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Leader prototypicality in sport: The implicit leadership theories of women and men entering sport management careers

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ABSTRACT

Implicit leadership theories (ILTs) matter because they are used as the benchmark against which people determine who is a leader and who is not. This assessment informs their behavioral responses. People are thought to have a superordinate-level ILT representing their prototypical mental model of leadership and a series of basic-level ILTs. Each of these represents how people conceptualize leadership in particular domains (e.g., sport, politics, and popular culture). In this study, the authors generate the structures of basic-level sport management ILTs for women and men who are about to enter this industry. These form the baseline from which socialization to work, organizational cultures, and the sport management industry begins. The ILTs of women entering sport management careers have a 35-item, 6-factor structure (Sensitivity, Knowledgeable, Physical Attractiveness, Inspirational, Dedication, and Focused), whereas men entering the industry have a 32-item, 7-factor structure (Sensitivity, Dedication, Physical Attractiveness, Focused, Creativity, Inspirational, Courageous). The resulting sport management ILT profiles differ from superordinate ones by emphasizing physical and vitality attributes, incorporating emotional elements, and by eschewing antiprototypical elements. The paper ends with a discussion of the implications for leadership research in sport management.

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1. Introduction

Recent developments in leadership theory have shifted attention away from leader-centric theories of leadership to the mental models that people hold about leaders and leadership (Billsberry et al., 2018; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Tavares, Sobral, Goldszmidt, & Araújo, 2018). These mental models, termed implicit leadership theories (ILTs), represent people's prototypical conceptualizations of ideal leadership they use as a benchmark against which to assess the leadership credentials of the people they encounter (Foti, Hansbrough, Epitropaki, & Coyle, 2017; Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord & Shondrick, 2011; Tavares et al., 2018). Leadership categorization theory (Lord, Foti, & De Vader, 1984; Lord et al., 1982; Lord, Foti, &

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Phillips, 1982; Rosch, 1978) and connectionist perspectives (Hanges, Lord, & Dickson, 2000; Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001; Lord & Shondrick, 2011) propose that people have a superordinate prototypical ILT that contains variations for particular contexts (e.g., military, politics, finance, business, education, popular culture, and sport). These variations are important because they determine what people deem as acceptable and effective leadership in these contexts (Hanges et al., 2000; Lord et al., 1984).

Of all the contexts in which leadership is important, perhaps only the military and political ones have equal stature to sport (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Liu, Ayman, & Ayman-Nolley, 2012; Lord et al., 1984). In the sport context, the leadership of administrators, owners, managers, coaches, team captains, and players all receives considerable attention and is seen as a driver of success (Kihl, Leberman, & Schull, 2010; Peachey, Zhou, Damon, & Burton, 2015). To date, almost all analysis of leaders within sport has taken leader-centric approaches and is yet to incorporate ILT perspectives (Billsberry et al., 2018; Peachey et al., 2015). This paper addresses this gap and takes the first step in introducing ILTs into the sport context. It does so by conducting an empirical investigation surfacing the nature of prototypical ILTs in people choosing to enter the discipline who are therefore free from the influences of specific corporate cultures. This is an important contribution because it reveals the leadership lay theories of people choosing to enter the profession upon which work and organizational socialization processes operate. In addition, we provide the first quantitative analysis of ILTs by gender and show significant similarities and differences in the way men and women conceptualize leadership in this context.

2. Leadership: a new approach

To provide a theoretical grounding to our empirical study, we review ILTs and the associated theories of leadership categorization and the connectionist perspective. These theories demonstrate the crucial role that people's own theories of leadership play in shaping perceptions of leadership. As we show, while our understanding of people's overarching ILTs is forming, we know little about domain-specific ILTs such as those related to sport, which is the purpose of the empirical study reported herein. The development of this knowledge is happening at a time when there are profound changes happening in society, sport, and leadership. The world is moving from a womanless leadership history when leadership roles were mainly occupied by men and leadership defined in masculine ways (Duevel, Nashman-Smith, & Stern, 2015) towards greater representation, although progress is frustratingly slow and uneven (Berkhemer-Credaire & Sonnabend, 2018; Burton, 2015; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Scarborough, 2018). As society develops its understanding of ILTs, it is imperative ensure that the women's voice on leadership is heard and not submerged beneath the history of masculine approaches to leadership. For this reason, we conclude this review by exploring extant knowledge on gender and ILTs.

2.1. Implicit leadership theories

Although leadership has been a scholarly subject for 2000 years or more (e.g., Aristotle, Lao Tzu, Plato, Socrates, and Sun Tzu), it is only recently (i.e., the last 40 years or so) that follower-centric approaches have risen to the fore (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Grint, 1997; Hollander, 1992; Meindl, Ehrlich, & Dukerich, 1985; Meindl, 1995). Previously, leadership research focused, quite naturally, on leaders and the impact they had (Grint, 1997, 2000, 2005). The traditional leadership theories considered various aspects of the leader such as their traits and style (Blake & Mouton, 1978, 1985; Carlyle, 1840/2008; Carlyle, 1840/2008; Judge, Bono, Ilies, & Gerhardt, 2002), charisma (Antonakis, Bastardo, Jacquart, & Shamir, 2016; Harding, Lee, Ford, & Learmonth, 2011; House, 1977), ethics (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Boddy, 2015; Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005), and background (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999; Sparrowe, 2005). Interestingly, analysis of the many leadership trait studies has revealed that these studies were not capturing leadership traits *per se*, but people's perceptions of leaders' traits (Lord, de Vader, & Alliger, 1986) thereby aligning much that we know about trait theory with a follower (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Meindl, 1995; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014) or observer-centric (Billsberry et al., 2018; Searle, 1995) approach to leadership. Recent trait studies (e.g., Nichols, 2015) have openly acknowledged that they are capturing people's perceptions of traits rather than leaders' traits themselves. These perceptions are important because they change the focus of leadership research. Instead of being about 'the leader', they position leadership as being about what 'the observer' perceives and how these perceptions align with what they hope to see. In doing so, the observer's mental model of leadership becomes an important leadership theory (Billsberry & Meisel, 2009). These determine who is declared a leader and by whom, and are the cognitive schemas explaining people's reactions to these individuals (Junker, Stegmann, Braun, & Van Dick, 2016; Riggs & Porter, 2017). These cognitive schemas are called implicit leadership theories (ILTs).

The concept of ILTs was introduced by Eden and Leviatan (1975) drawing on Schneider's (1973) work looking at implicit personality theories. An ILT is the lay theory of leadership that someone holds about the qualities of leaders (Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Offermann, Kennedy, & Wirtz, 1994; Schyns & Meindl, 2005; Schyns & Schilling, 2011). They are shaped by someone's upbringing and through social processes (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Schyns, Kiefer, Kerschreiter, & Tymon, 2011). Hence, everyone has a different ILT but there is a lot of similarity between people, especially in the same environments, contexts, and communities due to their common experience (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann et al., 1994; Schyns & Schilling, 2011; Shen, 2019). They begin to develop in early childhood (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005) and children as young as five years of age are known to hold a conceptualization of leadership (Antonakis & Dalgas, 2009). In their early years, children's ILTs are generally task-based (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Selman, Jaquette, & Lavin, 1977) and there is a key turning point around the age of 10 when they appear to take onboard more affective, motivational, functional, and idealized leadership qualities (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Chauvin & Karnes, 1984;

DeHaan, 1962; Hess & Easton, 1960; Okamura, 1968; Pigors, 1933). DeHaan (1962) discovered that in early age, children have realistic, concrete, immediate, experiential definitions of leadership. As they mature, their definitions are grounded more in activities and functions. They become more idealistic, vicarious, and abstract as they grow older.

