

The Effect of a New Coaching Staff on Team Culture

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Abstract

This study shows the importance of culture within college athletic teams and how a coaching staff has an effect on the culture of a program. Study participants included twelve individuals who are currently or had once been affiliated with the Virginia Tech Volleyball Program. Each individual answered a series of interview questions to the best of their ability. Each question followed Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change. Using semi-structured interviews, the information was gathered and sorted into codes and eventually turned into categories, revealing themes. Five themes emerged, which are explained in the findings section. The themes are: building relationships, establishing communication, displaying recognition and reward, dependability and changing culture. This study may be able to give coaching staff a better understanding of what different athletes are saying about the culture of their program and how it can be changed. It is aimed at coaches who believe their culture is hindered. New coaching staffs can understand how important team culture is within college athletics and instill it within their programs. If they do not follow Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change, their program may not be as successful. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to coaching staff. This can also be used for coaches who are concerned as to why their program is not excelling.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Abstract.....	3
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
Definition of Key Terms.....	6
Purpose Statement.....	7
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	8
Culture within Organizations	8
Change within Organizations.....	9
Coaching Effectiveness.....	10
Cohesion.....	10
Personality Differences.....	12
Theoretical/Conceptual Framework.....	13
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	15
Designing and Planning Interviews.....	15
Recruiting Participants.....	16
Conducting Interviews.....	16
Analysis of Data.....	17
Chapter 4: Findings.....	19
Themes.....	20
Theme 1- Building Relationships.....	21
Theme 2- Establishing Communication.....	22
Theme 3- Displaying Recognition and Reward.....	25
Theme 4- Dependability.....	27
Theme 5- Changing Culture.....	29
Discussion.....	33
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	36
Limitations.....	39
Recommendations.....	39
References.....	42
Appendices.....	45
Appendix A.....	45
Appendix B.....	46
Appendix C.....	47
Appendix D.....	48

Chapter 1: Introduction

Culture plays a major role in the success or failures within a sports team. Every team has a culture; it is up to the coaching staff to determine what that is. If the culture within a team is negative, odds are the team is not performing well. There are many definitions of culture. Schein (2004) defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as a correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17). In other words, culture is a consentient way of life, through values, beliefs and feelings.

Because culture is so unique, it is important to be aware of how that specific culture is affecting your team. Culture is an environment, one that needs to be focused on. A culture is the expression of a team’s values, attitudes, and goals about sports, competition, and relationships. It determines whether, for example, the team’s focus is on fun, improvement, or winning or whether it promotes individual accomplishment or team success (Taylor, 2016). This definition of culture suggests that a team's success or failure reflects the culture within those teams. If a team has had repeated losses, one can assume that the culture could be negative.

In athletics, it is necessary to be able to have a positive culture within a team and that starts with the coaching staff. Positive culture within a team generates positive performances. Coaches have one of the most important roles within an athletics program. Leaders need to understand the members of the group and provide them with necessary information and support to help them navigate the change taking place (Tamimi et al., 2017). The effect that coaches have on culture within a team is significant. Once the right people are on the bus, a leader can begin sculpting a new culture. Each coach comes into a program because they believe it can be better.

This could be that they want to change the culture. Having multiple leadership changes could mean different cultures, which could confuse players. Collectively, the organization must determine what values, attitudes, and beliefs are going to act as the foundation for the team culture (Tamimi et al., 2017). The players could have the potential to determine team culture, but it starts with the coaching staff. If the coaches are able to understand culture, it will allow their athletes to understand their cultural foundation better.

The Virginia Tech Volleyball Team has struggled with their team culture due to multiple coaching staff changes along with the dejection of the recent losing records. According to the NCAA, this past year Virginia Tech Volleyball was ranked 198 out of 312 and their record was 6-11. The ACC ranked Virginia Tech low in 2018 and 2020, and dead last in 2022. This program has seen three coaching changes in four years. Having been a part of the Virginia Tech Volleyball program for four years, it is noted that experience is present. In collegiate sports a high staffing turnover rate is detrimental to team culture and success. Negative culture plagues teams to repeated losses. This is evident with Virginia Tech Volleyball. This study shows the importance of culture and how it affects a collegiate program.

Definition of Key Terms

- Change: make (someone or something) different; alter or modify (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Culture: how individuals work together to achieve a common goal (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Coach: an individual who trains or instructs (a team or player) (Oxford Languages, 2022).

- Effects: a change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Sports: an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Staff: all the people employed by a particular organization (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Team: a group of players forming one side in a competitive game or sport (Oxford Languages, 2022).
- Virginia Tech Volleyball: a collegiate volleyball organization (Oxford Languages, 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to understand the importance of culture within college athletics, as well as knowing what it takes to come in and change a team's culture. If the study is followed thoroughly, it could potentially help a new coaching staff change or better the culture of their program. This project poses the question of: What factors are important for a coach to change a teams' culture?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Culture, change, coaching effectiveness, cohesion and personality differences are the topics touched on within this section. There are many ways to define culture because it is so complex and can be understood differently. Antonio (2013) argues that culture, “is the unique characteristic of a social group; the values and norms shared by its members set it apart from other social groups and is influenced by conscious beliefs” (Lebron, 2013). As a new coaching staff, it is important to try to understand the culture of the current team before trying to change it.

Culture within Organizations

Culture in organizations has become something that has been researched more throughout the years. Culture can be thought of as the foundation of the social order that we live in and of the rules we abide by (Schein, 2010). Internal failure waivers when the organization’s foundation is not concrete and the rules are not widely practiced. The internal process team culture can foster a work environment where members have a clear sense of role expectations, and thus, are likely to fulfill task requirements, which in turn results in enhanced task performance (Shin, et al, 2015). If coaches can foster that concrete culture, they are likely to see a positive organization. It is possible to have an opposite effect if not followed properly. Not all culture needs to be changed. The rational goal team culture can direct the energy and efforts of team members toward the competitiveness of the team by providing them with a clear sense of mission (Denison & Mishra, 1995). A clear sense of mission will allow for a program to succeed. Numerous studies have examined leadership, work design, and communication among members as precursors of team performance (Bass, 1985; Campion, Papper, & Medsker, 1996). If the coach is not aware of the deeper meaning of the concept, the athletes will not understand the deeper meaning. This clarity leads to a collective confidence that the change is not only the right

thing to do and indispensable, but that change is entirely possible (Tamimi et al., 2017). Clarity can oftentimes lead to confidence. Confidence can lead to a positive team culture. Positive team culture oftentimes leads to performance success. Shin's findings indicated that team culture is a crucial ambient input of team performance, even after controlling for other pivotal ambient inputs, such as leadership and task characteristics (Shin, et al, 2015). More research needs to be made between team culture and norms of team performance within organizations.

