

**Title:** Transformational Leadership Theories, Attribution Beliefs, and Self-Efficacy:

A Qualitative Study of One Successful NCAA Wrestling Coach

**Author:** Michael J. Hahey

**Dissertation Chair:** Dr. Wenfan Yan

**Dissertation Committee Members:** Dr. Peggy Farrah

Dr. Cathy Kaufman

### **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore how an individual coach was able to lead his team with such success for over a period of twenty-one years. In-depth qualitative research was conducted to study Mr. Daniel Mack Gable, the head wrestling coach at the University of Iowa from 1977 until 1997 who led his teams to 21 Big Ten titles and 15 NCAA titles.

The following five major questions guided this qualitative study: (a) What characteristics did Dan Gable possess that enabled him to be so successful? (b) Was Dan Gable a transformational leader according to the theories of transformational leadership? (c) Did Dan Gable change his leadership style from 1977 to 1997? (d) Was attribution theory used in Gable's motivational approach to his athletes? (e) Was Dan Gable able to incorporate self-efficacy into his athletes?

The in-depth interviewing techniques consisted of structured and open-ended questioning were conducted with Dan Gable and five former NCAA Champions that competed for Gable. A cross-case analysis was performed. Key answers were then presented in a matrix format. The results indicate that Gable was successful due a variety of factors including: enthusiasm for each athlete, motivating everyone, creating a successful environment, and encouraging hard teamwork. The results also indicate that Gable was a transformational leader by demonstrating high expectations, strong modeling, and encouraging competition. Gable also used

attribution theory in his approach to athletes by making his athletes attribute success to ability and effort and never to dwell on luck. The findings also indicate that Gable incorporates self-efficacy into his athletes by visualizing and maintaining a high level of confidence.