The ILTs that people hold are thought to represent an idealized or prototypical mental model of leaders (Foti et al., 2017; Lord & Shondrick, 2011; Tavares et al., 2018). These prototypical ILTs are useful because they are the benchmark against which people assess the other people they encounter in order to categorize them as leaders or not and to determine their reactions to them (Felfe & Schyns, 2014; House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002; Kenney, Schwartz-Kenney, & Blascovich, 1996; Lord & Maher, 1991). Hence, the ILT approach to follower behavior is a congruence or fit model where a situational set of characteristics (i.e., perceptions of a prospective leader) is compared to an internal one (i.e., a person's prototypical ILT) (Van Quaquebeke & Van Knippenberg, 2012). Where there is alignment, fit, or congruence, there is the acknowledgement of leadership and appropriate individual follower responses follow. Where there is misalignment, misfit, or incongruence, the observer does not recognize the leader as such and does not adopt their followership behavior. In contrast to the value congruence and person-environment fit literatures, the emerging ILT fit literature is unclear on the nature of the interaction between a person's perceptions and their own mental model. Shondrick, Dinh, and Lord (2010), for example, argue that ILT congruence is about patterns of matching rather than the alignment of individual traits, whereas DeRue and Ashford (2010) focus on the degree of consistency between observations of others' qualities and one's own ILT.

2.2. Leadership categorization theory and the connectionist perspective

Leadership categorization theory is an information-processing theory that explains how people seek out information about leaders, how they make sense of the complexity in the world, and how they respond to stimuli (Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 1984; Rosch, 1978). It advances the idea that people not only hold an idealized prototypical ILT but that they hold other ILTs reflecting different situations and contexts (Lord et al., 1982, 1984; Shondrick et al., 2010). Lord et al. (1984) tentatively propose that people's ILTs are hierarchically categorized in three levels. The highest, most overarching, level is called the *superordinate level*. This is an abstract collection of the qualities of leaders free from any particular context. Below this level is the *basic level* where the various contexts (e.g., sport, business, military, and politics) are situated. They argue that there is likely to be considerable overlap, termed family resemblance, between these context-specific basic ILTs and the superordinate ILT, but only a few attributes are thought to be common to all categories (Lord et al., 1984). Interestingly, Lord et al. (1984, p. 373) found that these basic level ILTs were “the most useful category for predicting behaviors or outcomes.” Tavares et al. (2018) supplied evidence showing that superordinate leadership prototypes constrained basic level prototypes, suggesting that basic level ILTs are a subset of superordinate ILTs. At the lowest level of the hierarchy is the *subordinate level*. These are subdivisions of each category that move further and further away from the content of the superordinate prototype. For example, a person's sport ILT could potentially be broken down into gender, or child vs adult, or amateur vs professional, or on-field vs off-field, or player vs manager subdivisions.

The leadership categorization approach suggests that people hold multiple mental models, which, although containing similarities, are separate. They are activated when a particular context is experienced with the person comparing environmental stimuli to the mental model and then drawing conclusions. This is a serial cognitive process in which the component parts are discrete and accessed without reference to other schemas and mental models (Hanges et al., 2000). The competing connectionist approach offers a different way of conceiving ILTs. Instead of a serial cognitive process, this one has a parallel design in which the component parts are assessed simultaneously in response to an environmental stimulus and a pattern of activation is evoked representing the mental model (Strauss & Quinn, 1997). Over time and multiple activations, the pattern establishes itself and becomes stronger. Differently to serial processes, the component parts of these connectionist patterns may also be part of other patterns (Hanges et al., 2000). Hence, according to this connectionist approach, people do not hold separate and distinct mental models representing superordinate, basic, and subordinate ILT categories. Instead, they hold different patterns of activation that are evoked by different environmental stimuli (Brown & Lord, 2001; Tavares et al., 2018).

Although these two approaches differ in how the brain processes information – separate mental models or different patterns of activation – they both contain multiple levels of ILTs and explain why there are both commonalities and differences in appearance and emphasis between the component parts at different levels and contexts. Current knowledge therefore holds that ILTs are comprised of multiple factors broken down into many facets that are differently evoked depending on the gaze of the observer.

2.3. Gender differences in ILTs

ILTs have their roots in a socially constructed view of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010; Meindl, 1995; Searle, 1995). They are not simply the solitary psychological constructions of individuals; they are also influenced by societal factors and the influence of “powerful voices” (Grint, 1997, p. 9) shaping how we understand the world. For most of the past 2000 years in most places in the world, leadership roles have been occupied by men (Allio, 2012; Duevel et al., 2015; Grint, 1997). As a consequence, our understanding of leadership has been shaped by reference to men, male leaders, and masculinity (Alexander & Andersen, 1993; Anderson, 2008; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Kelly, 2013; Offermann et al., 1994). Unsurprisingly given the weight of history, previous studies (e.g., Nye & Forsyth, 1991; Offermann et al., 1994) have shown

that men and women differ little in the prototypical ILTs they hold, and both encapsulate the male bias in the way that leadership is defined and conceptualized.

Offermann and Coats (2018) argue that now women are achieving much greater representation in managerial roles, the old mantra of ‘think leader, think male’ may be changing. Their conjecture is that “the salience of gender as a leadership trait has weakened to the point of its removal from ILTs entirely” (Offermann & Coats, 2018, p. 515). Evidence to support this assertion comes from Koenig et al., 2011 Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, and Ristikari (2011) who show that the male construal of leadership is weakening. However, Offermann and Coats’ (2018) own data included masculinity as a factor in ILTs, which is a replication of the findings of Epitropaki and Martin (2004) and Offermann et al. (1994). They also noted the non-appearance of feminine factors, and subtle differences in the way that men and women rated the various ILT factors. Tavares et al. (2018) similarly found gender differences in the way people rated ILT factors. It seems that the way people understand the construct of leadership retains an element of masculinity and there are subtle differences in the ways that men and women report their ILTs.

2.4. Leadership and sport management

Few contexts stress the importance of leadership more than sport. There is a focus on individuals in leadership positions (CEOs of sport associations, owners of franchises and clubs, team managers and coaches, and team captains) and fervent fan followership. Despite this interest in leadership, the subject has lagged behind the generic leadership literature and focused on leader characteristics and their transactional and transformational behavior, largely ignoring perceptual and constructed approaches (Kihl et al., 2010; Peachey et al., 2015). There are a few exceptions that have taken the perspective of observers or followers. Ferkins and Shilbury (2015), for example, conducted a two-year action research project in an Australian state sport organization and discovered a lack of stakeholder engagement. Investigating leadership at the 2005 Fédération Internationale de Natation (FINA) World Aquatics Championships, Parent, Olver, and Séguin (2009) found that a multiple stakeholder approach best explained leadership. Kihl et al. (2010) discovered that within the US intercollegiate athletics setting, stakeholders’ perceptions of leadership were widely conceived, based on experiences within the specific environment, and embedded within the particular context. These three exploratory studies all used in-depth qualitative methods to capture people’s leadership perceptions and demonstrated the relevance of the observer-centric approach to leadership in the sport context.

