CHAPTER 6

Leadership Behaviors for Athletic Trainers

"You treat a disease, you win, you lose. You treat a person, I guarantee you, you'll win, no matter what the outcome."

— **Patch Adams**

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▶ **Introduction**

According to the Association for Talent Development (ATD), companies in the United States spent over $164 billion on training and development in 2013 and that is only projected to increase in the next several years.[1] A large percentage of that, some estimates say $50 billion, is spent on leadership development alone.[2] The value that many people place on leadership is not without its cause. For example, research in medicine has reported that preliminary evidence of money spent on leadership development practices contributed toward improving patient outcomes.[3] There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that leadership is important to organizational and individual success.[2] Attempts to delineate leadership have produced lengthy lists of behaviors, skills, or abilities.

Likewise, there is a growing interest in leadership within athletic training.[4-11] Athletic training research has both identified leadership behaviors that are important for athletic training practice as well as competencies that should be taught in educational programs and as developed models for teaching leadership (**TABLE 6.1**). Athletic trainers should be aware of the leadership behaviors that contribute to organizational and individual effectiveness.

This chapter focuses on some of the specific leadership behaviors that the athletic trainer can implement in everyday practice. We will begin by discussing general healthcare leadership and evidence-based leadership. Next, we will discuss specific leadership behaviors that athletic trainers can implement. This is followed by a discussion of motivational theory and techniques that can be used by the athletic trainer. After motivation, we turn to a discussion of management tools that can be used by the athletic trainer to operate a more efficient athletic training facility.

TABLE 6.1 Leadership Research in Athletic Training*			
Date	**Author(s)**	**Journal**	**Title**
1994	Nellis	Journal of Athletic Training	Leadership and management: Techniques and principles for athletic training
2002	Platt-Meyer	Journal of Athletic Training	Athletic training clinical instructors is situational leaders
2002	Platt- Meyer	Athletic Therapy Today	Leadership characteristics as significant predictors of clinical teaching effectiveness
2007	Laurent and Bradney	Journal of Athletic Training	Leadership behaviors of athletic training leaders compared with leaders in other fields
2008	Kutz	Athletic Therapy Today	Leadership factors for athletic trainers

TABLE 6.1 *(Continued)*			
Date	**Author(s)**	**Journal**	**Title**
2008	Kutz and Scialli	Journal of Allied Health	Leadership content important in athletic training education with implications for allied healthcare
2009	Herzog, Zimmerman, and Lauber	Athletic Therapy Today	Transformational leadership in building relationships with clinical instructors
2010	Kutz	Journal of Allied Health	Leadership in athletic training: Implications for practice and education
2012	Kutz	Athletic Training education Journal	A review and clinical framework for integrating leadership into clinical practice
2012	Kutz	Athletic Training Education Journal	Leadership is positively related to athletic training students' clinical behaviors
2013	Katch, Tomczyk, Shinkle, and Berry	Athletic Training Education Journal	Students perspectives of leadership development
2013	Hazelbaker	Journal of Athletic Training	Perceived skills and abilities required by athletic trainers in hospital and clinical management positions: A Delphi study
2015	Mazerolle, Burton, and Cotrufo	Journal of Athletic Training	The experiences of female athletic trainers in the role of the head athletic trainer
2016	Pagnotta, Mazerolle, Pitney, Burton, and Casa	Journal of Athletic Training	Implementing health and safety policy changes at the high school level from a leadership perspective
2016	Peer and Webster	Athletic Training Education Journal	Bystanders to upstanders: Using the social change model of leadership to embrace educational reform
2018	Kutz and Doherty-Restrepo	Athletic Training Education Journal	Frequency of leadership behaviors among athletic trainers in university settings

*This list does not include dissertations, theses, and journal abstracts (which would considerably lengthen this list).

▶ Critical Leadership Questions

Articulating a philosophy of leadership is important. There are several leadership behaviors reported to be important for athletic training practice.[11] Some of these behaviors are specific to athletic training and others are general—that is, they transcend context and are not role or title dependent—and can be transferred between jobs, work settings, and social settings. However, before delineating any specific leadership behaviors, it will be helpful to perform a leadership awareness exercise, which will help you to articulate your philosophy of leadership. Take a moment to critically reflect on the following questions:

1. Who have I seen demonstrate leadership effectively?
2. What specific actions did I observe in that person to make me think that he or she was a leader?
3. Who have I observed who failed to demonstrate leadership effectively?
4. How is leadership "success" defined by others (e.g., at work and in athletic training, in settings outside of work)?
5. How do I define leadership success?
6. What leadership behaviors do I currently exhibit?
7. What are the early predictors of leadership that I look for in others?
8. What is it about my becoming a better leader that will enhance the profession of athletic training?
9. Do I consider myself to be a leader?

It is important that you are able to answer the above questions so that your leadership development can be informed and intentional.

Other questions that are important for leadership development include: is leadership an integrated cluster of tangible skills? Or, does leadership consist primarily of intangible abilities? The fact is that leadership consists of both tangible and intangible abilities. The tangible (or observable) behaviors of leadership include strategic thinking, communication, initiative and drive, time management, and resilience. The intangible aspects of leadership consist of things like personality, interpersonal skills, presence, social judgment, intuition, and attitude.

