Perceptions of Organizational Justice: A Study of Sport Type in Intercollegiate Athletics

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The landscape of intercollegiate athletics has changed over the past twenty years in terms of the emphasis on revenue production and sport sponsorship. For the 2006 fiscal year, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) reported the median total expenditures for Division I Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institutions was $38,602,000 (NCAA, 2008b), compared to $9,700,000 in 1989. For the academic years of 1988-89 to 2006-07, the NCAA reported that across all three NCAA Divisions (I, II, and III), 101 fewer institutions sponsored wrestling. However, during the same period, men's basketball experienced a positive net change of 37 (NCAA, 2008a). These statistics indicate that while spending in intercollegiate athletics continues to increase dramatically, support for some sports is declining while support for sports that traditionally generate more revenue is increasing. These decisions affect the sport programs in different ways, including impacting coaches. Coaches will make internal judgments as to whether these organizational decisions are fair or unfair, ultimately affecting organizational outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Hence, there is need to examine coaches' perceptions of organizational justice among different sport types based on revenue generation.

Perceptions of organizational fairness have been divided into three components: (a) distributive justice – an individual's perception of fairness of resource allocations (Greenberg, 1990), (b) procedural justice – an individual's perception of fairness based upon an organization’s policies (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005), and (c) interactional justice – an individual's perception of fairness based upon the interpersonal communications within the organization (Greenberg & Colquitt, 2005). The literature on organizational justice in the sport setting has primarily focused on the distributive justice component (Dittmore, Mahony, Andrew, & Hums, 2009; Hums & Chelladurai, 1994b; Mahony, Hums, & Riemer, 2002, 2005; Mahony, Riemer, Breeding, & Hums, 2006; Patrick, Mahony, Petrosko, 2008). In addition the literature has focused primarily on differences among gender, NCAA Division, and athletic job position. Few studies have attempted to examine differences based on the revenue generation of the sport programs (Evans, 1983; Kim & Cunningham, 2005). Therefore, a purpose of this study is to expand upon the lack of attention given to both procedural and interactional justice by examining perceptions of all three organizational justice components among coaches of sport types which differ, based on based on revenue generation.

The present study examined perceptions of organizational justice, in the intercollegiate setting using the following grouping variables: (a) sport type revenue generating [men's basketball], non-revenue-generating-stable [baseball], and non-revenue-generating-unsable[wrestling]; (b) coaching position (head and assistant), and (c) NCAA Division (I and II). Participants of the study included NCAA division I and III head and assistant coaches from the sports of baseball, men's basketball, and wrestling, creating a population of N=982. Each participant completed an internet questionnaire containing items used to measure: (a) descriptive statistics, and (b) perceptions of organizational justice. Of the 272 respondents, 39 were excluded due to incomplete responses, yielding a final response rate of 23.7% (n=233). Data was analyzed using a multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). One 3x2x2 factorial MANOVA analyzed the interaction of the independent variables on all three organizational justice components.

Findings on perceptions of organizational justice indicated assistant coaches had higher perceptions of procedural and interactional justice, while head coaches had higher perceptions of distributive justice. Division I coaches had higher perceptions of procedural and distributive justice, while Division III coaches had higher perceptions of interactional justice. Regarding sport type, men’s basketball coaches had higher perceptions of both distributive and interactional justice, while baseball coaches had higher perceptions of procedural justice. The 3x2x2 factorial MANOVA procedure produced three main findings: (a) no main effects were found to exist among sport type, NCAA Division, or coaching position; (b) significant interactional effects were found between sport type and NCAA Division among all organizational justice components(procedural justice [F (2,220) = 5.140; p = .007; η² = .045], distributive justice [F (2,220) = 5.780; p = .004; η² = .050], and interactional justice [F (2,220) = 3.142; p = .045; η² = .028]); and (c) a significant interactional effect was found between sport type and job title with only interactional justice [F (2,220) = 5.426; p = .005; η² = .047].
What are the implications on coaches’ perceptions of organizational justice in intercollegiate athletics? First, the fact that no differences were found based on sport type could indicate coaches of different sports accept the differences in resource distribution and therefore they do not allow those differences to affect their justice perceptions. Second, the interaction between sport and NCAA Division for all organizational justice types may be explained by decisions resulting in procedural injustice, the increasing gap of resource allocation among sport and Division, and differences in expectations of organizational interactions. More research would be needed to fully understand the reasons for the differences. Finally, the interaction between sport and job title among only interactional justice may be explained by the differing interactions athletic department decision makers have with head and assistant coaches. These perceived interactions may be a result of the hierarchy within intercollegiate athletic departments. Head coaches are more closely connected than assistant coaches, to the decision makers within athletic departments and therefore, may experience different types of interactions (e.g., team performance, personnel, budgeting) than assistant coaches (e.g., social interactions). Future research will also be discussed.