approach is taken to review Doug Williams's second tenure as Grambling State University's head football coach. Archival data (i.e., media reports, university communications, and court documents) indicated that Grambling University was an environment ripe for political behavior. Further, the data reveal that Williams's social capital and political will led to his demonstration of political support for his players, and that this behavior created loyalty and commitment from Williams's followers (i.e., his players), but simultaneously generated anger and resentment among his superiors (i.e., the university president and athletic director), and resulted in Williams's termination. Thus, the presently reviewed case indicates politics is a viable area of future exploration for in sport organization research.

Keywords: *organizational politics, political behavior, case study*

B. Parker Ellen III is an assistant professor of organizational behavior and leadership in the D'Amore-McKim School of Business at Northeastern University.

Please send correspondence to p.ellen@northeastern.edu

Introduction

Sports and industry organizations share a number of similar features. Fundamentally, both consist of a collective of individuals who routinely interact with one another in the execution of tasks as they pursue individual and group goals. As a result of this similarity, sports data often have been used to inform management theory (Day, Gordon, & Fink, 2012). Similarly, there is much from the management research literature that can be used to inform knowledge regarding sports organizations. For example, Anderson and Birrer (2011) used the resource-based view of the firm (Barney, 1991) to describe how sport organizations can develop and sustain competitive advantage, and Czekanski and Turner (2014) used social exchange theory to examine the effects of coach-player relationship quality on player performance. Because of their pervasiveness within organizations, politics and political behavior, long-standing areas of management inquiry (Ferris & Treadway, 2012), represent another interesting possibility of application to sport organizations.

Politics and political behavior encompass the methods of influence within organizations (Pfeffer, 1981), and their prevalence within organizations is evident by the five century-long discussions of the phenomena among philosophers (e.g., Plato, Aristotle, and Machiavelli), academic researchers, and practitioners (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). Further, politics has been noted as a part of the social fabric of organizations (Burns, 1961), and a method for resolving conflict in organizations (Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Pfeffer, 1981; 1992). In fact, Burns (1961) argued that political behavior was a means of survival within organizations, and Mintzberg (1983) argued that managerial success was dependent upon requisite levels of political skill (the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005, p. 127) and political will ("the motivation to engage in strategic, goal directed behavior that advances the personal agenda and objectives of the actor that inherently involves the risk of relational or reputational capital"; Treadway, 2012, p. 533). Thus, politics and political behavior are a fact of organizational life (Ferris & Treadway, 2012; McAllister, Ellen, & Ferris, 2016), regardless of organization type.

Historically, politics and political behavior have been described as value-neutral features of organizations (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). However, because most definitions have included terms like "self-interest" (e.g., Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick, & Mayes, 1979; Kacmar & Baron, 1999), researchers and practitioners alike have chosen to describe its outcomes in pejorative terms. As a result, decades of management research on organizational politics have focused largely on its negative consequences (Ferris & Treadway, 2012). However, politics and political behavior are neither inherently good nor evil. Rather, they represent the use of power within organizations, which can be employed to achieve positive

or negative outcomes (Pfeffer, 1992), the determination of which often is due to individual actors' perceptions (Gandz & Murray, 1980).

Regarding its negative consequences, scholars have argued, and evidence has shown, that individuals' perceptions of organizational politics can lead to increased tension and decreased job satisfaction (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989; Hochwarter, Ellen, & Ferris, 2014), which have negative effects on job performance (Chang, Rosen, & Levy, 2009). Conversely, some scholars have argued that organizational politics also has positive effects. For example, Kumar and Ghadially (1989) suggested that politics could facilitate goal attainment and promotion. Similarly, Ferris et al. (1989) argued that one response to perceptions of organizational politics could be increased effort, as an attempt to "out-perform" the political environment. Further, a number of scholars (e.g., Ellen, 2014; Hochwarter, 2012; Kacmar & Baron, 1999) have noted that political behavior could be employed as a means to restore justice within the organizational environment.

Recently, scholars (e.g., Hochwarter, 2012) have called for increased research attention on the positive aspects of political behavior, including a more balanced approach to political leadership (Bass & Bass, 2008). One proposed avenue for research in this area has been the leader political support construct (Ellen, 2014; Ellen, Ferris, & Buckley, 2013), which captures leaders' use of politics and political behavior for followers' benefit. Although leader political support has been argued to generate positive outcomes (e.g., enhanced leader reputation and commitment to the leader; Ellen et al., 2013), Ellen (2014) noted that leaders' display of political support might simultaneously lead to negative outcomes (e.g., decreased reputation among peers).