Intangible leadership skills are difficult to teach to another person, but they are often considered the "real" indicators of a leader. The tangible leadership skills are easier to teach. Therefore, the majority of leadership development has defaulted to teaching observable and measurable behaviors (or competencies). There is no question that in order to become a leader and to practice leadership successfully, it is important to develop intangible leadership skills. However, tangible skills are certainly easier to identify and measure. Regardless, leadership skills, in general, occur within a given context. Failing to understand how context influences leaders and followers can lead to incredible frustration.

▶ The Leader–Follower–Context Nexus

Context matters and it matters way more than most people realize.[12] In fact, traditional concepts of leadership are becoming insufficient because they "suffer" from what has been described as sole focus on either the leader, the follower (usually in a one-on-one relationship), or the context.[13] In other words, most leadership thinking fails to address the reality of a leader–follower–context nexus and the resulting complexity and volatility. Solutions are needed that provide a lens for leadership that accommodates the nuances of this nexus.[14–15] Failing to consider the leader, the follower, and the context collectively often leads to incomplete or inaccurate perceptions. It is important to explore what each of the elements of this nexus entails (**FIGURE 6.1**).

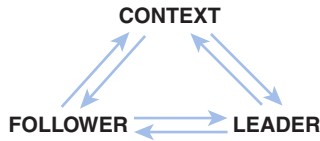Athletic training literature has identified several leadership myths that propagate

CONTEXT

FOLLOWER ⇄ **LEADER**

FIGURE 6.1 Leader–Follower–Context Nexus.

confusion and misunderstanding about leadership itself as well as followers and context. Here are some of those leadership myths:

1. Good leadership is common sense.
2. Leadership can only be learned in the school of hard knocks.
3. The best leaders solve all problems and have the best solutions.
4. The person with the highest ranking title or most seniority exercises the most influence.
5. To be a great leader, a person needs a charismatic personality.
6. To be a better leader, you have to mimic someone else's style.

These common leadership myths keep many qualified and deserving people from assuming leadership positions in organizations, or worse, keep them from trying to become a better leader.

Addressing Leadership Myths

These and other leadership myths need to be debunked. The reality is that leaders have to work very hard and many people with "common sense" do not necessarily make good leaders. The myth that leadership is learned in the school of hard knocks implies that experience is the only thing that matters, or worse, that valuable experience only comes through years of failure. While trial and error is an effective way to learn leadership, it is certainly not the only way, especially if one is willing to learn from the failures and successes of others. Certainly, leaders solve problems, but it is a myth to assume that they have all of the answers all of the time. The truth is the best leaders have a clear understanding of their limitations and work well with others in solving problems. Relative to

the myth of rank or seniority, it may have been true in the past that the most influence was held by the person at the top of the hierarchal structure; however, it is not the case in complex organizations nowadays. Speaking about the myth that leaders need a certain personality is entirely false in a remnant from trait theory ideals. The reality is that leaders who have followers have them because they have earned respect because of their hard work, integrity, dedication, and character. Finally, the myth that leaders should mimic the style of other popular leaders is completely fallacious and false. Trying to do what other people have done totally neglects your unique attributes and ignores the role and influence of context and followers.

The Context

Context has a tremendous impact on the process of leadership, especially within athletic training. Context consists of the values, cultural biases, political convictions, religious values, and the experiences and expectations that people always carry with them; those often lie "beneath the surface" of what they are often willing to discuss but have a profound impact on the external environment. Given this, it is easy to imagine how mixing together many people's contexts gives every situation its own unique fingerprint. Combine the individual's context with the organization's, department's, or profession's history, culture, core values, and policies and procedures, and you can begin to see how complex the context can be. Being able to diagnose the context becomes an important skill for athletic trainers, much like diagnosing an orthopedic injury is important for selecting the best treatment. Diagnosing the context is necessary for selecting the best course of action. Furthermore, just like diagnosing an injury requires an in-depth understanding of a patient's history, current complaint, knowledge of anatomy and arthrokinematics, special tests, neurology, and prognosis, and the patient's expectations; so does diagnosing the context require awareness and knowledge of several internal and external factors that are all relevant.

The origin of the word contexts comes from the Latin *contexere*, which means "to weave together." It was a term that represented the different fabrics and textures used to put together a tapestry. In effect, context is all of the different textures and colors of fabric that create a beautiful picture. Therefore, metaphorically speaking, in order to lead effectively within any context, the leader must be able to discern and decipher all of the different "threads" in a particular picture at which they are looking. That picture, of course, is analogous to the context in which you reside at any particular moment. The added difficulty to diagnosing context is that context is dynamic and always changing. Part of the reason for that continual changing is the fact that the actors within a context are always moving. Those actors are called followers and are another critical element to this nexus.

Followership

The final element in the leader–follower–context nexus is the follower. The fact is that followers' play an important role in contributing to leadership outcomes.[16] Followership is the process of being guided and directed by a leader in their work.[17] In essence, followership is the degree to which individuals allow themselves to believe in and submit to the authority of a leader. The degree to which the individuals will submit includes the follower's biases, preconceptions, and the expectations of the leader. The identities of the followers have added a great deal of complexity to understanding leadership; but those identities are essential to understanding it. Interestingly, the concept of followership was not relevant before knowledge management or a knowledge worker was understood. Because today's workforce is highly educated, and perhaps even more educated or more skilled than many of their supervisors, followership has become a powerful concept.