Change within Organizations

Changing culture within an organization is something that takes time. To change organizational culture, all people, systems, and practices need to be engaged in the transformation process (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019). Change is inevitable, but knowing how to go about it is the first step. Change is needed when individuals feel like something needs to be different. Researchers view organizations, then, as patterns of meaning, values, and behavior. (Morgan, Frost and Pondy 1983; Weick, 1979). Culture, according to this definition, is an integrating mechanism (Geertz, 1973 & Schein, 1983). Culture is centered around the values, thoughts and feelings of the organization. Being that culture is the glue that holds everything together, it is imperative for change.

Additionally, coaches have a major role in changing organizational culture. The organizational culture reflects the values and norms established by the leader and teaches new employees (players) to think in a similar manner (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019). Coaches are the leaders of the organization within athletics. Leadership connectivity is something that new coaches should be thinking about if they are trying to find different ways to better the culture within their organization. Leadership connectivity is focused on relationship-oriented behaviors, those that foster the leader-follower bond (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019). This bond creates a

strong sense of inspiration and willingness to listen to each other, involve and analyze different points of view, and share in a group vision (Page, Boysen & Arya, 2019). If the coaches allow leadership connectivity to be a part of their program they are more likely to see positive results.

Coaching Effectiveness

Effective coaching is defined as that which results in either successful performance outcomes (measured either in terms of win-loss percentages, individual player development, or success at the national or international level) or positive psychological responses on the part of the athletes (e.g., high perceived ability, high self-esteem, intrinsic motivational orientation, or high levels of sport enjoyment and satisfaction) (Horn, 2008). Knowing that there are negative performance outcomes within a culture, effective coaching is not taking place. It is the working relationship that is likely to determine what knowledge is required to bring about important outcomes such as improved skill and enhanced performance as well as increased satisfaction, happiness and wellbeing (Jowett, 2017).

With new coaching, it is important to note how coaching effectiveness can affect culture and coach-athlete relationships. The coach-athlete relationship is defined as a social situation. Closeness reflects interpersonal feelings of coaches and athletes that largely encapsulate an affective bond through their mutual respect, trust, appreciation, and liking for one another (Jowett, 2017). If you do not have a good relationship with your coach, you are not going to trust that what they do will improve the team's culture. More research needs to be done on how coaches can start the process of building hindered relationships.

Cohesion

Cohesion needs to be worked by all parties on in order to achieve success. If there are a few individuals who do not feel the need for change, it will not happen. Cohesion is a team

effort. Cohesion is improved by keeping members connecting, improving rewards, working on interdependent tasks, creating team identity, and keeping groups small (Franz, 2012, p. 197).

Teams that are highly cohesive are more likely to be effective in achieving their goals.

There are multiple ways of creating team cohesiveness within an organization. Team cohesion: nature, correlates, and development (Carron, Eys, Burke, 2007), state that cohesiveness is manifested from two dimensions:

1. Perceptions, suggests that a member perceives the team from two angles, the closeness of the team and the member's motivations to join and remain in the team (Carron, Eys, Burke, 2007).
2. Member's orientations, suggests that there are two foci to a member's perceptions: task cohesion (orientation towards achieving the group's task) and social cohesion (orientation towards developing and maintaining relationships) (Carron, Eys, Burke, 2007).

While cohesion promotes greater role clarity and a positive mood, and increases individual effort, it can compel a member to resort to self-handicapping if she perceives that she cannot perform up to par (Carron, Eys, Burke, 2007).

Personality Differences

Personality differences are something that coaches need to be aware of. Personality differences negatively contribute to task and social cohesion. Franz (2012) states, “What this means is that groups are more cohesive when people have similar personalities, and less cohesive when personalities are more diverse” (Franz, 2012, p. 185). This is problematic, given that groups and teams are likely to become more diverse in the future (Franz, 2012, p. 185). Not every athlete is going to buy into the culture change right away. If a coach is not aware of the different personalities on the team when coming into a new program, they risk the potential of their program failing. Different personalities are expected. Personalities that clash are the focus point that could potentially hinder culture. When personalities clash, teams operate less effectively. A study was done to dive deeper into personalities in organizations. Personality significantly affects the way individuals perceive their work environment, interact and perform within it (Lykourantzou, et al, 2016). As a leader and coach of a collegiate program, you want to do everything you can to make your program as successful as possible; personality differences will do the opposite. More research needs to be conducted on how to integrate different personalities within a team.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Kotter's Model was used for this study's framework. The 8-Step Process for Leading Change per Kotter (2021). This model is essential for a new leader to be aware of. The steps within this model are:

1. Create a sense of urgency
2. Build a guiding coalition
3. Form a strategic vision and initiatives
4. Enlist a volunteer army
5. Enable action by removing barriers
6. Generate short-term wins
7. Sustain acceleration
8. Institute change



Each one of these steps are going to be helpful for a new leader or coach to know. By following these steps, it will start the cultural shift into the right direction. Step one is creating a sense of urgency, “helps others see the need for change through a bold, aspirational opportunity statement that communicates the importance of acting immediately” (Kotter, 2021, p. 1). When the levels of urgency are low, it is difficult to change a program. Step two is building a guiding coalition. Collectively, teams can use Kotter's model to form a cohesive team who builds a culture. Step three talks about how important clarifying visions are. A vision says something that helps clarify the direction in which an organization wants to move, and it refers to a picture of future with some explicit or implicit commentary why people should strive to create that future (Aldemir, 2010). Step four talks about enlisting a volunteer army and how change is only possible if everyone is on board. Step five talks about removing barriers. A leader must keep the

communication channel open between all followers and remove some of the hierarchy to push decision outwards to other people, teams, and departments (Tamimi et al., 2017). Step six is about generating short term wins. Commitments to produce short-term wins can help keep complacency down and encourage the detailed analytical thinking that can usefully clarify or revise transformational visions (Kotter, 2012). Changes are easy to envision and initiate but difficult to sustain. Step seven is sustain acceleration. Although short term wins are important in keeping the urgency level up, it would be catastrophic to declare victory too soon (Aldemir, 2010). The last step is about instituting change in an organization. Solidifying change requires a cultural movement such that the vision becomes the norm (Small, et al., 2016).