Ferris and Treadway (2012) argued that politics research could benefit from more qualitative approaches that add to the robustness of our understanding of the phenomena. Thus, the purpose of the present research is to employ elements of a descriptive case study methodology (Yin, 2003) to examine the political elements surrounding the 2013 firing of Doug Williams as Grambling State University's head football coach. More specifically, archival records (i.e., media reports, university communications, and court documents) were reviewed for evidence of relevant variables from the leader political support theoretical framework (i.e., Ellen et al., 2013).

These data indicated that a political environment, leader political will, and leader social capital enabled Coach Doug Williams (i.e., the leader) to exhibit leader political support (i.e., the use of political means to provide necessary resources for followers; Ellen, 2014). Further, the data revealed that Williams's demonstration of political support created loyalty and commitment from Williams's followers (i.e., his players), but simultaneously generated anger and resentment among his superiors (i.e., the university president and athletic director). Ultimately, the demonstration of political support led to Williams's termination, as evidenced in the university's statement that the dismissal had nothing to do with the performance of the football team (ESPN, 2013b).

By following the events of a single case, the present study contributes to sport management research by demonstrating how concepts from management research can inform investigations of sport organizations. Further, the present study contributes to the organizational politics literature by highlighting some of the causal links not as readily apparent in the cross-sectional examinations that typify research on politics and political behavior. The section that follows provides an overview of the leader political support construct (Ellen, 2014; Ellen et al., 2013), and introduces a conceptual model that outlines the relationships between the variables identified in the qualitative review. Then, the remaining sections describe each element of the conceptual model, as well as the evidence of the concepts as apparent from a review of the archival data. Finally, the present article closes with some implications for sport management research, and some possible directions for future inquiry.

Leader Political Support

Leader political support is defined as “leaders’ tactical or strategic use of power or influence to provide for, advocate for, or otherwise aid followers by attempting to alter the distribution of advantages within the organization in followers’ favor” (Ellen, 2014, p. 893). The essence of the construct is derived from prior arguments by organization theorists, which state that a fundamental role of leaders is to provide for followers, but that formal, organizationally specified means for doing so are not always available (Mintzberg, 1983). That is, organizational policies do not always allow for, and sometimes may even prevent, leaders from providing followers with the support and resources necessary to meet individual and organizational goals (Ellen 2014; Ellen et al., 2013). Thus, where formal requests and adherence to organizational policies fail, leaders may use their personal power and influence to “work around” the bureaucracy. This may include engaging in a number of political acts, including exchanging favors, forming coalitions, and other activities not officially sanctioned by the organization (Lepisto & Pratt, 2012).

References to resource provision undoubtedly connote leaders’ acquisition and distribution of physical assets (e.g., supplies and other materials deemed necessary for role performance) to followers. However, it is important to acknowledge that theory on leader political support includes a variety of resource types, including the provision of opportunities for career advancement and personal development (Ellen, 2014; Ellen et al., 2013). For example, leaders may use their political sway to have followers staffed to projects that enable them to develop new skill sets, facilitating their professional growth. Further, leaders may use their influence to have followers assigned to special committees where they will interface with powerful members of the organization, which can enable them to build their own networks and gain exposure to those who make promotion, bonus, and other reward decisions (Ellen et al., 2013). In the context of sport organizations, this may take the form of a coach or manager using their personal power to designate

a player as an official representative of the team, whereby they could interact with a number of influential others related to the team.

Social Capital Theory

Ellen et al. (2013) argued that leaders' provision of political support for followers is based on their ability to leverage accumulated social capital, which is defined as "the goodwill available to individuals or groups" (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 23). Burt (1992) noted that social capital is a useful way to capture the nature of informal relationships. Because the effects of social capital are information and influence (Adler & Kwon, 2002), these informal relationships, which provide a "more varied flow of resources" (Hunt & Osborn, 1980, p. 57), have been included in discussions of leaders and organizational politics (Ellen et al., 2013). Social capital can be considered a substitute or complement to a leader's human capital (Brass, 2001), as it can be used for purposes outside the relationships' original purposes (e.g., non-work friendships could be used for work-related resources) (Coleman, 1988). Thus, leader political support represents leaders using their social capital to generate benefit for followers.

Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) is one of the most used theories in organizational behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). It argues that individuals embedded in relationships feel indebtedness when they benefit from an act by others. Those receiving benefit feel compelled to reciprocate, in efforts to establish balance in the relationship (Blau, 1964; Greenberg, 1980). Given this groundwork for "trading favors," it is not surprising that scholars have argued social exchange theory is relevant to studies of organizational politics (Hochwarter, 2012; Ellen et al., 2013), which largely deals with the acquisition and distribution of resources (Farrel & Peterson, 1982). Thus, Ellen et al. (2013) used social exchange theory as the explanatory mechanism for leader political support's outcomes, arguing that leaders' use of influence to benefit followers will generate feelings of indebtedness (Greenberg, 1980), leading followers to respond in kind (e.g., increased commitment to the leader, heightened effort and performance, etc.).

The Present Study

Ellen et al. (2013) presented a theoretical framework that specified relationships between leader political support and a number of antecedent, consequence, and moderating constructs. Drawing on this framework, as well as related politics literature, a conceptual model was developed to guide the narrative case study of Doug Williams's termination from Grambling State University. The conceptual model is presented in Figure 1, and the elements and relationships will be discussed in detail in the sections that follow. In brief, the model suggests that the atmosphere surrounding the Grambling State University football team was political. Further, the model suggests that, within this political environment, Williams had

the political will to leverage his social capital to provide political support for his followers, and that this provision of political support led to benefit in the form of increased follower commitment. However, the model also suggests that Williams's lack of political skill simultaneously led to detriment in the form of resentment (and ultimately, retaliation) from university administrators.

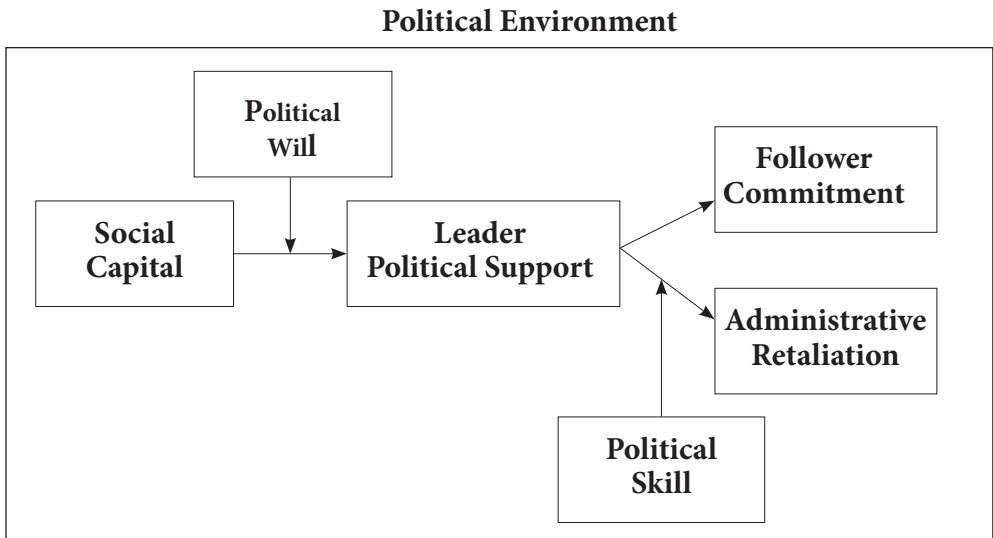


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

A case study is an appropriate method when attempting to learn something from a single organization or situation (Yin, 2003), and a number of case studies have been performed on sport organizations (e.g., Anderson & Birrer, 2011; Kerwin, MacLean, & Bell-Laroche, 2014; Mondello & Kamke, 2014). In the current case, the media coverage of Grambling State's termination of Doug Williams as head football coach included mentions of ongoing internal conflict between Williams and the administration, but continued support from his players, including a walk out, following his termination. This conflict indicated that organizational politics were prominent, which made this an appropriate case study to investigate the impact of politics in sports organizations.

A qualitative approach to this case study was taken, and archival data (media reports, university communications, and court documents) collected to review for elements of organizational politics and political behavior. New articles covering the termination and subsequent player walkout were located using the following search terms: "Doug Williams fired," "Doug Williams terminated," and "Grambling State football walkout." Additionally, given the information gleaned from the initial article reviews, the search terms were expanded to include "Doug Williams

hired,” “Doug Williams contract,” and “Doug Williams lawsuit.” Further, other articles referenced in the initial set of articles were collected and reviewed (e.g., university correspondence and court documents). Articles and referenced documents were included until a saturation point was reached and no new information about the termination was being revealed.