Followership, as a discipline, is the study of how a follower's traits, emotions, and attitudes influence his or her perceptions of, or preferences for, certain types of leaders. Without an understanding of followers, it is not possible to fully understand leadership or the context in which leadership takes place (e.g., organizational dynamics). The significance of followership is closely tied to what was presented in Chapter 5 about power and submission. The fact is that followers have a large degree of power within the workplace because they can voluntarily withdraw their support of any leader at any time. Therefore, leaders, to some degree, are dependent upon a follower's voluntary submission to accomplish desired leadership outcomes. This new understanding of how followers use power is an important aspect of contextual intelligence (discussed later in this chapter).

VUCA Reality

Leader–follower–context nexus, globalization, constant turnover of personnel and morale, and the constant changing of technology and workplace regulations has led to a new workplace reality called **VUCA**. VUCA is an acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Healthcare fits very nicely into the VUCA paradigm and failing to recognize it and adapt to it is hazardous.[16] The degree to which healthcare experiences volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity is profound. In fact, research in global education has found that the knowledge base provided by healthcare and medical education is unfortunately not sufficient once it is in a VUCA environment.[18]

The VUCA reality has a profound impact on how we solve problems and practice leadership. Acknowledging a VUCA reality is to realize that we can no longer solve problems using linear patterns of thinking based on Newtonian mechanics that include metaphors like, "we are firing on all cylinders," or "we are a well-oiled machine." In a VUCA, world things are nonlinear and chaotic (chaotic in the quantum physics sense, of an unknown, but nonrandom, pattern).

Volatility

Volatility is a condition of being unstable and is usually a consequence of rapid change or a reaction between two or more agents (e.g., followers, context, and leaders). Within the context of workplace-leadership people, the economy, products and services, rules and regulations, etc. can all be highly volatile. That means that at any time, and without any notice, they can change. Volatility also includes the unknown consequences or outcomes of an impending change. It is similar to knowing that something is going to change and it will be dramatically different but not knowing when it will happen or how different it will be. Living with that reality is living with volatility.

Athletic training leaders, must be prepared to live with and navigate volatility. A perfect example of volatility in athletic training was when the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) announced that the required professional preparation for an athletic trainer was to be the Master's degree. For example, clinical professionals, educators, universities, and employers knew that a change was happening, and despite having a deadline, did not know exactly when its impact would affect them, for how long it would impact them, or the degree of the impact. Furthermore, there was no one-size-fits-all way to implement that change; therefore, no one knew how that change would be implemented or the scope of its effect on them individually or the profession as a whole. This volatility made many people uncomfortable, but it is a reality that leaders must navigate nonetheless.

To work in a volatile environment means that on any given day, at any given time, things will operate differently today than they did yesterday. Failure to accept this is akin to a leader sticking his or her head in the sand. Athletic training leaders must be prepared to lead and direct in volatile environments. This

may be one of the reasons why burnout and stress are so high among athletic trainers. The nature of the work that athletic trainers do every day is volatile. For example, athletic trainers are constantly educating themselves and preparing for a catastrophic emergency that hopefully will never happen. This is volatility and to lead in a volatile environment is different from leading in a stable environment. Unfortunately, so much of what leadership education has been in the past required learning rules and regulations for leading in a stable and volatile environment, which, quite honestly, no longer exists—and, possibly never has for athletic trainers.

One final example of how this plays out in athletic training is a difference between learning management of a healthcare facility and learning to lead within the healthcare industry. Managing a healthcare facility (e.g., budgeting, facility design, recordkeeping, scheduling, SWOT [strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats] analysis, etc.) requires Newtonian-based concepts of mechanics and that skill set can be easily learned and measured. However, leadership within the VUCA healthcare industry requires a completely different skill set.

Uncertainty

Uncertainty is a condition of not being able to predict what will happen or identify the causal agents of a particular outcome. Within the context of leadership, that means not knowing the cause-and-effect relationship of events. This is particularly problematic in athletic training because we are trained as clinicians to be able to predict certain outcomes. Even much of the research we digest is predicated on evidence-based practice, i.e., identifying an option with the most predictable outcome for treatment. Or, identifying the cause of an injury. Within athletic training, there is dynamic tension between the clinical world and the "leadership world."

The metaphor of uncertainty in athletic training could be a differential diagnosis. Even though a patient presents with certain characteristics that are indicative of a certain condition, we still devise a differential diagnosis, which is a list of several possible conditions a particular set of symptoms could be indicating. Leading in an uncertain world also requires that as we diagnose the context, we come up with a list of several possible options.

Complexity

Complexity is the interconnected and irreducible nature of all of the variables that have an influence within an environment. The best way to understand complexity is to compare it with something that is complicated. Something that is complicated, like a car engine, has many moving parts, each of which can be separated and isolated if they need to be fixed. In a complicated system, identifying the problem is easy, assuming you are familiar with all of the pieces in the system and how they should work. Once identified, you simply replace the broken part and the system continues to function as it did before. However, that is not the case with complexity.