Now that its usefulness has been established, one of the next steps in extending the ILT approach for the sport management domain is to discover the nature of the prototypical sport management basic level ILT. Unfortunately, this is not as straightforward as it might seem. As ILTs are shaped by people’s experiences (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005; Eden & Leviatan, 1975; Schyns et al., 2011), they will reflect differing social processes in various sports, both within and between organizations, locations, and many other factors (see Fig. 1). Their socialized ILTs reflect the particular set of circumstances they have inhabited and to which they have adapted. Comparisons between these various domains will always be interesting as they will inform us about the nature of leadership perceptions in each context, how they differ, and the various socialization forces that impact upon people in those places. However, they do not provide a generic sport management prototypical ILT and may even be misleading about the generic nature of prototypical ILTs in sport management. Establishing the starting point, that is immediately prior to when people enter the industry, makes it possible to measure the strength and effect of socialization forces in particular processes, roles, and organizations in sport.

Take, for example, the antiprototype of ‘tyranny.’ This factor appeared in the generic ILT profiles of Epitropaki and Martin (2004), Offermann et al. (1994), and Offermann and Coats (2018). Imagine that future studies showed that this appeared in the prototypical ILTs of people in different sport organizations. We might therefore assume that tyranny is naturally a part of people’s ILTs in this industry. However, we know that people leaving school and university and entering careers tend to view their chosen industry with rose-tinted spectacles which has been shown to be the case in sport management (Cunningham, Sagas, Dixon, Kent, & Turner, 2005; Mathner & Martin, 2012; Todd & Andrew, 2008; Todd et al., 2014 Todd, Magnusen, Andrew, & Lachowetz, 2014). Such people are unlikely to have a tyrannical element to their sport management ILTs, and

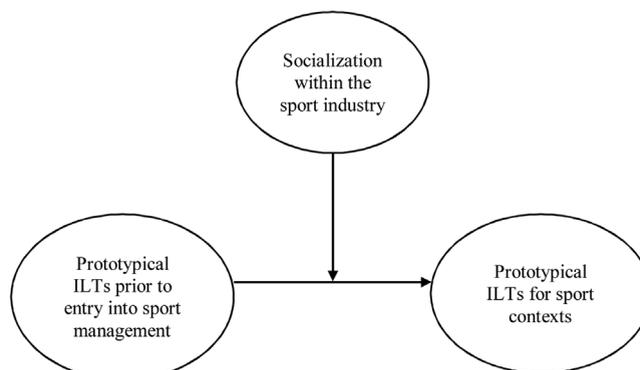


Fig. 1. The Socialization of Sport Management Prototypical ILTs.

hence its appearance later in their careers is a socialization effect. This example highlights the importance of establishing the baseline prototypical ILTs of people about to enter careers in sport management. By doing so, we can discover the socialization effects of varying sport contexts (e.g., women's and men's, amateur and professional, individual and team sports, etc).

This approach presumes that people about to enter sport management careers have a particular configuration of ILTs distinct from people about to enter other types of careers. Evidence to support this presumption comes from several sources. [Todd and Andrew \(2008\)](#) showed that sport management students graduated with a perceived fit with the sport management domain based on their interests in sport and their assessment of the industry's prestige. In the generic person-environment fit literature, many have argued and shown that people self-select the environments they chose to join based on their personality, values, and interests (e.g., [Bowers, 1973](#); [Chatman, 1989](#); [Schneider, 1973](#)). Vocational development theory ([Super, 1953](#)) shows that people choose occupations in line with their self-concepts. Similarly, [Holland's \(1985\)](#) RIASEC (realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional personality types) typology of careers has been shown to predict career choice based on the fit of these components to the particular environment they are entering ([Kristof, 1996](#); [Porter & Umbach, 2006](#)). Taken overall, this is strong evidence to suggest that people choosing to enter sport management careers after university hold some meaningful commonality in the way they conceive the sport management environment. By extension and in line with categorization theory, we expect sport management students' conceptualizations of ILTs in the sport industry to have meaningful similarity based on their self-selection into this domain.

2.5. What is the content of sport ILTs for women and men as they enter the industry?

Bringing these themes together, our goal is to identify the prototypical basic-level sport ILTs of people about to enter the industry. This is an exploratory investigation that has not been conducted before. It is important because these pre-entry ILTs are the base from which subsequent socialization effects deviate. Although previous studies have shown minimal differences between the ILTs of women and men, the masculine history to leadership theory is competing with societal change in which women are increasingly occupying leadership roles. Accordingly, we have been keenly attentive to women's and men's constructions of leadership and how these play out in their ILTs.

3. Research design

To explore the ILTs of people about to enter the sport management industry, we replicated the item generation and analysis process of [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#) that resulted in a typology of prototypical ILTs. This approach begins with a clean slate and asks people about the characteristics they see in leaders. Then, through data reduction processes, people's prototypical ILTs emerge. This approach was adopted by [Sy \(2010\)](#) for implicit followership theories, and [Ling, Chia, and Fang \(2000\)](#) to reveal the ILTs of Chinese people. We decided to apply this approach to people about to enter sport management careers while undertaking sport management undergraduate degrees.

The research was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, we asked sport management undergraduate students to generate items that were meaningful to them in terms of leadership in sport management organizations. In the second phase, a different sample of sport management students were asked to rate each of the items against their own ILTs in a sport management context. Each of the phases is described separately below.

4. Phase 1: item generation

4.1. Sample and procedure

The first phase of the study was conducted with a sample of university students in three different sport management undergraduate classes at a large university in the Northeast of the United States who are in NCAA Division I (the highest level of intercollegiate competition in the USA). A total of 101 students (freshmen and sophomores) participated ($N_1 = 101$) in the exercise which took place during class time using a paper and pencil questionnaire. The participants were aged between 18 and 22 with an average age of 20.3 years old. The gender split was 64.4% men and 35.6% women. Following [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#), we asked the participants to complete a written questionnaire that contained 20 blank lines for participants to list characteristics or traits of "... a leader in the front office, administration, or staff of a sport organization." Participants were asked to use whatever definition of a leader was meaningful to them in this context. All respondents returned a valid questionnaire.

4.2. Analysis and results

Of the 1803 total items generated, those which were clearly synonymous were combined (e.g., motivating and motivational) under the term mentioned most often. Frequencies were calculated yielding 552 different attributes. From this list of attributes, those that were mentioned by 10% or fewer of the respondents were eliminated, resulting in 55 items that were included in the factor identification stage (see [Table 1](#)). Of these, only 18 appear in the item scales of [Epitropaki and Martin \(2004\)](#), [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#), and [Offermann and Coats \(2018\)](#).

Table 1
Frequency of Items Generated.