Political Elements of the Doug Williams Case

Grambling State University: A Political Environment

Organizations are rife with political behavior (McAllister et al., 2015), such that they have been described as “political arenas” (Mintzberg, 1983). Much of the early research in this area focused on individuals’ perceptions of organizational politics: that is, “the factors that contribute to employees perceiving a work environment as political in nature” (Ferris & Kacmar, 1992, p. 93). Not surprisingly, the belief that others are behaving politically is a major contributor to individuals’ perceptions of organizational politics. However, these perceptions also are formed by individuals’ interpretations of interactions with others and with the organization, as they attempt to make sense of the events they experience (Ferris et al., 1989). More recent work has linked perceptions of organizational politics with subsequent political behavior (Ferris, Harrell-Cook, & Dulebohn, 2000; Ferris, Adams, Kolodinsky, Hochwarter, & Ammeter, 2002), using work by Lewin (1936), among others, who argue that individuals behave based on their subjective interpretations of their environments.

Often, these perceptions of organizational politics are based on attributions that others in the organization are acting in their own self-interest. That is, individuals assign the actions of others the label of “political” based on their attributions of the actors’ intent (Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor, & Judge, 1995). Thus, consistent with Lewin’s (1936) arguments, the individuals within organizations deem acts to be political not based on the nature of the act itself, but rather based on their perceptions and interpretations of the motives of others (Ferris et al., 1995). More specifically, when individuals attribute self-interested and manipulative intentions to others’ actions, they tend to label those actions as political (Ferris et al., 1995).

Evidence of this attributional process is apparent in Williams’s contract dispute with Grambling State University, which arose approximately 18 months prior to his termination. A review of court documents (i.e., *Williams v. Pogue, Grambling State University et al.*, 2012) indicated that Williams assigned manipulative intentions to Grambling State University President Frank Pogue’s actions during contract negotiations. Specifically, Williams’s lawsuit against Pogue and the university claimed that Pogue engaged in intentional “bait and switch” tactics by luring Williams to Grambling State with the promise of a generous contract, despite having no intention of forwarding the contract to the university’s board of directors for approval (Schneider, 2012; *Williams v. Pogue, Grambling State University et al.*, 2012). Instead, Williams stated, Pogue “engaged in a pattern of such deceptive

practices...” and attempted to renegotiate Williams’s contract with less favorable (i.e., for Williams) terms.

Further, Williams’s account of the contract renegotiations noted Pogue engaged in a number of political behaviors scholars have labeled as egregious (Farrell & Peterson, 1982). Specifically, Williams claimed Pogue attempted to use emotional pressure (Farrell & Peterson, 1982) to force Williams to sign a contract with a reduced salary, no bonuses, and other burdensome provisions (Associated Press, 2012). Further, Williams insisted Pogue presented this contract as “take it or leave it” (Associated Press, 2012; Schneider, 2012), which could be interpreted as a threat - another egregious political tactic (Farrell & Peterson, 1982).

Finally, Williams accused Pogue of failing to adequately communicate the status of the contract’s actual approval by the board of directors, which mirrors Farrell and Peterson’s (1982) description of intentionally withholding or manipulating information from others to maintain an advantage. Although the lawsuit was settled, and a contract ultimately was successfully renegotiated, signed, and approved by the Grambling State University board (Staff Report, 2012), it is evident from the above-cited interactions that Williams interpreted Pogue’s behavior as self-interested and manipulative. Thus, it appears Williams perceived the environment at Grambling State University to be highly political.

Although theory and research have established that individuals’ subjective interpretations of others’ actions can lead to perceptions of organizational politics (Ferris et al., 1995; Ferris et al., 2002), objective characteristics also can play a role in the formulation of politics perceptions (Ferris et al., 1989), and subsequently influence individual responses (Porter, 1976). For example, ambiguity and uncertainty, especially as it pertains to resource dependency and scarcity within organizations, has been noted as a precursor to perceptions of organizational politics and political behavior among organizational actors (Ferris, Fedor, Chachere, & Pondy, 1989; Ferris et al., 2000; Porter et al., 1981). Thus, it is important to note that, in addition to Williams’s political description of Pogue’s behavior, there also was objective evidence of organizational uncertainty that would indicate Grambling State University was an environment ripe for political behavior.

More specifically, Grambling State University, as part of the University System of Louisiana, was under financial duress, as evident by \$5 million in proposed cuts to its budget in 2009, \$3.5 million in proposed cuts in 2010, \$3.9 million in proposed cuts in 2011, and proposed mid-year cuts of \$943,729 in 2012 (Cosentino, 2013; Grambling State University, 2011; Monroe, 2012). Reports indicate that, in total, the university funding was cut 57% between 2007 and 2013 (Keown, 2013). In addition to hiring freezes and furloughs across university departments, athletics eliminated the men’s golf and tennis programs, as well as the women’s golf program (KSLA.com, 2010). Thus, in addition to likelihood that Williams perceived Grambling State as a political environment, it is evident that resources were scarce within the organization, creating an environment conducive for political behavior.