A complex system is nothing like a complicated system; the only similarity is that it also has many moving parts. In a complex system, its parts cannot be isolated or taken out of the whole. An example of a complex system would be a birthday cake. A birthday cake also has many "parts" (i.e., eggs, milk, sugar, flour, etc.), but once these ingredients are mixed together, they cannot be separated afterward. Therefore, solving problems in a complex system is completely different from solving a problem in a complicated system. Trying to apply techniques developed for complicated systems can never be very effective in complex systems. Therefore, athletic trainers need to learn to lead in complex environments and manage in complicated ones.

The added difficulty of complexity is that you can never know every variable that contributes to a situation. In fact, it is the complexity of the healthcare industry that makes strategic planning so challenging. Finally, outcomes within a complex system tend to be disproportionate to the input. In other words, in a complex system, very small, minor changes could result in small, almost unnoticeable alterations or disproportionately huge alterations. Likewise, very large changes could have almost no impact and vice versa. Within a complex system, there is no way to predict the magnitude of the outcome.

Ambiguity

Ambiguity is the inability to accurately discern a distinguishing characteristic of or between events. Stated another way, something that is ambiguous is difficult to distinguish from something else. A clinical example of ambiguity is not being able to clearly diagnose a particular injury. For example, your patient may have swelling in the lateral ankle and you are not exactly sure what the injury is; it could be *this* or it could be *that*, and despite your best effort and all of your clinical experience, you still cannot distinguish between the options. In that case, your next best course of action is to treat the issue generically, or as best you can. That usually means that you try a couple of different treatments to see which one works better. A similar scenario is often true within organizational leadership.

Within the context of organizational leadership, there are many situations where you do not know exactly what is going on or what is happening so it is important to do the best you can. Athletic trainers must have a broad base of leadership and life experiences to draw from so that *wisdom* can play a role in these ambiguous situations. Leading in an ambiguous environment means that the leader must be willing to experiment and try new things.

▶ Understanding Organizational Culture

All athletic trainers should make an effort to assess the organizational culture of potential employers. Organizational culture is important because it can help define boundaries, establish identities, facilitates stability and comfort, and helps regulate attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, organizational culture plays a role in determining the areas in which the organization is able to learn easily and those areas in which the organization is likely to resist change.[19] Often, the leadership style and strategies that will be used by your supervisors or that you might be expected to use are largely dependent on the organizational culture. Organizational culture is the personality of the organization and stems from the organization's beliefs, knowledge, attitudes, and customs; they are the framework and assumptions deemed true by the organization's employees.

The foundation of organizational culture is determined by the presence of four elements: symbols, heroes and heroines, rituals, and values[20]:

1. *Symbols* are the words or objects used to communicate ideas within an organization. For example, the use (or lack of use) of technical jargon can establish a certain culture. Written or unwritten performance expectations can also be powerful symbols.
2. *Heroes or heroines* are the people (alive or dead, real or imagined) who represent the ideals of the organization. For example, awarding the Sayers "Bud" Miller Award to a distinguished athletic training educator or the Dick Butkus award to an outstanding linebacker indicates that those individuals may be heroes within the organization and the behaviors and attitudes they represent are desirable traits.
3. *Rituals* are those actions that fill social needs within an organization. An example might be casual Friday or opening each staff meeting a certain way.
4. *Values*, which are the priorities held by the organization, are an important part of organizational culture. Failure to embrace an organization's values can lead to a frustrating career if not termination.

Whereas organizational structure is easier to delineate (i.e., organizational charts and hierarchy), organizational culture is less tangible and can be difficult to measure. Often, any symbols, beliefs, attitudes, and rituals of organizations are implied (as opposed to stated explicitly). Because they are not explicitly stated, it does not make them any less important. Caccia-Bava[21] identified four types of organizational culture:

1. *Developmental*: Typically, developmental cultures are flexible and have an external focus. The external focus is typically on gaining a competitive advantage by being aware of what others are doing. Developmental cultures are often adaptable, focus on growth, provide adequate resources, are willing to take necessary risks, resist formal hierarchy, and are governed by ideology.
2. *Group*: Typically, group cultures are flexible and have an internal focus. Internally, the focus seems to be on systems and clear lines of communication. Group cultures are often cohesive, have high morale, develop human resources, are very supportive and clan oriented, and are governed by affiliation and a sense of belonging.
3. *Rational*: Typically, rational cultures are predictable (versus flexible) and have an external focus. Rational cultures set a high priority on strategic planning and goal setting, operate efficiently (based

on expected outcomes and policies and procedures), value competence, and are governed by contract (i.e., transactional).

4. *Hierarchical*: Typically, hierarchical cultures are predictable and have an internal focus. Hierarchical cultures value stability and place a premium on control and the internal environment. Information is a powerful tool and is disseminated cautiously. There is often a value placed on conservative and cautious thinking. Hierarchical cultures gain compliance by promoting rules and regulations and are similar to a bureaucracy.

The next logical question is, what are the leadership behaviors that athletic trainers need to exhibit? The next section covers some of the general leadership competencies required of any healthcare professional. After that, specific behaviors are identified for leadership of athletic trainers.

▶ Leadership Competencies in Healthcare

Many leadership skills are similar among healthcare workers.[22] There is a growing body of evidence that suggests that leadership skills may be transferable among industries and organizations.[23–24] In this sense, there are generic leadership abilities that can be employed in almost any environment or setting.