Kotter's Model is not limited to athletic organizations. The focus is on the acceptance and preparedness for the change, which makes it an easier transition (Aldemir, 2010). To demonstrate that Kotter's Model is effective, it has been followed to promote patient safety communication within nursing organizations. Using the steps in Kotter's Model, the individuals in this study have concluded that success has been seen. Kotter's model lends itself to building culture. Within the nursing organization, communication was increased, which builds a positive culture. The use of Kotter's model was highly effective because it was easy to follow, was structured, and provided an effective framework to implement a practice change in a health care environment (Small, et al., 2016). Being that Kotter's Model is easy to follow, it allows for programs to likely see success quicker. The model is adaptable to any organization. It can be used to make change happen in practice by selecting the right group of people who will motivate others to change until the practice becomes the norm (Small, et al., 2016). Using Kotter's Model could potentially change the hindered culture of athletic programs. In doing so, following it thoroughly is possibly going to improve culture.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of the semi-structured interviews is to be able to get a deeper understanding on how the athletes within the Virginia Tech Volleyball program are feeling, as well as figuring out how the program can take more steps into the right direction. Because this is a qualitative research design, it is important to grasp their feelings. The researchers keep a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researchers bring to the research or that the writers express in the literature (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative research is best fit for this paper. The new coaches can benefit from the data based on feelings and language. The data from these interviews is going to be able to help coaches change the culture of the organization they are going into and make it their own. Each question pans off of Kotter's Model, which if taken step by step, the program is likely to see positive team culture.

Designing and Planning Interviews

An application was placed through Virginia Tech for an IRB approval. After review, the IRB determined that this project was accepted. Semi-structured interviews were used within this project. Semi-structured interviews take on a variety of different forms, with varying numbers of questions, and varying degrees of adaptation of questions and question order to accommodate the interviewee (Rowley, 2012). The objectives revolved around personal opinions, values, and experiences of the interviewees. These interviews were conducted one on one to ensure confidentiality and allowed for deeper conversation. Interviews give a window on what participants think and how they report their feelings and actions (Holloway, 2015). These interviews were held over "Zoom" (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). Questions were designed to best fit this project's objective and to be based off of Kotter's Model. Choosing Zoom for the interview method was helpful because you are able to record a meeting on any

device. The interviewer is able to go back and listen to what the interviewee has said within the interview. The interviews were further transcribed.

Recruiting Participants

This project is centered on athletes and what factors go into a new coaching staff to be able to change that teams' culture. Firstly, it was important to think about which individuals would be fitting for this study. The participants had to be on, or once affiliated with the Virginia Tech Volleyball Team. There were 12 individuals used in this study. All participants were females. Athletes who had only one coaching staff were not considered. Because there were so many changes there were multiple athletes who have had more than one coaching staff changes in their 4-year time at Virginia Tech. Having multiple participants who have had two or more coaching staff allows for more data.

Conducting Interviews

After IRB approval, the interview process started. An email was sent out to individuals that was once or currently affiliated with Virginia Tech Volleyball and have had 2 or more coaching staff changes. The email mentioned the major points of the project, along with what the interview was going to be like. They were able to choose whether or not they wanted to be a part of this study. Participation in a study should be seen as voluntary (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). They were informed that this interview is professional and that it might include sensitive topics. Reassuring that their names will not be involved within this project was talked about numerous times. For this purpose, they were given alias names. The participants followed the schedule that was sent to them with the dates and times of interview that they had stated they were able to make. Semi-structured interviews were the best way that data was going to be collected. To get the interview started, basic information about the project was introduced along with why it is the

project of interest to a new coaching staff. The introduction needs to create reader interest in the topic, establish the problem that leads to the study, place the study within the larger context of the scholarly literature, and reach out to specific audience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The interviews were conducted over “Zoom” (Zoom Video Communications). Interviews were no more than 45 minutes long. The Zoom calls were recorded. Participants gave consent to be recorded. Recording is necessary within this proposal. This project is made sure to include that the data collected from the interviews is completely anonymous in hopes of gaining honesty from each participant. The data could become distorted due to dishonest responses from each participant. The interviews were transcribed using an Application on Apple, called “Transcribe” (DENIVIP, 2018). Using a laptop, the Application allows for transcribed sentences to be transferred over into a word document, using copy and paste. This Application was time saving. Throughout the transcribing process, every word the participants said is accounted for.

Analysis of Data

Following the conclusions of each interview, the recordings were transcribed into a separate word document. It is important to be able to understand every word that the participants say, as it will help the findings. Data could be hindered if there are words missing in context. The use of the Application “Transcribe” (DENIVIP, 2018), was helpful as it took some time off of the transcription process. Transcriptions were looked over multiple times to ensure that there are no errors within the data. The data was analyzed through a specific 4-step coding process. First, the audio was played back and transcribed. Second, the data was printed from a word document with highlighted phrases that correlate. Phrases that seemingly went together were gathered into a pile. Third, the highlighted piles from the previous step were cut out into phrases, using scissors. Fourth, the cut-out piles were turned into themes based on similarities between the

categories found from the highlighted phrases. Each step was attentively thought out. Five themes stemmed from the different categories. Theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Discovering themes was time consuming because it needed to be done meticulously. Towards the end of the interviewing process, constructive feedback was welcomed from the interviewees. This is important and will allow for further recommendations for the next individual looking into this project.

Chapter 4: Findings

Findings

The purpose of this project is to understand the importance of culture within college athletics, as well as knowing what it takes to come in and change a team's culture. The end results throughout this project are going to be a tremendous help in regards to a new coaching staff coming in to try to improve their team's culture. This project poses the question of: What factors are important for a coach to change a team's culture?