Doug Williams's Social Capital

The framework outlined in Figure 1 suggests that, within political environments, leaders leverage their social capital to provide support for their followers through political acts. As established in the preceding section, the environment at Grambling State University demonstrated elements of organizational politics and political behavior. Thus, the focus of the current section is to investigate Williams's available social capital.

Social capital has been described as the accumulated goodwill available to individuals as a result of their network of relationships (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Although these networks may include formal contacts based on organizational position, they also include social relationships that cross formal boundaries, both inside and outside the organization (Wei, Chiang, & Wu, 2012). Further, social capital has been described as a long-lived asset (Adler & Kwon, 2002), in that it is accumulated and stored, such that it can be "cashed in" at a later date. Thus, Coleman (1988) referred to social capital as analogous to "credit slips" that individuals can trade for resources, information, and other benefits that facilitate goal attainment (Adler & Kwon, 2002).

A hallmark of those with social capital is their access to powerful and well connected others (Ammeter, Douglas, Gardner, Hochwarter, & Ferris, 2002), such that they maintain an advantageous position within resource flows (Brass, 1984). Accordingly, Ellen et al. (2013) argued that leaders with social capital will have more "credit slips" available to exchange for valuable resources and opportunities to their followers. A review of Williams's connections indicates that he was well positioned within resource networks. That is, Williams had available social capital that he could leverage, through political acts, to provide for his followers (i.e., the Grambling State University football players).

Doug Williams's social capital is evident from his degree of embeddedness in the Grambling State University community. First, Williams was a well-known Grambling State alum. During his tenure as star quarterback during the 1970s, Williams led the football team to a 35-5 record and four consecutive Southwestern Athletic Conference Championships (Burton, 2011; Nance, 2013). Second, after a successful career in the National Football League (NFL), which included a Super Bowl victory, and a few assistant coaching positions, Williams returned to Grambling State as head football coach in 1998. During his five-year tenure, his teams won another three consecutive conference titles (Associated Press, 2012). As a result, Williams was considered a school icon (Keown, 2013), and was a member of Grambling Legends, a group of prominent athletics alumni (Sheinin, 2013), including a number of College Football Hall of Fame members.

Williams was well connected beyond college athletics, as well. After stepping down as Grambling's head coach in 2003, he served as a personnel executive (2004-2008) and Coordinator of Pro Scouting (2009-2010) for the NFL's Tampa Bay Buccaneers, and as General Manager of the United Football League's Virginia

Destroyers (2010–2011). Additionally, he was in negotiations for an executive position with the NFL's Washington Redskins of the National Football League when Grambling State University began recruiting him to return for another stint as head coach (Sheinin, 2013). Clearly, Williams was well connected to powerful individuals within the football industry, in addition to being respected within the Grambling community (Sheinin, 2013). Thus, there is evidence that Williams had ample social capital on which he could draw to provide support for his followers.

Doug Williams's Political Will

In addition to the opportunity to provide political support (i.e., being in a political environment), Ellen et al. (2013) argued that leaders must possess the motivation to behave politically. Mintzberg (1983) referred to this as political will, which Treadway (2012, p. 533) has defined as "the motivation to engage in strategic, goal-directed behavior that advances the personal objectives of the actor that inherently involves the risk of relational or reputational capital." Although the definition of political will addresses personal objectives (Treadway, 2012), and research suggests that leaders provide political support in efforts to benefit followers (e.g., Ellen, 2014; Hochwarter, 2012; Kane-Frieder, Hochwarter, Hampton, & Ferris, 2014), Ellen et al. (2013) argued that facilitating followers' goal achievement also is in leaders' best interest. Thus, leaders can exhibit political support and still be exercising political will. Further, leader self-interest and follower-interest often are not mutually exclusive, which certainly is the case for a football coach and his players.

A review of the history between Williams and Grambling State University President Frank Pogue, as well as Williams's comments following his termination, indicates that Williams understood the potential ramifications of his actions, and yet still chose to engage in political behavior to support his followers. More specifically, it is clear from the lawsuit between the two over the contract that Williams believed Pogue would act in his own best interest, at Williams's expense. Additionally, several sources have described Pogue exercising power over Williams, including removing the reserved parking space signs Williams had installed at the athletic complex for him and his assistant coaches (Sheinin, 2013). Further, in interviews following his dismissal from Grambling State, Williams declared, "He's the president and he has the power" (*USA Today*, 2013).