The Pew Commission[25] identified 21 competencies of the competent healthcare professional. Interestingly, competency 17 "practice leadership" indicates that all healthcare professionals, whether or not they seek administrative and managerial positions, should be exposed to experiences that improve their ability to communicate, negotiate, lead, and facilitate change.[25] The implications of this

recommendation are that practicing leadership should not be restricted to those in formal positions of authority. Rather, it implies that communicating, negotiating, and facilitating change are the behaviors of healthcare professionals, regardless of position. Another aspect of leadership is the judicial application of evidence in decision making.

Evidence-Based Leadership

Leadership is an evidence-based professional activity.[26] Unfortunately, with leadership, disregarding sound evidence, relying solely on personal experience, following the popular ideas, management gurus, and bestselling books are too common.[27] The idea of evidence-based practice hasn't yet filtered into leadership practices. The tendency to ignore evidence in leadership decisions is especially troubling given the fact that managerial work affects the lives of so many people.[27]

Leadership decisions should not be made in a vacuum and should include available evidence. *Evidence-based leadership* is a structured method for interpreting and applying evidence in the identification of appropriate actions and the innovative and creative implementation of decisions. Evidence in this construct includes past experiences and best practices. **FIGURE 6.2** is a graphic depiction of what "evidence" is available in an evidence-based leadership process. The available evidence includes knowledge of established leadership theory, the historic experiences of corporate and team decisions, knowledge of individual past decisions, outcomes of and reactions to those decisions, context-specific knowledge, and knowledge of relationships and motivation. The next section will delineate some specific leadership behaviors that are important for athletic trainers. This is certainly not an exhaustive list but serves as a sound starting point.
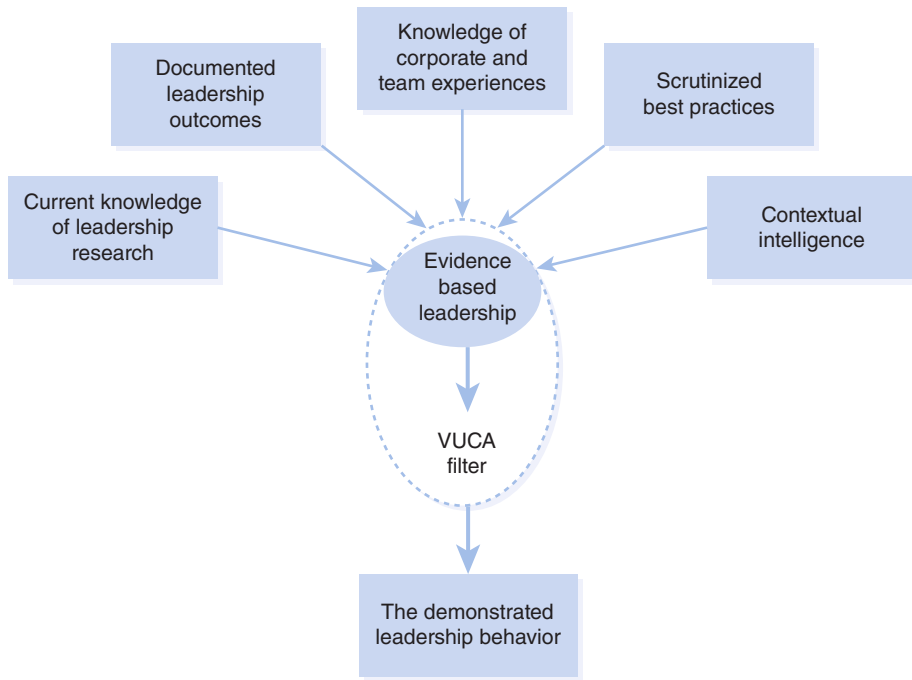
FIGURE 6.2 Factors for Evidence-Based Leadership.

▶ Leadership Behaviors Important for Athletic Training

The existence of leadership ultimately is determined by behavior. What you do determines who you are. Therefore, leadership is ultimately about what you do, not about what you've read, say, or think. Leaders tend to consistently demonstrate certain behaviors that are often credited for their effectiveness or success (however that is defined). Several leadership behaviors have been identified as important for athletic training practice.[28] Athletic trainers who demonstrate these specific behaviors are likely to be perceived as leaders within athletic training. To better understand and implement these leadership behaviors, they have been organized into six broad leadership factors. The six leadership factors that are important for athletic training practice include the following:

1. Personality Characteristics
2. Diagnosing Context
3. People Skills
4. Communication
5. Initiative
6. Strategic Thinking

TABLE 6.2 on the next page is a list of the six leadership factors for athletic trainers. Under each factor is a list of specific behaviors associated with the factor.