Rank	Item	Frequency (%)	1994 ^a	2004 ^b	2018 ^c
1	intelligent	77	x	x	x
2	charismatic	50	x		x
3	confident	42			
4	organized	37			
5	knowledgeable	31	x	x	
6	honest	30			
7	creative	27			x
8	open-minded	27			
9	caring	26			
10	hard-working	25	x	x	
11	goal-oriented	23	x		
12	loyal	22			
13	trustworthy	22			
14	determined	21			x
15	respectful	21			
16	understanding	21	x	x	
17	responsible	20			
18	dependable	19			
19	adaptable	18			
20	attentive	17			
21	communicative	16			
22	experienced	16			
23	fair	16			
24	motivating	16			
25	outgoing	16			
26	approachable	15			
27	strong	15	x	x	x
28	articulate	14			
29	attractive	14	x		x
30	authoritative	14			x
31	driven	14			
32	innovative	14			x
33	inspirational	14			
34	passionate	14			
35	focused	13			x
36	physically fit	13			
37	powerful	13			
38	ambitious	12			
39	courageous	12			x
40	dedicated	12	x	x	x
41	energetic	12	x	x	
42	flexible	12			
43	poised	12			
44	risk-taker	12			
45	well-dressed	12	x		x
46	assertive	11			x
47	committed	11			
48	competitive	11			
49	decisive	11			
50	know sports	11			
51	optimistic	11			
52	persistent	11			
53	personable	11			
54	respected	11			
55	team-oriented	11			

x's denote the item was also included in the final superordinate ILT scales of:

^a Offermann et al. (1994).

^b Epitropaki and Martin (2004).

^c Offermann and Coats (2018).

5. Phase 2: factor identification

5.1. Sample and procedure

The second phase of the study utilized a different sample of sport management students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors in the sport management major) from the same university. One limitation of this sample is that the university required students to undertake a short internship between their sophomore and junior years meaning that about half of the

sample had some work experience in sport management. However, this internship was quite ‘light touch’, unlikely to have a major impact on the students’ nascent sport ILTs, and broadly representative of students taking sport management undergraduate degrees.

A total of 267 participants completed the voluntary online survey ($N_2 = 267$). None of the participants in Phase 2 were participants in Phase 1. Age bands were used with this sample. 88.4% (236) were aged between 18 and 23, with 11.6% (31) indicating 24 years or older. The gender split was 187 (70%) men and 80 (30%) women. The ethnic breakdown was 82.4% Caucasian, 11.2% African American, and 6.4% identifying as Asian, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander, or preferred not to provide this information.

Our interest was to capture the basic-level sport context ILT that would provide the typical career destination for sport management students. As such, we were implicitly defining the sport context primarily as professional, off-field, and North American. The cohort has career variation, of course, but the majority were taking the course with this sort of destination in mind. Accordingly, the participants were asked to rate from 1 to 5 how well each of the 55 attributes that emerged from the item generation phase “. . . fit their image of an effective leader in a sport organization” (e.g., Lord et al., 1984; Offermann et al., 1994).

5.2. Analysis and results

Given concerns that men and women conceptualize leadership differently (e.g., Buss & Perry, 1992; Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Frost, 2016; Gill, 1986; Koenig et al., 2011; Marongiu & Ekehammar, 1999; Shore & Thornton, 1986; Tavares et al., 2018; van Gils, Van Quaquebeke, Borkowski, & van Knippenberg, 2018; Wilson & Daly, 1985; cf. Gneezy et al., 2009; Gneezy, Leonard, & List, 2009), we split the dataset according to gender and conducted all analysis separately. Following Offermann and Coats (2018), exploratory factor analyses was conducted with principle axis factoring and promax rotation to allow for intercorrelated factors. Following accepted procedure (Floyd & Widaman, 1995), we allocated an item to a given factor if the loading equaled or exceeded 0.40. The women’s perceptions of leaders in the sport environment were represented by 12 factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Six of these factors were retained based on the scree plot analysis and interpretability of the factors. We removed two items exhibiting a cross-loading that exceeded 0.40 on a second factor, two items with multiple cross-loadings on two or more additional factors above 0.30, and one item that was the weakest item (‘Energetic’) in a set of ten from the Sensitivity factor as a poor fit (Ferguson & Cox, 1993).

The first factor, Sensitivity, accounted for 35.5% of the total variation, with all six factors of the solution collectively accounting for 60.8% of the total variance. The final women’s ILT model contained 6 factors comprising 35 items. Table 2 lists each factor along with its items, factor loadings, and reliability coefficient (alpha). Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations among the factors of the 35-item ILT scale are presented in Table 3.

The men’s perceptions of leaders in the sport environment were represented by 13 factors with eigenvalues greater than one. Seven factors were retained based on the scree plot and interpretability of the factors. We removed two items for cross-loadings above 0.40. The first factor, Sensitivity, accounted for 27.9% of the total variation, with all seven factors of the solution collectively accounting for 53.9% of the total variance. The final men’s ILT model contained 7 factors comprising 32 items. Table 4 lists each factor along with its items, factor loadings, and reliability coefficient (alpha). Means, standard deviations, reliabilities and intercorrelations among the factors of the 32-item ILT scale are presented in Table 5.

Compared side-by-side (see Table 6), the women’s and men’s prototypical ILT structures broadly share five factors: Sensitivity, Dedication, Physical Attractiveness, Inspirational, and Focused. One factor is singular to women, Knowledgeable, and two to men, Creativity and Courageous. This comparison aligns well with previous findings on ILT gender differences (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann et al., 1994) with men and women similarly conceptualizing leadership, but with some subtle differences within factors and the appearance of the three unshared factors. Due to these differences, we decided these gendered subordinate prototypical sport management ILTs had sufficient meaning to be kept separate and that a combined composite would obscure and be misleading.

Table 2
Factor Names, Items, and Reliabilities of ILT Factors – Women.

Factor Name (No. of Items)	Items (Factor Loading)	Reliability ^a
Sensitivity (9)	Loyal (0.88), caring (0.86), understanding (0.85), honest (0.82), trustworthy (0.79), respectful (0.76), fair (0.65), approachable (0.63), optimistic (0.59)	.93
Knowledgeable (8)	Knowledgeable (0.93), communicative (0.83), intelligent (0.69), experienced (0.60), decisive (0.55), confident (0.55), team-oriented (0.49), innovative (0.48)	.87
Physical Attractiveness (5)	Physically fit (0.93), attractive (0.73), well-dressed (0.73), strong (0.57), competitive (0.50)	.78
Inspirational (7)	Inspirational (0.72), authoritative (0.70), motivating (0.68), personable (0.68), courageous (0.58), risk-taker (0.48), passionate (0.45)	.85
Dedication (4)	Dedicated (0.82), responsible (0.65), determined (0.63), hard-working (0.52)	.88
Focused (2)	Focused (0.74), attentive (0.70)	.60

^a Cronbach's alpha.

Table 3
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations for ILT Factors of the 35-Item Scale – Women.

Factor	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Sensitivity	4.49	.60	(.93)					
2 Knowledgeable	4.56	.46	.50**	(.87)				
3 Physical Attractiveness	3.51	.84	.31**	.30**	(.78)			
4 Inspirational	4.34	.56	.51**	.54**	.49**	(.85)		
5 Dedication	4.79	.39	.67**	.63**	.29**	.46**	(.88)	
6 Focused	4.74	.41	.25*	.27*	.13	.32**	.12	(.60)

Values in parentheses indicate the reliability score for the scale.

** p < .01.
* p < .05.

Table 4
Factor Names, Items, and Reliabilities of ILT Factors – Men.