Finally, Williams claimed that Pogue had circulated a letter officially distancing the university from any affiliation with the Grambling Legends alumni group (Sheinin, 2013). Thus, it is evident that Williams understood Pogue would exercise power to thwart him if Pogue disagreed or disapproved of Williams's actions. Despite this, Williams still chose to behave politically in efforts to support his followers, and this willingness to risk his reputational and social capital is indicative of someone with political will (Treadway, 2012).

Doug Williams's Political Support

If leaders want to succeed, “they have to play politics at least part of the time” (Buchanan, 2008, p. 57). Further, because leader and follower goals often are aligned, one way for leaders to use political behavior in pursuit of goal attainment is to use power and influence to provide support for their followers (Ellen, 2014; Ellen et al., 2013). Thus, as indicated in the conceptual model outlined in Figure 1, politically willed leaders are likely to leverage their accumulated social capital, through political means, to support followers.

During Williams's tenure as Grambling State University's head football coach, he undoubtedly did, and attempted to do, much to provide for the players (i.e., his followers). Additionally, it is possible that many of Williams's actions could have been political in nature. However, the current focus is on the act that received the most attention in the wake of his termination from Grambling State. More specifically, a review of the reports regarding his termination indicates that one particular action immediately preceding his termination can be classified both as political, and as in direct support of his followers.

Multiple sources have documented the poor conditions of the athletic complex, including the dilapidated flooring in the weight room, which was considered a potential safety hazard for players (e.g., Associated Press, 2013b; Freedman, 2013). The documented state of funding cuts for Grambling State, including athletics, suggests that funding for repairs and upgrades likely was not going to come from within the university. Thus, Williams raised money (reportedly between \$11,000 and \$32,000) through one (i.e., the Grambling Legends) and possibly a second (i.e., Friends of Football) alumni group to fund replacement flooring (Freedman, 2013; Sheinin, 2013). This act clearly was for the benefit of his followers, as it directly impacted the well-being and potentially performance of the Grambling State football players. Further, the act is considered political in that it was outside of Grambling State University protocol, as private donations were to be routed through the university foundation. Instead, Williams raised the funds and purchased the new flooring outside the university-specified process (Freedman, 2013; Sheinin, 2013).

Mixed Reactions to Williams's Political Behavior

Ellen et al. (2013) used social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to argue the potential beneficial outcomes of leader political support. However, subsequent research (i.e., Ellen, 2014; Ellen et al., forthcoming) has suggested that there might be both positive and negative consequences associated with leader political support. A review of the divergent responses to Williams' political act supports this updated view.

Follower commitment. Ellen (2014) and colleagues (2013) argued that followers benefitting from acts of leader political support would feel indebted to the leader, such that, acts of leader political support would be correlated with follower commitment to the leader. Commitment refers to a form of psychological

attachment or dedication (Colquitt, LePine, & Wesson, 2012), and manifests from a bond developed between parties that experience mutual benefit (Blau, 1964). In the aftermath of Williams's termination, the Grambling State football players formed a united coalition and boycotted further participation in football activities, which led to a week of missed practice and the forfeiture of one game (ESPN.com news services, 2013b; Associated Press, 2013b). Although a letter from the players outlined a number of concerns, sources indicated that the termination of their leader was a major contributor to their decision to protest (Keown, 2013). Further, a year removed from the resolution of the protest, "a veteran group with more than two dozen seniors" believed "that these should still be Williams's Tigers" (Schroeder, 2014). Thus, it is evident that Williams's political support of his followers contributed to their commitment to him.

Administrative retaliation. In contrast to the commitment displayed by Williams's followers, the university moved to sever their ties with him. University administrators had the replacement flooring locked away (Keown, 2013) because the funds used to purchase it were not routed through the foundation (Huguenin, 2013), and Williams was fired within a week (ESPN news services, 2013b). Williams believed his procurement of funds through alumni groups led to his firing (Huguenin, 2013), and stated, "I think the firing was more about trying to embarrass me, or to try to make me understand who's king" (Sheinin, 2013). However, the most compelling evidence that Williams's dismissal was related to his political behavior was an official statement from the university, during which spokesman Bob Sutton said Williams's dismissal was not related to his "wins or losses, or X's and O's. Not at all." (ESPN news services, 2013b).