This section contains the findings from the participants that are current and/or once affiliated with the Virginia Tech Volleyball program. There were twelve individuals who had participated in this study. All individuals were female. No freshman participated in this study because they have only had one coach with the Virginia Tech Volleyball program and did not fit the criteria.

All interviews were conducted via "Zoom" (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). Participants were asked twelve questions and were expected to answer honestly. Each question follows Kotter's Model, which hopes for success within whatever program is following that model. These findings are going to allow newer coaching programs to follow these interview responses, as well as Kotter's Model, and use them as a guiding tool to further potential success.

Themes

Upon gathering the data from the interviews, it was important to point out all of the similarities within each individual participant. Using semi-structured interview methods to answer the study question, five themes emerged from the findings. Each participant was eager to share their experiences and thoughts within these questions. They were more than willing to speak on the culture relating to the Virginia Tech Volleyball program over the past few years. While going through the coding process, there were around 70 codes found, which have been brought together to create categories and from that these five themes emerged.

Underlying themes from the findings are:

1. Building Relationships
2. Establishing Communication
3. Displaying Recognition and Reward
4. Dependability
5. Changing Culture

Theme 1: Building Relationships

The first theme revealed the importance of building relationships within an athletic program. The quotes taken from the participants all have similarities with relationships between individuals. The question that was asked: In your opinion, how do you think a coaching staff can create a positive culture?

Callie touched on the importance of how coaching resembles parenting and the relationship between the two. She explained how they relate to each other as well as what it can do positively for a program. Building these relationships between coaches and players is a necessity and will create a positive culture within the program.

“I think coaching often times closely resembles parenting. When your parent wants the best for you they show you tough love, teach you right from wrong, but above all they celebrate your victories. I think to create a positive culture coaches need to understand their athletes’ personalities, capabilities and understand their limits. Pushing them just far enough, but remembering to take the time and celebrate their victories on and off the court. And honesty. Always be honest” (Callie).

Hayley and Kristy talked about how relationships between coaches and players need to be apparent but also needs to be able to maintain the tough coaching aspect as well.

“Creating good relationships with the players. They are a tough coaching staff that we wanted to please. I only think it would be better if I felt like I had a more personal relationship with them” (Hayley).

“By creating one on one relationships/creating an atmosphere of respect. However, also remaining tough and not allowing unprofessional behavior to slide” (Kristy).

Jackie was very eager to answer this question. She mentioned how showing that you care about your players can go a long way. It creates a level of respect between the coaching staff and the players. She talked about how volleyball is a very emotion driven sport and it is easy to slip away if the coaching staff does not get on top of things immediately.

“The biggest improvement that needs to be made is for the coaches to demonstrate that they care about each player beyond what they have to offer on the volleyball court”

(Jackie).

Jackie also stated:

“Strong relationships will make or break this team culture: volleyball is too emotionally driven and the difference between good and great programs is too thin for it not to matter.” (Jackie).

Theme 2: Establishing Communication

The second theme that emerged from the interviews was Establishing Communication. Within the findings, it is pointed out that communication is necessary and if communicated properly, the team will meet the expected goals. The questions following Kotter’s Model in regards to communication is: (1) How were strategic visions communicated to the team? (2) How did the coaching staff make sure everyone was on the same page? (3) Explain how the coaching staff expresses the need for continual improvement?

Becky expressed her discomfort with the communication aspect of the program’s culture. She talked about how sometimes the coaching staff does a poor job at communicating plans, which can be chaotic at times.

“Oftentimes in writing or diagrams in film. They also made sure everyone was on the same page before practices and games with pregame meetings. Sometimes the plan was

not clearly stated and when we went into the game we didn't necessarily have a game plan for the first coaching staff that I was under (Becky).

Callie talked about how communication was consistent in regards to what a player lacks. Although she mentioned this as a negative, she said that it grew their mental toughness in certain situations.

“It was very clearly and consistently communicated that our fundamentals were lacking and needed work. While this form of communication was very direct at times. It made all the difference in our mental toughness and the payoff when we did achieve our large goals was more than worth it. Communication. Clear, consistent and honest communication was the biggest difference” (Callie).

Francesca and Ally took a different approach and talked about how the coaching staff communicated with the teams. They touched on the difference in learning between players and how that should be looked at more. Books and movies were read and watched to create a motto for the team to look back on and think about.

“The coaches' idea of how the team culture should have been was expressed by showing examples of good cultures through books and movies. It was set by providing a motto every year which helped explaining the steps we should have took to reach the desired culture and strategic vision” (Francesca).

Ally agrees with Francesca:

“One surrounded us with motivational quotes, stories, and awards that supported the potential that we could reach as individuals and as a team. The critiques in practice is how they communicated what they wanted us to do and be. They also make it clear what

they are expecting us to accomplish beforehand. If these expectations aren't met they are communicated in the post-season meetings" (Ally).

Ally also expresses her thoughts on the clear image:

"I think both coaching staffs had a clear image of what they wanted in their heads but when it came down to communicating that, I think they could have found more effective methods to do that. Every player learns differently and sometimes it came across poorly" (Ally).

Jackie mentioned how the coaching staff communicated by giving stats and mentioning the ACC tournament to the team as motivation. Jackie had mentioned the lack of communication from the coaching staff when it came to schedules and deadlines. She talked about the coaching staff communicating the expectations and visions that they have set for the team, but nothing more than that. She mentioned the after-season meeting, which is where the coaching staff is able to sit down one-on-one and show your productivity throughout the past year within the program. Jackie mentioned ways that she thinks the communication can improve, which will further create a positive culture.

"The visions have only ever been communicated implicitly, but the idea of being a top team in the ACC is used often in practices and workouts as the motivation for us to give our best effort. Communication between the coaches and players has not been phenomenal. Things such as practice schedule, game schedule, and deadlines to complete tasks are not always clear. At times, the players are disciplined for making mistakes that result from miscommunications. The coaching staff has done a good job of ensuring that everybody is on the same page in terms of expectations and vision, but the details are often left unexplained" (Jackie).

Jackie mentioned her performance review with a coaching staff:

“In my meeting this past season, they provided a graph showing my productivity throughout the season to help illustrate performance trends. Some practical ways that the coaches can shift this cultural issue is by improving communication, especially about issues outside of volleyball; avoiding gossip and slander about team members; and improving consistency and transparency about coaching decisions” (Jackie).