Factor Name (No. of Items)	Items (Factor Loading)	Reliability ^a
Sensitivity (8)	Fair (0.83), flexible (0.64), approachable (0.59), caring (0.56), personable (0.56), adaptable (0.45), understanding (0.44), trustworthy (0.44)	.83
Dedication (8)	Goal-oriented (0.89), dedicated (0.81), committed (0.57), responsible (0.48), open-minded (0.48), confident (0.46), team-oriented (0.43), driven (0.41)	.82
Physical Attractiveness (3)	Physically fit (0.94), attractive (0.77), well-dressed (0.49)	.75
Focused (2)	Attentive (0.72), focused (0.64)	.67
Creativity (3)	Creative (0.84), energetic (0.73), innovative (0.63)	.77
Inspirational (2)	Inspirational (0.89), motivating (0.70)	.78
Courageous (6)	Courageous (0.82), poised (0.70), persistent (0.62), powerful (0.60), decisive (0.50), assertive (0.41)	.78

^a Cronbach's alpha.

Table 5
Means, Standard Deviations, Reliabilities, and Intercorrelations for ILT Factors of the 32-Item Scale – Men.

Factor	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1 Sensitivity	4.30	.53	(.83)						
2 Dedication	4.50	.43	.55**	(.82)					
3 Physical Attractiveness	3.20	.96	.16*	.12	(.75)				
4 Focused	4.54	.52	.22**	.49**	.01	(.67)			
5 Creativity	4.19	.67	.43**	.46**	.27**	.31**	(.77)		
6 Inspirational	4.38	.73	.26**	.51**	.09	.36**	.39**	(.78)	
7 Courageous	3.97	.59	.40**	.58**	.30**	.37**	.54**	.51**	(.78)

Values in parentheses indicate the reliability score for the scale.

** p < .001.
* p < .05.

The greatest difference to previous studies (i.e., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann et al., 1994) is the non-appearance of a Masculinity factor. All previous ILT studies had surfaced this, but our young adult respondents appear to hold sport management ILTs devoid of any factors that are specifically masculine.

Two factors, Sensitivity and Dedication, directly overlap with factors found in earlier studies (i.e., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann et al., 1994) for both genders. One factor, Physical Attractiveness, is broadly similar to the Attractiveness factor of Epitropaki and Martin (2004) and the Well-groomed factor in the Offermann studies with these sport management students, perhaps unsurprisingly, giving this factor a sport edge with the inclusion of physical as well as sartorial attractiveness. In addition, women included Knowledgeable as a factor, which is broadly similar to the Intelligence factor found in previous studies. The factor Creativity that men included was found in the Offermann and Coats (2018) study.

Two factors that appeared in the ILTs factor structures of women and men, Inspirational and Focused, which seem particularly relevant to the sport context, had not been found in previous ILT studies. Similarly, the Courageous factor surfaced by the men is also new and seems appropriate to the sport context. Taken overall, these patterns of similarity and difference align with the activation model of the relationship of superordinate, basic, and subordinate levels of ILTs.

5.2.1. The emergent factors

Before discussing the broader themes, we will outline each factor in relation to the ILT literature as a frame of reference for the current findings. For the sake of streamlining this process, use of the term 'previous ILT studies' in the remainder of this section will specifically refer to the following three studies unless otherwise specified: Epitropaki and Martin (2004), Offermann et al. (1994), and Offermann and Coats (2018).

Table 6

Comparison of the Factor Structures for Women and Men.

Factor Name	Women	Men
<i>Factors broadly similar to women and men</i>		
Sensitivity	Loyal, caring, understanding, honest, trustworthy, respectful, fair, approachable, optimistic	Fair, flexible, approachable, caring, personable, adaptable, understanding, trustworthy
Dedication	Dedicated, responsible, determined, hard-working	Goal-oriented, dedicated, committed, responsible, open-minded, confident, team-oriented, driven
Physical Attractiveness	Physically fit, attractive, well-dressed, strong, competitive	Physically fit, attractive, well-dressed
Inspirational	Inspirational, authoritative, motivating, personable, courageous, risk-taker, passionate	Inspirational, motivating
Focused	Focused, attentive	Attentive, focused
<i>Factor singular to women</i>		
Knowledgeable	Knowledgeable, communicative, intelligent, experienced, decisive, confident, team-oriented, innovative	
<i>Factors singular to men</i>		
Creativity		Creative, energetic, innovative
Courageous		Courageous, poised, persistent, powerful, decisive, assertive

The first dimension that emerged in the current study, Sensitivity, shares much similarity to factors that emerged in previous ILT studies. There is a very subtle difference between women and men, with women slightly emphasizing loyalty and men slightly emphasizing fairness. But both differ notably from the way that Sensitivity is conceptualized in previous studies. These sport management students emphasized trust, approachability, and caring, but without the emphasis on being sensitive, sympathetic, and sincere as indicated in previous ILT studies. The notion of sensitivity is no stranger to the leadership literature. In the 1940's and 1950's, the Ohio state leadership (see [Stogdill, 1950](#)) sought to identify primary indicators of effective leadership. These studies uncovered two primary factors referred to as consideration (people-oriented) and initiating structure (task-oriented), with these two dimensions having a major presence in leadership research for a few decades to follow ([Judge, Piccolo, & Ilies, 2004](#)). The Sensitivity factor identified in the current research strongly resembles that of the same name found in the aforementioned foundational studies. The Sensitivity factor involves the concern for followers' well-being, incorporating support, approachability, and mutual trust and respect (e.g., [Halpin & Winer, 1957](#); [Lambert, Tepper, Carr, Holt, & Barelka, 2012](#)).

The second factor to emerge in the current study was Dedication. The women's version contained four components (i.e., 'dedicated', 'responsible', 'determined', and 'hard-working') whereas the men's version contained eight items (i.e., 'goal-oriented', 'dedicated', 'committed', 'responsible', 'open-minded', 'confident', 'team-oriented', and 'driven'). These are subtly different with the women emphasizing process and the men's conceptualization being more goal- or performance-oriented. Interestingly, previous studies conflate this process/goal dichotomy and contain items relating to both.

The third factor, Physical Attractiveness, indicates a physical aspect giving it a slightly different meaning to the Attractiveness factor identified in previous ILT studies. Similar to the findings of [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#), this factor includes concepts of attractiveness and being well-dressed; however, it also includes 'physically fit' as the highest loading item for both women and men. The Attractiveness factor does not appear in the shortened scale developed by [Epitropaki and Martin \(2004\)](#), and the more recent [Offermann and Coats \(2018\)](#) only contains remnants of the [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#) scale with a new factor referred to as 'well-groomed.' In contrast, the identification of Physical Attractiveness in the current study indicates that attractiveness is indeed a factor in the sport management context, however, it also places a strong emphasis on physical health as one means to demonstrate this visually appealing characteristic.

The fourth common factor to men and women, Inspirational, consists of only two items for men ('inspirational' and 'motivational'), but seven for women ('inspirational', 'authoritative', 'motivating', 'personable', 'courageous', 'risk-taker', 'passionate'). The only slight connection for this factor with previous ILT studies is with the Charisma dimension identified by [Offermann et al. \(1994\)](#), which included 'inspiring' as one of the items loading on this factor. Whilst identifying an Inspirational factor in the sport context is understandable, perhaps what is most surprising is that a similar factor has not emerged in the structure of prototypical ILTs in previous generic studies, as motivation is a common theme in theories of effective leadership ([Bass, 2008](#)). This factor also includes the notion of passion, which is consistent with previous sport management research indicating the important role of emotion in sport organizations ([Swanson & Kent, 2017](#)).