Doug Williams's Lack of Political Skill

Adler and Kwon (2002) argued that individuals' ability is essential to the translation of social capital into benefit. In the context of political support, Ellen and colleagues (2013) have argued that political skill represents that ability, basing their arguments on Mintzberg's (1983, p. 26) comment that political skill was a necessary characteristic to "convince those to whom one has access." Over the past several decades, political skill, defined as "the ability to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005, p. 127), has been investigated increasingly within the management literature.

Political skill consists of four sub-dimensions: networking ability, social astuteness, interpersonal influence, and apparent sincerity (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). Networking ability represents individuals' savvy at identifying and developing relationships with a diverse and powerful collection of individuals that can provide valuable resources to facilitate success (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). Social astuteness captures individuals' ability to observe and understand social situ-

ations, including the ability to deal well with others (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). Interpersonal influence references individuals' subtle and convincing style, as well as their ability to carefully calibrate behavior to best fit the situation (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005). Finally, apparent sincerity enables politically skilled individuals to appear genuine and sincere when they attempt to influence others, as it helps them hide any ulterior motives (Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005).

In combination, the dimensions provide politically skilled individuals with the ability to effectively understand others at work, and influence them in ways that enhance personal and/or organizational objectives (Ferris et al., 2007). In addition to its direct effects on performance (Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015), theory and research have argued for (e.g., Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005; Ferris, Treadway, Brouer, & Munyon, 2012) and supported (e.g., Treadway, Ferris, Duke, Adams, & Thatcher, 2007; Wihler, Blickle, Ellen, Hochwarter, & Ferris, *in press*) the moderating effects of political skill. For example, evidence indicates that political skill moderates the relationship between political behavior and others' perceptions of the political actor. More specifically, Treadway et al. (2007) found that politically skilled subordinates were able to engage in ingratiation (i.e., a political behavior) without supervisors labeling the behavior as political. This effect is driven by politically skilled individuals' ability to select behaviors that are appropriate for the situation, and to execute these behaviors in a sincere and genuine manner (Ferris et al., 2007; Ferris et al., 2012).

Although much of the theory and research on political skill relates to the benefits afforded to those who have it, scholars have argued that the lack of political skill can be detrimental to organizational actors. Recently, Wihler et al. (*in press*) found support for these claims in their study of personal initiative in organizations. More specifically, these authors found that individuals with high interpersonal influence were able to translate high personal initiative into higher performance evaluations than their low initiative counterparts. However, those with low interpersonal influence who exhibited personal initiative actually received lower performance evaluations than their low-initiative peers. These results support arguments that individuals may have enough political skill (e.g., networking ability and/or social astuteness) to recognize opportunities, but not enough (e.g., interpersonal influence and/or apparent sincerity) to successfully capitalize on them (McAllister, Ellen, & Ferris, *in press*).

Williams was successful convincing those outside the university to provide financial support for the football program, indicating that he might have some degree of political skill – likely networking ability. However, he was not nearly as successful influencing the university administration, as evidenced by the conflict and his ultimate dismissal from Grambling State. Thus, there is some question as to whether Williams lacked the ability to effectively engage in political behavior in a manner that would have enabled him to provide for his followers without the negative repercussions from the university administration. More specifically, it seems Williams lacked the social astuteness to understand how to best handle

the Grambling State administration, as well as the interpersonal influence ability to craft his behavior in a manner that would persuade the administration.

Discussion

A stated goal of this special issue was to foster awareness of politics in sport organizations, and thus advance sport management research on the power and politics. In the preceding sections, archival descriptions of Doug Williams's second tenure as Grambling State University's head football coach were reviewed, focusing on the events that led to his termination. The results of this narrative case study approach demonstrate that sport organizations, like their business counterparts, are affected greatly by the political behavior of members. Additionally, the above sections demonstrate that organizational politics concepts from management research are applicable to sport organizations. Accordingly, the results provide both practical implications for sport organizations, as well as some interesting future directions for sport management research.

Implications for Sport Organizations

Politics are a fact of organizational life (Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989). Thus, understanding political behavior is fundamental to understanding all organizations (Vigoda-Gadot & Dryzin-Amit, 2006), including those focused on amateur and professional sports. Through the case analysis of Coach Doug Williams's tenure at Grambling State University, we can see the presence and impact of organizational politics and political behavior for individuals and groups within sport organizations. First, this case demonstrates how an environment marked by conflict over scarce resources serves as a breeding ground for political behavior. Consistent with prior arguments from the management literature (e.g., Hochwarter, 2012; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981), an examination of Williams's actions in his second tenure as Grambling State's coach demonstrates that actors within sport organizations will resort to organizationally unsanctioned means in an attempt to achieve organizationally sanctioned goals (i.e., a winning program).