Theme 3: Displaying Recognition and Reward

The question that follows Kotter’s Model is: Explain how the coaching staff celebrated individual wins.

Ellie and Dawn mentioned how the coaching staff is always looking for you to be better. Even if you were to win a game, there was still something that needed to be fixed.

“They would reach out and congratulate us and tell the other coaches as well about our achievements. Even when we accomplish something, they remind us that this is only the beginning and there is still work to do to get even better” (Ellie).

Dawn corroborates Ellie’s statement:

“They celebrate with us but they are always looking for us to be better. If we get a win, it’s a good job but we still need to work on things. This is the way that only makes us better. For academics, if we get a A-, they will be proud but wants us next time to make an A+. they are always looking for ways to improve ourselves and to make us better” (Dawn).

Loren and Ally mentioned how one coaching staff differed from the other in this aspect. One of the coaching staff made sure to celebrate academics and the other coaching staff did not. Loren mentioned that the effort was not recognized, there was no other context behind her

answer. Ally mentioned that one coaching staff would sit down and talk about what could be improved in academics.

“With the prior staff, there would commonly be verbal compliments when there were academic victories, but with the newer staff it is less common. Most of the academic/schedule discussions are between players and our academic advisor. My effort was not recognized. The coaches that I have experienced at Virginia Tech have failed to ever recognize any player on their team that wasn’t one of their star players” (Loren).

Loren talks about the different priorities:

“One coach did a really great job of prioritizing academics. They kept up to date with all of our academic progress, constantly offered to help, and really was a great support system when it came to our school work. When we struggled she didn’t punish us, they sat us down and helped us come up with real solutions to do better. Their commitment to our actual development as individuals was unparalleled, at least in my sports experience with coaches” (Ally).

Ally talks about the difference in coaching staffs that she had experienced:

“With the recent coaches, academics are not really talked about. There are occasional check-ins but they usually only consist of five-minute conversations. They are relatively uninvolved when it comes to our academics. When it comes to volleyball-related awards/wins both coaching staffs acknowledged them relatively well” (Ally).

Jackie expressed how celebrating individual wins was non-existent in one of the coaching staff that she had experienced. There is a lack of communication when it comes to academics.

“The coaches I had have done very little to celebrate individual wins. Poor academic performance is reprimanded, but exceptional performance is unacknowledged. Securing

internships or exciting opportunities outside of volleyball are not usually known about or celebrated. Some affirmation is given within the volleyball context, but it is outweighed by constructive feedback” (Jackie).

Theme 4: Dependability

The fourth theme is dependability, which gains trust and it is important within teams. The questions asked following Kotter’s Model: (1) How does the coaching staff make sure the right individuals are a part of the team? (2) What barriers has the coaching staff removed to reach the desired culture? (3) What was the process of removing those barriers?

Francesca mentioned how they were trying to understand players’ personalities to make sure that they do not clash within the program causing tension. She also mentioned how if there were any players who did not comply with the rules, they would quickly be removed from the team.

“During the recruiting season the coaches would try to understand as best as possible player’s personalities. Coaches put extreme emphasis on social media in their decision-making process. The staff took serious actions to eliminate people that did not comply with the rules. They also introduced the concept of a “dry season” to prevent from people going out and partying during the season” (Francesca).

Callie mentioned the strategies the coaching staff took in order to create dependability. Working on best fit players is very important and should not be taken lightly and Jackie mentions that right fit is more important than the skill of the player.

“My first coaching staff put an emphasis on skill, and less so overall fit in the program. My second coaching staff worked to find players that fit both our program’s skill set/need as well as fitting in with existing players. I believe that right fit is almost more important

as skill. If you aren't happy with your teammates, coaching and with the school itself, your competitive drive dwindles rapidly" (Callie).

Isabelle mentioned the coaching staff would communicate their skills with the athletes at the end of the season. They made aware that everyone is not perfect, which allows for confidence to set in.

"After each semester we have an end of the season meeting with the coaches and if the players performance or their goals don't fall in line with what the coaches want then they have that conversation. The most recent coaching staff has made it clear that we're learning and in the event of learning there's going to be failure sometimes. I feel like they're better at understanding that situations aren't always going to be perfect" (Isabelle).

Ally mentioned her concerns with the two different coaching staff. She mentioned that one of her coaching staff was on top of everything and made sure that you could be dependent on them. Ally mentioned that her other coaching staff did not pay attention to the personalities of the players, only what their skills could bring to the court.

"I think one of the coaches I had definitely took the time to learn about and get to know girls they were seriously recruiting. During my visit, they made me feel very comfortable and I was able to show them who I was and I'd like to think they thought I would get along well with the rest of the team. They were definitely very conscientious of finding girls who would do better than harm to the team's dynamic" (Ally).

Ally mentions her thoughts about another coaching staff:

"The other coaching staff definitely looked at the player and not the person. They gave me the impression that as long as they perform on the court for them, they didn't

particularly care who they might've hurt on the team or what damage they had done to the team dynamic" (Ally).

Jackie mentioned one of the coach's strategies for trying to create dependability. She talked about how there were individuals who were removed because they were not helping the mission of the program. She mentioned that a barrier could have been attitudes within the team in regards to being determined to win because this program had not been winning in the past few years.

"From the two very large teams I have been a part of with the current coaching staff, it seems that their process for selecting the right individuals for the team is to start with a surplus of players and gradually remove anybody who they do not feel fits into their mission" (Jackie).

Jackie talks about how the coaching staff determined who did not fit in their mission:

"People with bad effort, attitude, or team chemistry have been removed, as well as those who were never going to have opportunities to contribute during games. I think the primary barriers the coaches are concerned with are the attitudes within the team. Since the team has been remarkably unsuccessful in recent history, they are trying to shift from a culture that considers losing an acceptable norm to a culture of competitiveness, where anything less than the team's best performance is considered unacceptable. They have been trying to remove those barriers by using drills that force us to compete, being candid about poor performance, and removing players from the team when necessary" (Jackie).

Theme 5: Changing Culture

Changing culture is the last theme that has emerged throughout the interview responses. It is evident that sometimes change is needed in order to build a better culture for a program to

succeed and reach the intended goals. The questions that follow Kotter's Model in regards to changing culture are: (1) How would you describe the culture of the team? (2) What and how has the coaching staff done to institute change within the organization?

