Commitment to Diversity: The Impact on Athletic Department Organizational Attractiveness and Job Pursuit Intentions

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Positions of power, leadership and decision-making in intercollegiate athletics are dominated by white, heterosexual males (Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001). Administratively, for the National Collegiate Athletic Association’s (NCAA) 2009-10 season, 83.3, 84.2, and 95.1 percent of athletic directors at the Division I, II, and III levels, respectively, were White (Irick, 2010). Similarly, 90.6, 83.8, and 71.2 percent of athletic directors at the Division I, II, and III levels, respectively, were males (Irick, 2010). Furthermore, this underrepresentation of racial and ethnic minorities and women permeates the coaching side of intercollegiate athletics. This paltry representation in crucial intercollegiate leadership positions has been found to negatively impact racial and ethnic minorities’ and women’s head coaching intentions (e.g. Sagas, Cunningham, & Pastore, 2006), occupational tenure (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002), career satisfaction and advancement (Sagas & Cunningham, 2005), and a myriad of other occupational factors (e.g. Cunningham & Fink, 2006).

Diversity can account for and be examined through a number of variables and characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, personality, attitudes, beliefs, and values. An individual’s identification with a group or culture is often based on one or more of the abovementioned personal characteristics shared by group members and is not exclusive (Doherty & Chelladurai, 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999).

Diversity management can be an effective practice to ensure positive returns on such diversity investments. However, such an understanding of diversity management marginalizes employee differences, treating it as an initiative to simply deal with diverse employees (e.g. Fink & Pastore, 1999). Diversity management is more than an organizational initiative. It considers diversity to be an asset and as such, seeks to manage it in an attempt to maximize benefits, gain a competitive edge, and create a more inclusive and inviting environment for minorities (Rau & Hyland, 2003). Similarly, it attempts to minimize possible drawbacks that may occur due to employee differences. In practice, diversity management must evolve from and be supported by upper-management, must be proactive, and must strategically attempt to capitalize on the advantages of employee differences (Cunningham, 2007). “The most important step, however, a manager can take to bring about employee commitment to gender diversity is to integrate diversity efforts into the broader organizational landscape” (Cunningham, 2010, p. 142).

“Organizational attractiveness fully mediates the relations between the job characteristics and the organizational attributes with intention to apply for a job vacancy” (Gomes & Neves, 2011, p. 684). Research suggests a strong relationship between applicant perceptions of organizational attractiveness and job choice decisions. Perceptions of attractiveness predict job acceptance and job pursuit intentions (Gomes & Neves, 2011). In this three-part study, we sought to determine what would be the impact, if any, of an athletic department’s commitment to diversity on its organizational attractiveness as well as on the job pursuit intentions of potential job applicants. The focus of this presentation is on parts two and three of the overall study.

In part two, students (N = 178) in an introductory level sports management course were asked to answer questions regarding one of three recruitment brochures, randomly assigned, for an athletic department internship. A 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was utilized by participants to rate organizational attractiveness and job pursuit intention items. Brochures in part two focused on the diversity and inclusiveness of the athletic department. One brochure was given a word and picture prime for diversity and inclusiveness, another brochure was given only a word prime, while a last brochure was given no prime at all.

Significant interaction effects were found between the type of brochure, the sex and the race of participants as they relate to perceptions that the athletic department would be a good organization for which to work, F(2, 171) = 2.939, p = .05. White females who were given the brochure with no priming (M = 4.80, SD = 1.01) were found to be the least likely to perceive the athletic department as a good organization for which to work. Conversely, minority females
who were primed with words only (M = 6.29, SD = 0.76) rated the athletic department highest. This finding suggests that prospective female applicants deemed diversity and inclusion as significant factors in their perceptions of a good athletic department for which to work.

Likewise, significant interaction effects between the type of brochure, the sex and the race of participants were found in their likelihood of accepting a job interview with the athletic department $F(2, 171) = 5.077, p < .05$. Minority males who were not primed were the least likely to accept an interview with the athletic department (M = 5.10, SD = 1.86); however, minority females who were not primed were found to be the most likely to accept a job interview (M = 6.56, SD = 0.73). This finding is telling in that the lack of a prime potentially influenced minority male’s acceptance of a job interview; whereas, it seems to have not been a critical factor in minority females decision making.

In part three, students (N = 159) in an introductory level sports management course were asked to answer questions regarding one of three recruitment brochures, randomly assigned, for an athletic department internship. Brochures in study three made no mention of diversity and inclusiveness of the athletic department. One brochure was given a word and picture prime for diversity and inclusiveness, another brochure was given only a word prime, while a last brochure was given no prime at all.

Significant interaction effects were found between the type of brochure, sex and race of the participants as they relate to the participants wanting on-campus recruitment of the athletic department, $F(2, 152) = 4.158, p = .01$. Minority females who were not primed were found to have the lowest mean scores (M = 3.40, SD = 1.82) while minority females who were primed with both the words and a picture (M = 5.67, SD = 0.52) were found to be the most interested in having the athletic department recruit on campus. This suggests that inclusion of both a picture and written word had a positive effect on job recruitment.

In this study, we sought to determine what would be the impact, if any, of an athletic department’s commitment to diversity on its organizational attractiveness as well as on the job pursuit intentions of potential job applicants; with a specific focus on racial and ethnic minorities, as well as females. Results supported previous research, confirming that athletic departments would be wise to advertise their commitment to diversity with these new findings suggesting that the most effective form of communicating diversity within the organization to prospective recruits is by utilizing both visual and written aids. Successful implementation of this should lead to a more organizationally attractive athletic department as well as an increase in potential candidates’ intentions to pursue employment with the athletic department. As this occurs, it is hoped that diversity and equality will spread throughout athletic departments and the NCAA as a whole.