Personality Characteristics

There is certain personal characteristics that are important for leadership. These personal characteristics are related to, but not synonymous with, personality. Personality is

TABLE 6.2 Six Leadership Factors and Related Behaviors or Skills

Leadership Factor	Factor Definition	Specific Behaviors Exhibited in this Factor
Personality Characteristics	Tendencies or behaviors that are primarily learned early in childhood. Many of these characteristics are difficult to learn as part of a leadership development program but can be reinforced or assessed.	▪ Ethical behavior ▪ Thrives on responsibility ▪ Emotionally stable ▪ Disciplined ▪ Open mindedness ▪ Flexible or adaptive in times of change, crisis, or stress ▪ Assertive ▪ Creative/innovative leadership ▪ Ambitious
Contextual Intelligence	The ability to assess and interpret different variables that influence a given situation and then demonstrate the appropriate behavior based on that assessment.	▪ Dedicated ▪ Critical thinker ▪ Utilizes appropriate leadership style ▪ Socially responsible ▪ Leadership planner ▪ Diagnosis context ▪ Change agent ▪ Resilience ▪ Willing to take appropriate risks
People Skills	The ability to align and influence people with different points of view and diverse backgrounds.	▪ Consensus builder ▪ Cultural sensitivity ▪ Collaborator ▪ Protector ▪ Multicultural leadership ▪ Improves morale ▪ Nurtures professional relationships ▪ Delegates effectively
Communication	Concisely and articulately portrays meaning to others.	▪ Written communication skill ▪ Empathetic ▪ Verbal communication skill ▪ Uses body language
Initiative	Demonstrates a history of beginning or facilitating a new series of actions or embarks on a new venture.	▪ Intentional leadership ▪ Crisis management ▪ Applies known and attained knowledge ▪ Credible ▪ Identifies leaders ▪ Advocate ▪ Courageous

(continues)

TABLE 6.2 *(Continued)*		
Leadership Factor	**Factor Definition**	**Specific behaviors exhibited in this factor**
Strategic Thinking	Executing a delineated plan of action that is based on the integration of relevant past experiences, present reality, and an anticipated future.	■ Future minded ■ Organizational savvy ■ Knowledgeable ■ Ensures awareness of mission ■ Influencer ■ Controls risk

developed early and may be well established by the time formal leadership development occurs. Because it is developed early on, personality is unlikely to be significantly affected by formal leadership development programs.[2] However, knowing what behaviors are perceived by other athletic trainers to be associated with a desirable personality can help inform self-reflection. Athletic trainers who can learn to effectively critique and implement some of the behaviors associated with the personality factor increase the perception of leadership that others may have of them. Following are behaviors that contribute toward having the desirable personality characteristics of a leader:

1. **Ethical behavior** has been reported to be the most important of all personality behaviors.[28] It involves promoting ethical practice in the treatment of patients and in the pursuit of organizational goals and objectives. This behavior includes reporting incompetent, unethical, and illegal practice objectively, factually, and according to current standards/procedures, and treating people equitably and fairly. Additional aspects of ethics are discussed in Chapter 15.

2. **Ambition** is also an important aspect of personality that seems to be exhibited by leaders. It is the use of available resources (intrinsic and extrinsic) and other effective strategies to promote professional and personal development. While ambition is deemed important, it is critical that it be tempered with ethical behavior.

3. **Assertiveness** is being proactive about new ideas, innovations, and change initiatives while maintaining respect for personal boundaries and the rights of others. It is critical to remember that these attributes are a small part of other personality characteristics and need to be integrated with them.

4. Another behavior associated with personality often perceived in leaders is open-mindedness. Being open-minded involves a willingness to consider new ways of thinking or even abandoning former ways of thinking when evidence indicates. An open-minded disposition facilitates effective decision making by considering relevant evidence.

5. Responsibility is another behavior associated with personality and involves two distinct aspects. The first is taking responsibility for actions, which is the ability to tactfully accept scrutiny and even criticism for personal actions and decisions that prove to be distracting. The second aspect involves thriving on responsibility, which is having a sense of duty to the profession and organization.

6. Exhibiting personal **discipline** is another key indicator of a leader's personality. Discipline is consistent and steady

behavior. Being disciplined requires balancing consistency with flexibility and adaptability in a crisis or stress. A temptation for many athletic trainers might be to maintain discipline and strict boundaries at the expense of being flexible or adaptable. However, longevity in athletic training requires adaptability.

7. One final behavior that lends itself to a desirable personality is creativity. **Creativity** is the willingness to produce plausible ideas when asked or needed. In other words, creativity is helping to generate or participate in brainstorming. **Brainstorming** is a technique used to generate new ideas or thoughts in a "safe" context in which there are no "right" or "wrong" ideas.

Personality characteristics are only a small portion of what contributes to leadership. Many of the above behaviors, such as ambition, assertiveness, and discipline, may be difficult to learn. Others, such as discipline, ethical behavior, and open-mindedness can be intentionally integrated into behavior, which may help to foster the perception of leadership. Another leadership factor is the ability to diagnose context. The next section will involve delineating the behaviors associated with diagnosing context.

Diagnosing Context

The context in which the athletic trainer practices his or her profession is dynamic. Healthcare, in general, is extremely dynamic and, at times, can be volatile. The **context** is the background in which an event takes place and involves a combination of any number of variables, such as attitudes, belief systems, values, cultural bias, and symbols. For example, there are often political, cultural, social, religious, and other "factors" present that define the context of any circumstance. Often, in athletic training, there is a mixture of physician's, parent's, coach's, and athlete's values, biases, and beliefs. These variables, combined with organizational culture, historic precedent, and personal experiences make each context unique and dynamic. Being able to diagnose the context is an important leadership consideration for the athletic trainer.

The following list of behaviors is consistent with being able to accurately diagnose context:

1. **Contextual intelligence** is the ability to recognize, assess, and assimilate multiple external and internal variables in a given environment or circumstance. Simply stated, contextual intelligence is the ability to interpret and react to changing surroundings. Contextual intelligence is a skill that separates many leaders from non-leaders.