The fifth and final factor common to both women and men, Focused, contains just two items in both cases ('focused' and 'attentive'). This factor has not been present in previous ILT studies. While the term 'focused' was one of the items of the Dedication factor in the [Offermann and Coats \(2018\)](#) study, the concepts of focus and attentiveness take on increased importance in the current investigation and coalesce into a separate factor. The inclusion of a Focused factor suggests that ILTs in the sport management environment incorporate characteristics which are also prominent in sport participation and competition. For example, terminology related to being 'focused' is ubiquitous in the sport context, with the mental focus of athletes and coaches considered an essential ingredient for high performance (e.g., [MacPherson, Collins, & Morriss, 2008](#)).

The dimension, Creativity, contained in the men's factor structure appears to have the same meaning as the newly found factor of the same name in a recent ILT investigation. In both the current study and Offermann and Coats (2018), this factor includes the related ideas of leaders being creative and innovative. The inclusion of Creativity in the current findings lends support to the assertion of Offermann and Coats (2018) that ILT structures have been recently modified to include the expectation that creativity is a core leader attribute. There is one difference to mention in the current study: The Creativity factor herein found also incorporates the concepts of leaders being energetic. Similar to the previously discussed factor relating to attractiveness, the inclusion of energy gives the Creativity factor a dynamism and vitality pertinent to the sport context.

The factor, Courageous, contained in the men's factor structure incorporates the idea of leaders being courageous, powerful, poised, persistent, decisive, and assertive. The closest factor seen in previous ILT research appears to be the Strength factor in Offermann and Coats's (2018) scale, which also captures that notion of leaders being strong and assertive. In contrast, however, the Courageous factor in the current study accentuates poise and persistence suggesting a sense of calmness when confronted with challenging situations. There is also a light connection with Epitropaki and Martin's (2004) Dynamism factor which incorporates strength. The emergence of Courageous as an identifiable factor in this study of sport management ILTs emphasizes the importance of courage and power in this context.

The factor, Knowledgeable, which appears in the women's factor structure, aligns with the Intelligence factors in previous ILT studies. Rather than commenting on the factor's appearance in the women's ILT structure, perhaps its non-appearance in the men's factor structure is more surprising. Four of the eight items included in the women's factor appeared in other factors in the men's structure. 'Confident' and 'team-oriented' loaded on Dedication, 'innovative' loaded on Creativity, and 'decisive' loaded on Courageous. It seems that the men saw intelligence and being knowledgeable as integral components of other factors rather than a separate quality of leaders.

5.3. The missing factors

As basic and subordinate ILTs are thought to be a subset of superordinate ILTs, there are likely to be omissions and factors that do not appear. This is the case with our sample. Most notably, a Charisma factor was revealed in the two Offermann studies but did not appear in the final model of Epitropaki and Martin (2004). In Offermann and Coats (2018), the Charisma factor has a different form to the other factors the authors report in that it has one dominant item, 'charismatic', and three weakly correlated subordinate items, 'sociable', 'dynamic', and 'bold', which only seem loosely connected to charisma. In contrast, their other factors all contained more evenly weighted items. In our study, 'charismatic' was the second most frequently mentioned item in the item generation phase, but the three other items did not appear. Instead, charisma did not load on any factor for either women or men. It appears charisma may be one of those concepts that does not break down easily into component parts and naturally stands alone in a factor analysis.

Another important distinction from previous ILT studies is that the current findings did not identify any factors that Epitropaki and Martin (2004) termed 'negative.' They subdivided their factor structure into prototypes (Sensitivity, Intelligence, Dedication, Charisma, Strength, and Attractiveness) and antiprototypes (Tyranny and Masculinity). Offermann et al. (1994) and Offermann and Coats (2018) similarly included Tyranny and Masculinity as factors but did not separate them out and label them pejoratively. In our study, tyrannical items such as 'domineering', 'pushy', 'manipulative', 'selfish', and 'obnoxious' simply did not materialize during the item generation phase. There appears to be a straightforward explanation. The participants in our item generation phase were undergraduates who had made a positive decision to enter this profession. It is one they had chosen above all others to enter and they were optimistic about the prospects. Not surprisingly, they did not highlight any negative elements. In addition, we know that children's prototypical ILTs tend to be positive (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005) and most of the participants in our study had not been subject to the realities of work or been socialized into corporate cultures. They were transitioning from childhood into adulthood with optimistic expectations for the future. Interestingly, the masculinity items found in previous ILT studies ('male' and 'masculinity') also did not emerge during the item generation phase perhaps reflecting a new generation's greater sensitivity to such myopic thinking. Such a positive interpretation also comes from the studies of Topakas (2011), who found that masculinity was not a factor in her ILT study, and Riggs and Porter (2017), who found that the antiprototypical dimensions did not produce significant effects in their study.

5.4. Summary

Overall, the results of this study suggest that there is indeed a context effect resulting in distinct ILTs for sport management. When revealing the factors comprising leadership in this environment, our participants produced gendered factor structures that both closely resembled the superordinate models of previous studies and exhibited noticeable differences that appear to reflect the vitality of the sport context. In addition, Epitropaki and Martin's (2004) antiprototypes failed to appear.

6. Discussion

The goal of this study was to discover whether there is a sport management basic level ILT subordinately split by gender that is noticeably and meaningfully different to the generic superordinate ILTs that had been described by Epitropaki and Martin (2004) and Offermann and Coats (2018) and, if there was, to surface the nature of this prototypical ILTs of people about to enter the sport

management industry. By focusing on these people, we expected to find sport management prototypical ILTs representing the natural leadership perceptions of people tending towards this industry largely unaffected by an experience of working in it. Hence, the profiles of sport management prototypical ILTs surfaced in this study capture a baseline from which work, organization, and further sport socialization influences change people's thinking about leadership. By comparing this profile of ILTs to those found in particular organizations, sports, and environments, researchers will be able to measure the impact of those different contexts and thereby begin to understand how leadership varies in diverse places in this industry. The results of the study demonstrate that there is a sport management basic ILT, it has distinctions from previously surfaced generic superordinate ILTs, and although women and men hold broadly similar sport management basic ILTs, there are some differences. This finding suggests that at the basic level of ILTs, gender differences might be more relevant than at the superordinate level.

6.1. Research implications and future directions

The sport management prototypical ILT we discovered differs to the superordinate prototypical ILTs in several noteworthy ways. First, the ILT profile these budding sport managers produced was very positive. Whereas previous studies have darker elements, they are not present here. To some extent, this lighter depiction of leadership is unsurprising given that we know that children's ILTs tend to be framed in positive terms (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005). These participants were at university preparing themselves for exciting futures and had chosen this industry as one that appealed to them. Why would they see a darker side to leadership? The natural question to ask is whether the darker elements emerge later and, if they do, why. Perhaps it is related to their socialization to work (Cohen-Scali, 2003); perhaps it is related to their socialization to corporate cultures (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989). It might be a reaction to abusive supervision (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012) or simply longer organizational tenure (Chiaburu, Peng, Oh, Banks, & Lomeli, 2013). Perhaps when they think about leadership in different milieu, they see darker elements, but they have chosen to enter a career where they see more positivity and light, or, perhaps the sport management industry is one that keeps darkness in check. To answer these questions, we need studies that explore the nature of prototypical ILTs held by people working in the industry.