Jackie expressed her feelings about change within the program and said that it is very result oriented. There is a lot of good within the program but there are some things that need to be fixed in order to start winning. Jackie mentioned how the coaching staff has expressed their frustration with the past results and are not acceptable to them. She gave some examples on how the coaching staff could start making some changes within the program.

"I would consider the current culture of the team very results-oriented. All activities are done with the expectation that they will move us towards a shared set of goals, in our case: winning games, raising to the top of the conference, and making it to post-season play. Player development and personal relationships are emphasized to the extent that they can help us move towards those goals. The ideals of transparency and honesty are claimed, but not fully practiced. Teammates do a good job of motivating and encouraging one another, but affirmation from coaches can be rare" (Jackie).

Jackie mentioned the expectations:

"The coaches have made it very clear that they are not satisfied with the past results or expectations and have taken the actions described in the preceding questions to change them. These changes involve removing barriers, changing team attitudes, roster changes, new expectations, and a new strategic vision" (Jackie).

Callie mentioned the two different cultures within the coaching staff that she has had and how important change is. Callie had not mentioned anything negative within her response and stated that the change in the team dynamic was the most important part.

“The culture of my first team was very close-knit. We banded together through difficult seasons, off-seasons and coaching decisions. Our focus was often on academics and making the most of our time together on the court. The culture of my second team was very similar, however, there was an unspoken, more intense need to be the best on the court and less so on the camaraderie of the team as a whole” (Callie).

Callie mentions what changed in her team culture:

“I believe the change in the team dynamic was the greatest change between the coaches as a whole. They had different priorities for the team and the athletes responded accordingly. The largest and most obvious way our coaching staff made changes was literally clearing house of all previous personnel. All coaches, weight coaches, the way our academic advisors interacted with us and how we prevented and treated injuries with our trainers” (Callie).

Francesca mentioned that her experience of team culture was interesting. There was a mishandling of some situations within the program that had destroyed the team chemistry and the bonds that the players had. She expressed how the coaching staff try to change the culture by being motivational and reading books along with showing examples of other teams’ cultures.

“The team had a very interesting culture. Once the new coaching staff arrived everyone was very excited and looking forward to new beginnings. Unfortunately, some of the dynamics and situations were not handled as expected. This destroyed the chemistry of the team and ruined previous bonds that the team had” (Francesca).

Francesca talked about her experience with two different staffs:

“The other coaches I had would read us books about culture within the team, about work ethic and how to be successful. They tried to change the culture by showing the team

good examples of successful teams and cultures. The coaches would during the week make every player select one thing that they would work on and have the team select areas of improvement to work on as a unity” (Francesca).

Hayley was mentioning how there was good team chemistry at first but it was based around something negative. Being tough can be a good and bad thing and Hayley mentioned how it could potentially divide a team.

“With the first coach, the team chemistry between the players was very good. We all got along well and had a great time together. However, the reason we all bonded was because we all had something in common – not favoring the coaching staff” (Hayley).

Hayley mentioned her second coaching staff:

“Once we got our second coach things started to change. They upped the expectations and level of our practices and play. They are definitely taking the program in the right direction. However, they are much more tough and straight to the point, which is good, but it can definitely cause a divide in the team of who can hang with them and who can’t. They like people with big personalities so it is a possibility that the girls on the team can clash. However, I think they are a good fit for taking this program in the right direction” (Hayley).

Loren was talking about how the culture is odd because there are players on the team who have had three different coaching staff. With that being said, it is hard to build or change the culture with that many different views.

“The culture is kind of odd due to the fact that we have kids from three different staffs. Because of this, it is hard to build culture. The prior staff would be proactive in talking to whoever needed to be talked to if we needed anything (namely our textbooks when they

apparently didn't come one semester). Additionally, the prior staff placed emphasis on relationships with alumni and doesn't exist with the new staff" (Loren).

Discussion

The different steps in Kotter's Model emphasize what an organization should follow for potential success. After interviewing the participants, the themes are: building relationships, establishing communication, displaying recognition and reward, dependability, changing culture. Each theme is connected to the objective.

Within theme one, relationships, it was noticed that relationships within teammates as well as coaches is very important and was very important. Six participants talked about how important relationships are. From the initial responses, within the past few years the relationships between coaches and players were not established for every athlete. Some players felt they had no relationship with the coaching staff. Coach to athlete relationships are necessary to have to become successful. Coaches who value and focus on effective, personal relationships with their athletes are guaranteed benefits regardless of wins and scores because they will have helped to influence positive moral and ethical behaviors (Gels, 2017). As a coaching staff, you should always want your players to excel in every aspect of life, this starts with good relationships.

Within theme two, communication, it was understood that there is good communication in most aspects within the Virginia tech Volleyball program. Communication is the key to many things. Communication plays a huge role in team process and team performance. You have to be able to communicate to understand. Improving on the communication skills of the people in your team or business is an easy and relatively inexpensive way to develop your overall performance (Hanson, 2021). Athletic performance within this program is well communicated in regards to the coaching staff initiating it. However, the program seems to lack communication for other

activities, such as academics. This could become an issue down the road if not addressed.

According to Athlete Assessments, “Being able to communicate effectively is not limited to how your athlete is feeling. Establishing communication not just about athletics could unfold potential success.

Within the third theme, displaying recognition and reward, is important and gains confidence. The Virginia Tech Volleyball program has done well when recognizing its athletes as well as rewarding them. The participants did not seem to have any excessive emotions towards the questions that this theme emerged from. Some participants felt as if their effort was not noticed. Demi strongly stated, “I think the coaching staff can create a positive culture by having full confidence in their team. For me, if I know that the coaching staff believes in me and the team then I have confidence in myself and my team to change this program around” (Demi). Confidence allows for success. Recognizing and rewarding the athletes within the program is essential and can help create a positive culture.