2. **Critical thinking** is an essential behavior of every professional and can be developed in formal athletic training education. Richard Paul is often cited as stating "critical thinking is thinking about your thinking, while you're thinking, in order to change your thinking." The key idea about critical thinking is to make improvements in how you assess your options and organize your actions. A more pragmatic definition of critical thinking in light of leadership is the cognitive ability to make connections, integrate, and make practical application of different actions, opinions, and information.

3. Diagnosing context also involves demonstrating the appropriate use of leadership style. As noted in a previous chapter, there are many leadership styles. The athletic trainer who knows which leadership style is appropriate is likely aware of the current context.

4. **Resilience** is the ability to recover from and adjust to misfortune. It is also a personality characteristic but is part diagnosing context in that it demonstrates an ability to adapt to impending change.

5. Willingness to take appropriate risks involves thought-out actions. It is the opposite of a cavalier attitude. Risk taking involves taking bold actions. Bold

actions require precision and calculation so that any foreseeable risk is minimized.

The next leadership factor involves those behaviors associated with relating to people. Obviously, leaders have to interact with people. Those athletic trainers who are comfortable with and around other people are likely to have other leadership attributes. The next section will include a brief discussion of important people skills for the athletic trainer to possess.

People Skills

A major contributor to every context is people (e.g., followers and leaders). Therefore, contextual intelligence is dependent on an accurate assessment of people and how they are reacting within a defined context. In fact, it is likely that leadership ability will be limited to the extent that one is comfortable interacting with other people. People skills include the following specific behaviors:

1. Building a consensus takes advantage of a person's interpersonal skill to convince others to see the common good or a different point of view. This requires the ability to listen and communicate effectively, manage conflict, and diagnose context.

2. **Cultural sensitivity** promotes diversity and aligns diverse individuals by creating opportunities for diverse members to interact in a nondiscriminatory manner.

3. Athletic trainers with people skills often create an atmosphere in their athletic training facility that is inviting and conducive to the rich cultural, ideological, and ethnic diversity.

☑ LEADERSHIP APPLICATION

You are a new assistant athletic trainer at State College. After a few days on the job, you were approached by a veteran assistant athletic trainer who informed you that the head athletic trainer and the educational program director have been competing to be the primary influencer in all athletic training-related decisions for years. After a few months, you begin to notice that they both prefer that all decisions come through them; furthermore, you realize that they rarely delegate tasks and each tries to "outdo" the other or have the last word. You begin to find yourself in casual discussions with the other assistants over this apparent interpersonal "drama" that is unfolding before your eyes. While your coworkers do not, you perceive this apparent tension as a real problem. One afternoon, the head athletic trainer invites you to lunch and during lunch it is apparent that he is trying to lobby for your support over an upcoming staffing decision that is likely to be challenged by the program director at the next meeting. The decision involves hiring a new athletic trainer who will serve a dual appointment as a part-time faculty member and part-time assistant athletic trainer. What the head athletic trainer does not know is that the program director already spoke to you about the same issue. Based on what you have heard from both the head athletic trainer and program director, you are sure that the next meeting will involve an unnecessary confrontation.

Reflection Questions:

1. What interpersonal dynamics might be involved that would influence you to choose sides?
2. What leadership strategies can you employ to prevent becoming cynical about this apparent problem?
3. What skills might help navigate this complex environment, and why?
4. What leadership or management strategies can you employ to eliminate the apathy among your peers and motivate them to take action?

4. **Collaborating** involves participating with other professionals within the local or global community in achieving similar goals.

5. Finally, those with effective people skills protect others. Protecting in a leadership context means providing as secure and safe an environment as possible. To develop authentic leadership, the responsibility of protecting is important.

Communication

Rarely, will anyone argue against the importance for a leader to communicate effectively. This does not mean that every leader must always give great speeches, but they must be able to articulate their ideas clearly to others. Essentially, effective communication is how well others understand what you are saying. Effective communicators use multiple techniques to get others to understand their message.

Communication was addressed extensively in an earlier chapter. This section will only identify the specific behaviors of those leaders who communicate effectively. Three primary behaviors are:

1. Verbal communication
2. Written communication
3. Effective use of body language

Skill in these three areas may dramatically enhance the perception of leadership by peers, subordinates, and supervisors. Likewise, poor written and verbal skills, accompanied by inappropriate use of body language can seriously hinder leadership.

The next leadership factor involves initiative. Leaders simply must initiate action. The next section describes specific behaviors associated with initiative.

Initiative

Initiative is an individual's track record relative to embarking on a new venture. It also means the first in a series of events or steps.

To initiate implies readiness and willingness to take an action and may even include a calculated risk. Like the other factors, initiative is greater than the sum of its parts. The behaviors associated with initiative are the following:

1. *Intentional leadership* is purposefully taking the actions necessary to become a better leader. It involves purposeful assessment and evaluation of one's own leadership performance and an acute awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses. This assessment and awareness must result in new or changed actions. Practicing intentional leadership requires that knowledge gained from self-reflection be used as a framework from which to modify undesirable or unproductive behaviors. Intentional leaders must be open-minded, able to accept and synthesize feedback, and welcome the opportunity to develop themselves through interaction with others.