More specifically, administrators of sports organizations must understand that perceptions of self-interested and manipulative behavior serve as a breeding ground for political behavior. Regardless of the objective reasons for the contract dispute upon Williams's return to Grambling State, Williams viewed Pogue as manipulative and dishonest. As a result of this perception regarding Pogue's behavior, it is not surprising that Williams and members of the Grambling Legends and Friends of Football would be skeptical that donated funds would reach their intended cause (Schroeder, 2014). Further, administrators within sport organizations need to understand that objective factors, such as ambiguity and uncertainty, as well as scarcity of and conflict over resources, also serve as catalysts for political behavior. Thus, sport organizations must be prepared for leaders to engage in "rogue" behaviors in efforts to provide for their followers and achieve their goals.

For leaders within sport organizations, a review of this case demonstrates the double-edged nature of political behavior. That is, consistent with theories of social exchange (Blau, 1964), the provision of resources through political behavior can generate a number of positive outcomes (Ellen et al., 2013), including follower commitment to the leader. However, the use of such organizationally unsanctioned means to provide those resources may come with significant personal costs (Ellen, 2014), including diminished reputation among superiors, reprimands, and possibly termination. Thus, politically willed leaders in sport organizations need to be mindful of both the risks and the rewards in play when they decide to behave politically.

Finally, leaders at all levels of sport organizations would benefit from the development and use of political skill (Ferris et al., 2007). With more political skill (i.e., the ability to accurately read social situations at work, and to select appropriate influence behaviors for the situation; Ferris, Treadway et al., 2005), perhaps Grambling President Frank Pogue could have more successfully navigated Doug Williams's contract situation. If so, he might have been able to prevent Williams from developing manipulative perceptions regarding Pogue's behavior. Similarly, with more political skill, Williams might have been better able to interact with Pogue and other Grambling State administrators, such that he could have successfully raised the funds from outside alumni groups and guaranteed their use to resolve football-related issues. Fortunately for leaders of and within sport organizations, political skill is considered developable, such that individuals can improve their interpersonal savvy (Ferris, Davidson, & Perrewé, 2005), and perhaps avoid the turmoil experienced by Pogue and Williams.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Research

Looking at a single case study enables evaluation of events as they unfold, which allows for researchers to observe the richness of the organizational context. Thus, a strength of the present study is the ability to see more clearly, although certainly not definitively, the interconnectedness of events. However, because archival data were used for the analysis, it was not possible to employ more specific and clarifying questions regarding the political elements of the case. Further, the use of a single case, while rich and informative, is subject to some degree of subjective interpretation by the researcher. Thus, sport management researchers should endeavor to explore the concepts introduced here in future research efforts.

Directions for Future Study

In terms of specific directions for future inquiry, sport management researchers have ample opportunities. For example, it would be interesting to understand more about the types of political behaviors present in sport organizations. More specifically, research has shown that individuals differ in their choice of impression management tactics (i.e., a form of political behavior) based on gender, personality, and other characteristics (Bolino & Turnley, 2003). Thus, given the male-

dominated landscape of sport management, it would be interesting to see if more aggressive tactics are prevalent in sport organizations than traditional business organizations. Further, it would be interesting to see how tactic use within sport organizations translated to individual success. Do only aggressive tactics work in sport organizations?

Sport management research also would benefit from additional research on political skill. A growing body of research in management has shown the efficacy of political skill in predicting a number of work outcomes (Munyon et al., 2015). Additionally, research has shown a link between the political skill of leaders and the objective performance of teams (Ahearn, Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, & Ammeter, 2004). Further, political skill also has been found as advantageous in a sport context (Treadway, Adams, Hanes, Perrewé, Magnusen, & Ferris, 2014). Thus, a number of interesting directions exist for sport management scholars interested in political skill. For example, do politically skilled team executives negotiate more advantageous contracts (i.e., for their sports teams)? Are politically skilled coaches more highly regarded among conference and league executives?

Conclusion

In summary, a narrative case review of the events that preceded and surrounded Doug Williams's termination from Grambling State University indicate that politics very much are a part of sport organizations. Further, a review of this case demonstrates that a number of concepts from the business management research literature (e.g., social capital, political will, leader political support, and political skill) are applicable to research in sport management. As a result, it is hoped that sport management researchers can use the present examination as inspiration to explore management-related topics—specifically, politics and political behavior—in sport organization research.

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