Impact of Surface-Level and Deep-Level Diversity on Career Advancement Intentions: A Structural Equation Modeling Approach

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Organizational contexts, and particularly the intercollegiate athletic environment, are constantly changing in terms of demographic composition (Cox, 1996). In the relational demography literature, two characteristics, surface-level and deep-level diversity, have found to be central to the cultivation of meaningful relationships in similar or dissimilar dyads. Many scholars (e.g., Harrison, Price, Gavin & Florey, 2002; Tsui & Gutek, 1991) believe that diversity management is among the most pressing and daunting challenge faced by upper-level executives in organizational life.

Yet, research in sport has conventionally focused on visible or surface-level factors such as race, gender or age. While these inquiries have broadened our knowledge and understanding of diversity issues, the emergent paradigm of deep-level characteristics (e.g., attitudes, interests and values) may provide a greater platform in explaining organizational phenomena (Emmerik & Benninkmeijer, 2009). Indeed, models of deep-level diversity (Cunningham, 2005; Harrison, Price & Bell, 1998) purport that underlying and deep psychological characteristics can actually be more influential than the impact of surface level attributes.

Accordingly, this study seeks to extend the diversity literature in sport by examining the antecedents of deep-level diversity and the impact such diversity has on the career advancement intentions of associate athletic directors inside and outside of their own organization in Division I, II and III of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

In doing so, we draw from theories of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and law of attraction (Byrne, 1971) to propose and test a model that that seeks to achieve two main objectives. First, we investigate possible antecedents of deep-level diversity in the intercollegiate athletics context by examining the enduring effects of personality traits (extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism and extraversion and openness to experience), contextual factors (empowerment), and surface-level attributes on perceived deep-level diversity. Second, we explore the mechanism through which the perceived deep-level diversity influences associate athletic directors’ career advancement intentions (both inside and outside of the organization). We anticipate this relationship will be mediated by the employee’s affective commitment to the supervisor (ACS). This type of commitment is defined as the emotional attachment of a subordinate (e.g. associate director) to his or her leader (e.g., athletic director). The use of a supervisor directed commitment as a measure of overall job attitude has already gained general consensus among researchers (Harrison, Newman & Roth, 2006; Mathieu & Zajac, 1990).

Both social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and law of attraction (Byrne, 1971) provide the foundation for relational and attitudinal diversity. Many scholars (Tsui et al., 1989; Tsui, Xin, & Egan, 1995) have, in fact, drawn from these theories to advance the notion of similarity or dissimilarity. Byrne’s law of attraction borrows from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) to posit that similarities or differences foster or hinder attraction and interaction between groups. That is, in similar or dissimilar dyads, interaction may occur differentially between parties. Tsui and colleagues, for instance suggested that greater similarity leads individuals (e.g., leaders and subordinates) to assume that they have similar beliefs and values. Previous research has shown that similarity or dissimilarity in different areas may lead to higher quality exchanges between leaders and their followers or lack thereof (e.g., Deluga, 1998; Dose, 1999).

Based on these various contentions, an investigation of the antecedents, correlates and outcomes of deep-level diversity seem warranted and findings should offer greater opportunities for theory development and/or refinement in the sport diversity literature.

Data will be collected using a combination of previously tested scales and newly created items. Personality dimensions will be measured using the Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI) developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003). Perceived surface-level similarity will be measured by 3 items previously established by Harrison et al (2002). Perceived deep-level similarity will be measured with five items adapted from Emmerik and Breninkmeijer (2009). Affective commitment directed at the supervisor as a measure will be measured using 5 items of the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ) by Mowday, Steers, and Porter (1979) scale. Psychological empowerment will be assessed using Spreitzer's (1996) 12-item Individual Empowerment Measure. All of these scales have reported alpha values greater than .80 in previous studies. Finally, career advancement intentions inside and outside the organization will be assessed using the following two created items, “If a
promotional opportunity presented itself inside the organization, to what extent would you consider the job?” and “If a promotional opportunity presented itself outside the organization, to what extent would you consider the job?” Answer choices will be: definitely consider, not sure, will not consider. While, these are single items measures, the turnover literature has, for the most part, used these techniques and they have been found to be effective measures (e.g. Cunningham, 2005, Kraut, 1975). Following the guidelines advanced by Kline (2005) about sample size estimation in structural equation modeling (SEM) (small, \( N < 100 \); medium, \( 100 < N < 200 \); large, \( N > 200 \)), a stratified convenience sample aiming for a large sample will be used for this study. Data will be collected from at least 100 participants from each NCAA Division (i.e. I, II and III) for a total of 300. Of particular note, it is not a goal of this current study to compare different divisions but to rather gain a general understanding of how perceptions of deep-level diversity manifest themselves in the workplace. Participants will be contacted via email asking for their willingness to participate in the study. Upon agreeing to participate, they will later receive either an online questionnaire or a mail survey.

To test the hypothesized relationships of our model, a four-step process will be used to analyze the collected data. First, following entry of survey responses into SSPS, the data will be reviewed and analyzed for missing information and an examination of the correlations between the exogenous and endogenous variables will be performed. Next, descriptive statistics about the participants (i.e. associate directors) will be examined in order to understand the overall make-up of the sample in the study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) will then be used to assess how well the various survey items represent various hypothesized constructs of perceived diversity (deep-level and surface-level), attitude, empowerment and career intentions. Finally, a SEM analysis will be performed to assess the goodness-of-fit of the overall model. Toward that end, we will follow current practice and recommendations (e.g. Boomsma, 2000, Kline, 2005; McDonald & Ho, 2002) to report and interpret our results using the following set of fit indices (a) the model chi-square, (b) the Steiger-Lind root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) with 90% confidence interval, (c) the Bentler comparative fit index (CFI) and (d) the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR).

Results will be discussed relative to current literature and related theoretical constructs. Practical implications derived from the results will also be discussed.