2. An athletic trainer with initiative will *handle a crisis internally and externally*. Handling a crisis internally implies that the trainer will remain in control of his or her emotions. Handling a crisis externally means that any response or action is deliberate and calm. Crisis management in the context of a leadership behavior is defined as effectively handling an unforeseen crises, which includes limiting or correcting problems in a reasonable amount of time by using problem solving and dialogue. An athletic trainer who handles a crisis effectively often provides effective strategies for conflict resolution soon after the crisis is identified.

3. The final aspect behind initiative is *credibility*. Nothing can potentially stifle a leader more than a lack of or loss of credibility. Being credible is critical to leading a successful initiative. Simply stated, credibility is gained by being believable, honest, trustworthy, and ethical in dealing with subordinates, peers, and supervisors.

Everyone must believe you mean what you say and that you will do what you say. Without that level of believability, any initiative will falter right out of the gate.

In the next section, we will discuss the final leadership factor, which is important for an athletic trainer: strategic thinking. Strategic thinking is more than preparing a vision statement, identifying values, or performing a SWOT analysis (these aspects of strategic planning are outlined in detail in a subsequent chapter). Strategic thinking involves specific actions based on awareness and intent.

Strategic Thinking

Strategic thinking is vastly different from strategic planning.[29–32] Strategic thinking involves having an intuitive awareness of the proverbial "big picture." Specifically, strategic thinking requires a holistic viewpoint that is based on the integration of hindsight, insight, and foresight[12] (discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter).

The strategic athletic trainer has a forward-looking mentality and sense of direction and concern for where the organization should be in the future. To do this, the leader must manage several stimuli simultaneously. Because of the potential for so much stimuli, it is important to consult others and have a trusted group of people with diverse backgrounds to help tailor or temper ideas.

Appropriate use of influence is another behavior of strategic thinkers. The strategic aspect of influence involves knowing when, where, and how to use it. Appropriately using influence requires interpersonal skills to ethically and non-coercively affect the actions and decisions of others toward the future that they envision. Strategic thinkers must also be organizationally savvy. Organizational savvy requires profound understanding of the organization's infrastructure, its history, its future plans, policy and procedure, and its opportunities and threats.

⌖ LEADERSHIP ACTIVITY

Make a list of six athletic trainers who you believe to be exemplary leaders. These individuals do not have to be famous or well-known. They can be athletic trainers who you know personally or could be those you know of, but have never met. The critical element is that you believe they are exemplary leaders. Once you have a list that you are satisfied with, identify three to five distinct leadership characteristics that are unique to each person and which you believe contributes to their being exemplary leaders. After completing that assignment, you should have a list of about 20 to 30 leadership characteristics. Evaluate your master list of leadership characteristics for any recurring or overlapping themes. Share your list (and any themes) with other members in the class and discuss why you believe certain individuals to be leaders and why the specific characteristics that you identified represent exemplary leadership. When discussing, be sure to address if the characteristics you identified as exemplary leadership behaviors are something that you believe the individual learned, or if those characteristics are something that they were born with. Please take special notice if other classmates have picked the same athletic trainers and if their list of characteristics of exemplary leadership matches your own. After discussing with your classmates, revisit your list of trainers and choose one of them for an interview. Imagine that you will be interviewing face-to-face at the next National Athletic Trainers' Association convention in front of an audience (talk show host style). Now, write five questions that you would ask that person about his or her leadership journey?

▶ Chapter Summary

Leadership within athletic training requires assimilating several leadership behaviors, which can be organized into six general factors: personality characteristics, diagnosing context, people skills, communication, initiative, and strategic

thinking. These factors should be integrated into management tools that increase effectiveness and organizational awareness. Management tools can be used to assess individuals and programs or to help motivate by articulating specific actions that are needed. Motivating others requires an understanding of the specific factors that might contribute to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction as well as awareness of someone's current need. The athletic trainer who is purposeful about leadership development will take the time to reflect critically on existing or absent leadership behaviors and will seek to understand what motivates others and learn which management tools can be used to facilitate desired outcomes.

Wrap-Up

Key Terms and Definitions

Ambition The use of available resources (intrinsic and extrinsic) and other effective strategies to promote professional and personal development.

Assertiveness Being proactive about new ideas, innovations, and change initiatives while maintaining respect for personal boundaries and rights of others.

Brainstorming A technique used to generate new ideas, where the context is such that there are no "right" or "wrong" ideas.

Collaborating Effectively participating with other professionals within the local or global community in achieving similar goals.

Context The background information to an event. It is the integration of any number of external and internal variables, such as attitudes, belief systems, values, cultural bias, and symbols that make up a circumstance.

Contextual intelligence The ability to recognize, assess, and assimilate multiple external and internal variables that constitute any context.

Creativity The willingness and ability to produce plausible ideas when asked or needed.

Critical thinking The cognitive ability to make connections, integrate, and make practical applications of different actions, opinions, and information.

Cultural sensitivity Promoting diversity by aligning diverse individuals and creating opportunities for diverse members to interact in a nondiscriminatory manner.

Discipline Demonstrating consistent and steady behavior.

Ethical behavior Reports incompetent, unethical, and illegal practice objectively, factually, and according to current standards/rocedures. Treats people equitably and fairly.

Initiative A willingness to embark on a new venture.

Resilience The ability to recover from and adjust to misfortune or change.

VUCA An acronym for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

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