Within the fourth theme, dependability, it is important when dealing with any sort of team or program. If you are dependable, you are trustworthy and reliable. As a leader, you should want people to be able to trust you and to be able to rely on you. Coaches hold a lot of responsibility when it comes to a collegiate athletic program. From the responses the staff has shown that there are times that they are trustworthy and reliable. However, this seemed to be a sort of touchy subject in regards to feelings when interviewing these participants. Some seemed a little uncomfortable answering these questions regarding this theme, more so than the other questions. Some participants mentioned how the coaching staff got rid of individuals who seem to be toxic to the culture of the team. This allows for the athletes to be aware that the coaching staff only wanted what is best for the athletes and the program’s success. Being able to remove

individuals who do not belong or create a toxic environment, shows that the coaching staff has the program's best interest at heart.

Within the fifth theme, changing culture, these seemed to be the most interactive questions when it came to the participants' responses. This theme is based around the questions that mention the program's culture as well as what the coaching staff have implemented in order to create the change they want. The questions were based off of Kotter's model, which is all about moving forward and helping programs succeed. Jackie mentioned, "since the team has been remarkably unsuccessful in recent history, they are trying to shift from a culture that considers losing an acceptable norm to a culture of competitiveness, where anything less than the team's best performance is considered unacceptable" (Jackie). Many of the participants had mentioned the same ideas about their thoughts about the program's culture. These changes involve removing barriers, changing team attitudes, roster changes, new expectations, and a new strategic vision (Jackie). There has been strides of change from all coaching staff to try to create the culture that they wanted to achieve. Unfortunately, this could lead to players feeling alienated if they are one of the players being removed. Culture is all about movement and change. If an individual is not ready for that change, they will be removed.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In conclusion, this study shows the importance of culture within college athletic teams. The purpose of this study was to answer the question: what factors are important for a coach to change a team's culture? This data made it possible to do so. There were five themes that had come from the data collected which are: building relationships, establishing communication, displaying recognition and reward, dependability and changing culture.

The Virginia Tech Volleyball program has struggled for many years with the team culture. This study provides real responses from athletes affiliated with the program about their thoughts in regards to the culture of the program. It shows the importance of culture within an athletic program and what coaches are able to take away from it.

By using Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change, the study was able to identify themes and factors. Kotter's Model is extremely important within this study. The purpose of using Kotter's Model within the questions was to be able to give the coaches something manageable and efficient to follow. There were many positive responses that came from the participants. This means that they were able to follow Kotter's Model and not even realize they were doing so. If more programs would use this specific model to frame their program around, more positive outcomes are likely to materialize.

Each theme that emerged from the participants' responses correlates back to each of Kotter's Model steps. The first theme that emerged from the data was building relationships. This theme comes from the fourth step in Kotter's Model, enlist a volunteer army. You need every individual to be on the same page moving forward. From the interview questions, relationships were a major topic between the participants. Five participants stated something about relationships and how important they are. In contrast, players could potentially form an

army against the coaches. If those relationships are built in positive ways by coaches, the culture would not be hindered.

The second theme that emerged was establishing communication. Communication falls under the third step in Kotter's Model, form a strategic vision and initiative. Clarify how the future will be different from the past and how you can make that future a reality through initiatives linked directly to the vision (Kotter, 2021). There were a few participants that mentioned that the coaching staff was adamant about changing the past habits of the program. In doing so, it needs to be clarified and communicated. There should not be a disconnection between the sender and the receiver for a powerful communication (Gürgen, 1997). A few participants stated that the coaching staff lacks effective communication. This disconnection has caused frustration and confusion.

The third theme that emerged was recognition and reward. This theme connects to the sixth step in Kotter's Model, generating short-term wins. Wins need to be recognized and rewarded. It was made aware that this program lacks this aspect. There were many participants mentioning that this was a weak point that needs to be looked into. Many pointed out that academics were not recognized. Players were only recognized if they performed well on the court. If the program is able to do better recognizing and rewarding athletes, not just in skills, it will create that energy that makes the athletes feel valued. The coaching staff at Virginia Tech seem to struggle with celebrating small victories as well as not asking about academics, only once the athlete is rewarded publicly. The coaching staff actively communicated skills with players but lacked communicating about scheduling, leaving the players confused. Poor academic performance is reprimanded, but exceptional performance is unacknowledged (Jackie).

The fourth theme within the project that emerged was dependability. The theme connects back to two steps in Kotter's Model. The first step is step 5, enabling action by removing barriers. Removing barriers such as inefficient processes and hierarchies provides the freedom necessary to work across silos and generate real impact (Kotter, 2021). Dependability created trust and reliability. As a coach, you want your athletes to see you as such. The participants made it aware that the removal of some individuals who do not necessarily belong in the new culture had potentially started to change the culture shift to positive. The next step that this theme connects to is step 7, sustain acceleration. Acceleration only happens if it is pushed. Press harder after the first successes.. be relentless with initiating change after change until the vision is a reality (Kotter, 2021). It is important that a coach knows how important creating a positive reality is within a program. Athletes depend on coaches to be able to carry the program and allow it to accelerate in the right direction. From the participants' responses, it is likely that they are wanting to celebrate the victories longer than what is allowed, if at all. The participants note that their successes are occasionally noted, but are always followed by how they can improve. Acceleration is something that coaches want to see within their program, but if there is no success noticed acceleration is likely to stop.

The last theme that has emerged was changing culture. This theme connects with Kotter's Model and step 8, which is institute change. This is the most important step within Kotter's Model as it is the step that brings everything together. Articulate the connections between the new behaviors and organizational success, making sure they continue until they become strong enough to replace old habits (Kotter, 2021). Creating change within programs

is difficult as some of the participants stated. Some had also mentioned habits and how some are toxic, which needs to change.

Limitations of Project

One limitation within the project was my affiliation with the Virginia Tech Volleyball program, which could have created bias. This is called social desirability bias. Social desirability bias refers to the tendency of research subjects to give socially desirable responses instead of choosing responses that are reflective of their true feelings (Grimm, 2010). I was a part of the program for 4 years, recently finishing my last season. This could have been a limitation because some of the athletes might have not been as honest. Some participants could have felt nervous that the information was going to get out somehow and their name could be seen somewhere within this project. Hesitation is not something you want within a project when trying to obtain honesty. Showing concern and allowing it to be known that everything is going to be anonymous is very important to incorporate within the interview process.