One distinctive variation to generic profiles of prototypical ILTs is the emphasis on physicality, vitality, and dynamism across several of the emergent factors. Although the design of the sport management degree we studied was to prepare people for off-field jobs in sport management, which are primarily office-bound and sedentary, the characteristics of on-field sport seems to bleed across the on-field/off-field divide and permeate these sport management ILTs. This raises many interesting questions about these students and their career choices. For example, does the glamour of on-field exploit influence the attractiveness of sport management careers (Todd & Andrew, 2008)? Are these people frustrated sportspeople who are unable to make a living playing but cannot divorce themselves from the industry? More simply, they may be people who are more active than the norm who therefore factor in more physical elements to their conceptualizations of leadership. They might be influenced by leadership role models from the industry who are surrounded by athletes whose presence moderates how people perceive leadership. Or they might conflate their own on-field sporting exploits to their notions of leadership going forward. These questions suggest research studies in childhood to explore how the sport management ILT is formed and in adulthood to see if the physical emphasis is maintained once people are working in the industry.

Another distinction to generic ILT profiles is the presence of emotional considerations. While this aspect of the sport management ILT surfaces primarily in the factors of Courageous and Inspirational, the emergence of affect in a prototypical sport management ILT profile appears somewhat distinct from the superordinate level ILTs found in previous studies. Beyond the empathic component of the Sensitivity dimension found across the ILT superordinate studies, there is no clear indication of emotional considerations in these investigations. In contrast, the current study surfaces the notions of passion and inspiration that are quite relevant to the sport context. In a similar way that physicality may pervade sport management ILTs, emotional characteristics also appear to be expected when considering prototypical leadership in this context. This again raises questions about these students and their expectations in the industry. Do these people subconsciously transfer the emotion experienced on the field, in the locker room, and in the stands to working in sport management? Do they consider leadership in sport organizations to be akin to coaching on the field, where coaches are expected to be passionate and inspire emotion from their athletes? Is their idea of leadership based in large part on previous experiences where sport coaches serve as their primary examples of leaders? Future exploration of leadership in sport management in relation to sports coaching appears to be fertile ground to increase our understanding in this area.

Finally, like the Sensitivity dimension present in previous ILT research, it is also worth noting that the Inspirational factor found here also speaks to the idea of connecting with others. While other dimensions can be seen as expectations for leaders as role models, the Inspirational factor surfaces the idea that similar to coaches in sport, there may be higher expectations for leaders in the sport management environment to motivate and inspire their group members.

In summary, perhaps the most important finding of this study is the general presence and description of sport management prototypical ILT for women and men. These participants developed a profile of leadership characteristics that has elements of similarity along with some apparent distinctions from prototypical ILT profiles previously uncovered. With positive and physical and emotional slants, the resulting factor structures align well with common notions of sport cultures (Anderson, 2008; Burton, Welty Peachey, & Wells, 2017; Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999).

The natural extension of this study is to explore the impact of these ILTs in sport management. The mainstream ILT literature has been strong on surfacing ILTs but much weaker at exploring their relevance in real situations. The general idea is that people compare what they see (or hear about) someone to their ILTs to determine whether or not they regard that person as a leader (Felfe &

Schyns, 2014; Lord & Maher, 1991). From this premise, socio-behavioral propositions flow that have been tested by Van Quaquebeke et al. in generic working populations. With a group of German employees, Van Quaquebeke and Van Knippenberg (2012) showed that ILT fit was associated with increased respect and identification with the leader. In an extension, Van Quaquebeke, Van Graf, and Eckloff (2014) discovered that ILT fit was also associated with increased levels of affective commitment towards the leader, satisfaction with leadership, and leader member exchange, and lower levels of intent to leave. These studies were conducted in the realm of prototypical ILTs and it is important to explore if such outcomes are also associated with basic ILTs, and if so, how the prototypical and basic level ILTs interact. Moreover, the type of relationships found in these studies are highly relevant to sport management, both in off-field and on-field contexts. Leadership and followership are enduring concepts in these environments (Peachey et al., 2015) and ILT fit appears to offer insights into the effectiveness of leadership.

The results of the current study also build on the work of Swanson and Kent (2014) which indicated that there are domain-specific expectations of leaders within the sport context. More specifically, their findings indicated that people working in the sport environment would expect their leaders to have sport-specific expertise to be considered prototypical and credible in this context. Beyond the traditional expectations of being trustworthy and experienced in their functional areas (e.g., accounting, marketing, etc.), the researchers' findings indicated that having sport domain experience (e.g., management, coaching, and playing) was also considered an important leadership attribute in sport management. The findings of the current study support the idea of distinct psychological processes in the sport environment (Swanson & Kent, 2014; Todd & Kent, 2009), where expectations of leadership include context-specific attributes. Distinct from previous leadership research in the mainstream management literature, the current findings indicate that beyond being dedicated, sensitive, and more recently creative, prototypical leaders in the sport environment are also considered to be knowledgeable, focused, and inspirational. Future investigations should further explore more specifically how and why observers consider these attributes as key components of effective leadership in the sport management environment.

It should be noted that the findings represent socially constructed perceptions of important leadership qualities in the sport management context. That is, different from the actual qualities of leaders, this research employed an observer-centric approach and surfaced the key characteristics as viewed by individuals preparing for a career in sport management (Billsberry et al., 2018). Implicit leadership theory indicates that one factor influencing the perceived effectiveness of leaders is whether they are seen to behave in ways which align with the ILTs of group members in that environment. A takeaway from this research is that leaders in the sport context could legitimately possess the attributes which emerged in the current research, however the positive impact on perceived effectiveness in the eyes of observers will depend upon witnessing these characteristics. That is, the ILT perspective advances the notion that leadership emerges over time. In relation to the current context, leaders who can demonstrate their sensitivity, dedication, physical attractiveness, creativity, courage, focus and intelligence on a regular basis should increase the likelihood group members cognitively rating them as effective (Schyns & Schilling, 2011; Scott, Jiang, Wildman, & Griffith, 2018; Trichas, Schyns, Lord, & Hall, 2016).

In addition to having implications for sport management, this study also has lessons for the mainstream (i.e., non-discipline specific) ILT literature. As far as we are aware, this is the first study to surface ILTs at the transition to adulthood, and just before the entrance to work and the powerful socialization forces that they will experience (Ayman-Nolley & Ayman, 2005). This is a key moment in people's lives that symbolizes the end of their childhood development when their neurodevelopment is becoming set, although a degree of plasticity remains (Berger et al., 2012; Berger, Rohn, & Oxford, 2012; DeHaan, 1962; Pigors, 1933). Our participants produced a very positive image of leadership. Is this because they have chosen this industry and they do not see any negatives, or because people at this key transition are more positive? There are several ways to explore this question. One would be to ask a group of people such as our sport management participants to also generate items related to other fields that they are not seeking careers in such as politics or medicine, and also to turn it around to ask politics and medical students to reveal their ILTs and those in sport. Are they more positive about leadership in the industries they have chosen to enter than ones they have not?

6.2. Practical implications

While the current results will need to be extended and replicated, this line of research has several practical implications. Primarily, these results speak to the representation of women in sport administration. Many scholars have noted and discussed women's underrepresentation in leadership roles in sport administration that continues to the present time (e.g., Burton, 2015; Burton, Grappendorf, & Henderson, 2011; Cooky & Lavoie, 2012; Harris, Grappendorf, Aicher, & Veraldo, 2015; LaVoi, 2016; Walker & Bopp, 2010; Walker, Bopp, & Sagas, 2011). Our study adds to this literature by exploring whether there are differences between women's and men's perceptions of leadership for people entering the industry. We found many similarities in the ways that women and men conceptualize leadership. However some differences were exhibited, which was not the case in previous studies of ILTs (e.g., Epitropaki & Martin, 2004; Offermann & Coats, 2018; Offermann et al., 1994). These differences might signify one or more of the following trends. The difference from previous generic ILT studies could indicate that women's and men's perceptions of leadership in sport management are different while more general perceptions are not. Alternatively, it might reflect Koenig et al.'s (2011) assertion that the male construal of leadership in society is changing. Or, it might suggest that a female reconceptualization of leadership is emerging from beneath centuries of 'think leader, think male' attitudes (Ling et al., 2000; Offermann & Coats, 2018). Our results add weight to other recent studies such as Tavares et al. (2018) who similarly found gender differences in the way people rated ILT factors. Charting the

dynamic quality of these gender differences across different levels and domains is likely to be an exciting avenue for future ILT research, especially as these gender differences may have an impact on attitudes and behavior.

The second practical implication arising from this study relates to the way sport management is taught to undergraduates at university. The discovery that our participants lacked the darker side of leadership in their sport management ILTs suggests a degree of naivety about the nature of work. It is well-established that organizations are political domains (Morgan, 1986) and that leadership has a dark side deeply embedded in the human condition (Billsberry & Edwards, 2008; Conger, 1990; Haynes, Hitt, & Campbell, 2015). If the sport management degree offered at the university that provided the site of this study is typical (and the site was chosen as it was deemed to be typical of such degrees), it suggests that universities could do more to expose students to the realities of leadership in organizational life. The short internships that our participants undertook seem to have been ineffective in this regard.

Building on the previous point, a third practical implication emerging from this study concerns the induction and socialization these people will experience entering their employers. Induction, sometimes called 'onboarding', is the process of introducing people to the practical realities of the organization they have joined, whereas socialization is the process of someone appreciating the nature of an environment and acquiring its habits, beliefs, and accumulated knowledge (Cable & Parsons, 2001; Dean, 1983; Vleugels, Tierens, Billsberry, Verbruggen, & De Cooman, 2019), which tends to take a lot longer (Feldman, 1981). Our data shows that when it comes to leadership, our new sport management recruits have romanticized, perhaps even naïve, notions of the nature of leadership, which puts additional onus on the sensitivity of the recruiting organization's induction and socialization processes. These processes cannot just focus on preparing these new recruits for the organization; they must also sensitively introduce them to the world of work.

6.3. Limitations

In the previous discussion, we described some of the many ways in which the results of this study could form the base of future studies. In addition to those, there are several other ways in which the results of this study could be extended. Our focus was on sport management students and how they conceptualize leadership in this industry. Although most of these individuals were anticipating a career in sport management, the group most likely included some students doing the subject out of interest rather than for specific career reasons. In this respect, sport management degrees are like many others. In addition, sport management degrees often contain a group of students who hope for on-field sport careers but are taking sport management as a way to stay in the industry if their ambitions falter, or for when their on-field careers end. Although these people are considering sport management careers, the presence of such a group may infuse these student sport management ILTs with more physicality and emotional considerations than is warranted. To explore this concern further, it would be informative to compare the ILTs of sport management students with students taking other forms of sport degrees and to include measures of their on-field ambitions. Such a study would help explain the nature of the physicality infusions in many of the factors we revealed. In addition, future research should also investigate the nature of prototypical ILTs for employees firmly entrenched in the sport management environment to understand how their respective environments and experiences impact upon their views of prototypical leadership.

When we look at our final factor structures, we are concerned about the missing factor of Charisma. We have already discussed this earlier, but we wish to highlight and discuss this omission further. This item appeared second most frequently in the item generation phase of our study. The cause of its nonappearance as an exploratory factor appears to be due to the fact that no associated items were in the mix. In Offermann and Coats (2018), the Charisma factor incorporates the 'energy' and 'dynamic' items. In our ILT factor structures, 'energetic' loaded elsewhere and 'dynamic' exhibited cross-loadings. We consulted several thesauruses to see the type of qualities the charisma might be traditionally associated with. The most relevant words that spring up include glamour, magnetism, appeal, fascination, charm, attraction, enchantment, lure, and beguilement. Few of these seem to sit comfortably in a sport management context. Academic definitions of charisma (e.g., Antonakis et al., 2016) align the construct with a values-based, symbolic, and emotion-laden signaling, which also seems to distance the definition from lay uses of the term. We find ourselves concluding that perhaps charisma should appear in future studies of sport management ILTs and more work is needed to unpack it.

One of the challenges we faced in this study was how to conceptualize basic level ILTs in the sport context. The literature typically talks about basic level ILTs very broadly as professions or contexts such as politics, military, or sport. However, as soon as we started developing the study, we found ourselves making decisions about the nature of the sport ILT. Was it on-field or off-field sport, professional or amateur, geographically limited or not, or managerial or not? And there were many other choices to make as well. These are not subordinate level ILTs, but different facets of the basic level sport ILT. This is an important distinction and the implication is that basic level ILTs may contain multiple facets of the same domain. Just as superordinate ILTs contain multiple basic level ILTs, a basic level ILT may contain multiple facets within the same domain. We were looking to capture the most typical ILTs of people about to enter sport management jobs in organizations that we could imagine. However, there are many other facets to the sport domain and our results may not be relevant to them.

Our study was designed to discover the prototypical basic level sport ILTs of the most typical cohort of students entering sport management careers that we could find. As such, one limitation of this study is the characteristics of that typical cohort. While it offered sizeable populations of female and male sport management students, it did not offer similar populations for other demographic divisions. For example, although there was some racial and ethnic diversity in the sample, there were insufficient numbers of students in the minority divisions to afford meaningful statistical analysis. We join Offermann and

Coats (2018) in calling for follow-up research that explores other demographic differences in addition to gender in prototypical ILT research. Despite these limitations, we believe that our study opens up an exciting array of possibilities for scholars wanting to understand leadership in the context of sport.

6.4. Conclusion

This study contributes to the sport management literature by establishing the profile and content of ILTs of people entering the industry. These ILT profiles represent the starting blocks from which socialization to corporate cultures and the peculiarities of particular sport environments may change the way that people conceptualize and experience leadership in different parts of the industry. We found that although women and men have some differences in their sport management ILTs, they are very similar and generally enter the industry on an equal footing with regard to their mental models of leadership. By outlining this starting position, future studies will be able to explore prevailing conceptualizations of leadership and consider their impact on people working in those places.

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