Sample size is a limitation within this project. The number of participants wanted was 10-15. There were individuals who have had a different number of coaching staff, which could potentially become a limitation if not collected correctly. Keeping players that had only one coach would hinder the data as it is focused multiple cultures from different coaching staffs. The project was kept to having the individuals who have had two or more coaching staff within the program.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to consider building strong relationships with the individuals in the program. After conducting this study, building relationships between athletes and coaches seems to be the main aspect of building positive culture within athletic programs. The coaching

staff should focus on relationships outside of athletics. For example, asking about academics or family. This study shows real life examples on how important relationships are. Placing focus upon building relationships between athletes and coaches has shown positive results. The coaching staff should facilitate those relationships early in order to hopefully create a more successful program.

The second recommendation is to follow Kotter's 8-Step Process for Leading Change. Kotter's model is a well written model that has been followed and shown to change culture in organizations. This model was cultivated from over four decades of Dr. Kotter's observations of countless leaders and organizations as they were trying to transform or execute their strategies (Kotter, 2021). It is important to implement the 8 steps with athletes in the program before and after every season, to get a better understanding of the culture as well as the athletes.

My third recommendation is to establish and improve communication during the new coaching change process. It is important for the athletes to have some type of communication as this process could be confusing. Some individuals in this study mentioned that sometimes the communication was confusing. Jackie had stated, "Communication between the coaches and players has not been phenomenal. Things such as practice schedule, game schedule, and deadlines to complete tasks are not always clear. At times, the players are disciplined for making mistakes that result from miscommunications" (Jackie). Clear, consistent and honest communication was the biggest difference (Callie). The communication needs to be transparent. Communication is necessary and needs to be imposed.

My fourth recommendation is to gather a practitioner specifically assigned to the volleyball team. An individual who has had previous collegiate athletic experience might be more beneficial. When a coaching staff is changed, the new staff is able to get rid of whoever

they want to in regards to the staff. The new coaching staff should not have the right to remove the assigned practitioner from the staff. This practitioner will create relationships with each of the athletes. The practitioner will give them someone to talk to as well as someone the athletes can lean on if another change were to happen. Change is inevitable. Having an individual who is stable and involved with the volleyball team might be beneficial to the program as a whole.

Future Considerations

Further research needs to be done in regards to volleyball and team culture. There is a lack of research from opposing angles as well. Interviewing coaches about their intentions on changing culture could be beneficial to the athletes. Kotter's Model could be beneficial when asking questions to the coaching staff as well. Although Kotter's Model has been studied for over 4 decades, there is limited research when using Kotter's Model for athletic teams, especially volleyball programs.

Reflexivity Statement

As a former Virginia Tech Volleyball player, I have taken it upon myself to try to help hindered cultures. The culture I had experienced was hindered. In my experience, I have had 3 out of the 4 coaching staff changes. Trying to grasp a culture with so many changes is difficult. We could never come together to follow a specific culture because there were so many changes happening. Some coaches brought players with them who they had coached at their previous school. This created tension between current and new players. Personality differences was something that hindered the culture, or lack thereof, that I was a part of. Culture is something that needs to stay consistent in order to be followed. Hearing what each participant mentioned, was everything I had experienced at one time or another, good or bad. I am going to provide this study to collegiate coaches in hopes to create awareness about culture and the factors that will guide hindered culture in the right direction.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment Script

Hello _____, this is Kaitlin Smith, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my study on the effects of a new coaching staff on team culture. Part of this project includes interviews with past and current volleyball student athletes at Virginia Tech. Due to your involvement and knowledge within this program I am asking if you would like to participate. The interview would be no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted by myself via Zoom.

Appendix B: Icebreaker, Interview Questions & Prompts

Icebreaker – Tell the participants the purpose of the study as well as why I am conducting the study. It is important to thank the participants for their time. I made it very clear that their responses are completely anonymous and will never have their names being used. Each participant has had two or more coaching staffs within the past four years.

Interview Questions & Prompts

1. How many coaching staffs have you had at your time at VT?
2. How would you describe the culture of the team?
 - a. How has the culture changed between different coaches?
3. What has the coaching staff done to create a sense of urgency?
4. How does the coaching staff make sure the right individuals are a part of the team?
5. What were the coach's strategic visions set for the team?
 - a. How were the strategic visions communicated to the team?
6. How did the coaching staff make sure everyone was on the same page? If they didn't, explain.
7. How has the coaching staff created a culture where people are excited to show up?
8. What barriers has the coaching staff removed to reach the desired culture? What was the process of removing those barriers?
9. Explain how the coaching staff celebrated individual wins. Ex. Academics.
10. Explain how the coaching staff expresses the need for continual improvement?
11. What and how has the coaching staff done to institute change within the organization?
12. In your own opinion, how do you think a coaching staff can create a positive culture?

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
 Research Compliance
 Institutional Review Board
 North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
 300 Turner Street NW
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
 540/231-3732
 irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/siro/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: June 16, 2021
TO: Richard James Rateau
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: The Effects of a New Coaching Staff on Team Culture
IRB NUMBER: 21-554

Based on the submitted project description and items listed in the Special Instructions section found on Page 2, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) has determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by HHS and FDA regulations.

Further review and approval by the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) is not required because this is not human research. This determination applies only to the activities described in the submitted project description and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made you must immediately submit an Amendment to the HRPP for a new determination. Your amendment must include a description of the changes and you must upload all revised documents. At that time, the HRPP will review the submission activities to confirm the original "Not Research" decision or to advise if a new application must be made.

If there are additional undisclosed components that you feel merit a change in this initial determination, please contact our office for a consultation.

Please be aware that receiving a "Not Research" Determination is not the same as IRB review and approval of the activity. You are NOT to use IRB consent forms or templates for these activities. If you have any questions, please contact the Virginia Tech HRPP office at 540-231-3732 or irb@vt.edu.

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Not Research**
 Protocol Determination Date: **June 16, 2021**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

Appendix D: Consent Form

Hello _____, this is Kaitlin Smith, and I am currently working towards the completion of my Master's degree and I will be conducting my study on the effects of a new coaching staff on team culture. As a part of my Virginia Tech Master's Degree project I will be conducting interviews. These recorded interviews will provide feedback that will not only guide my project, but will also allow for the Virginia Tech Volleyball Staff to continue enhancing their team culture. Please answer the following questions below to the best of your abilities.