An Examination of Recognition and Impact of Deep-Level Diversity in the Team Sport Environment

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For the past two decades, research has been conducted to understand the complicated relationship between workforce team diversity and workforce team performance in the field of business management (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). According to Jackson, Mary, and Whitney (1995), workforce team diversity can be characterized by two elements such as more observable factors (i.e., bio-demographic characteristics) and less observable factors (i.e., ability and cognitive resources). In addition, Harrison, Price, and Bell (1998) attempted to explore the impact of surface-level workforce team diversity (e.g., sex, race, age) and deep-level workforce diversity (attitudes, belief, and values) on workforce team performance. Many researchers in the realm of business management have examined the impact of diversity on workforce team performance but the recent diversity studies have extensively examined demographic diversity such as race or sex (Harrison et al., 1998). Some researchers in this area have found demographic diversity within workforce teams became less important whereas deep-level diversity (e.g., perspectives, values, attitudes) became more important because groups kept interacting over time (Harrison, et al., 1998; Harrison, Price, & Florey., 2002).

In the context of sport, diversity has been defined as “any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities” (Thomas, 1996, p. 5) and recently, diversity issues have become one of the most crucial factors for people in sport organizations (Cunningham & Fink, 2006). Many researchers and managers in sport, supported diversity in organizations because of the fact diversity can generate perceived value in the workplace (Cunningham, 2009). According to Cunningham (2006), diversity studies in sport have been conducted on the basis of two main categories: a) surface-level diversity (e.g., age, gender, sex) and b) deep-level diversity (e.g., perspectives, values, attitudes). Like diversity studies in the field of business management, there are a great number of research studies in the context of sport, focusing on the relationship between team diversity and team performance based on surface-level diversity. Cunningham (2006) argued research has indicated surface-level diversity has a significant impact on team performance (e.g., function of group work). For instance, Fink and Cunningham (2005) found surface-level diversity in a dyadic relationship had an influence toward the quality of work. Furthermore, Cunningham and Sagas (2004) argued racial differences within a team can be an influential factor toward occupational commitments and turnover intentions of team members.

However, as previously stated, few research studies have been conducted to find the relationship between diversity and team performance on the basis of deep-level diversity in the context of sport; and the research in this area has mainly focused on sexual orientation (Krane & Barber, 2005). Other research studies, which focus on deep-level diversity, have only examined functions and background of executive boards for efficient programs and the increase of fundraising (Siciliano, 1996; Zald, 1967). Thus, Gill, Morrow, Collins, Lucey, and Schultz (2006) argue that researchers in sport need to examine deep-level diversity and its impacts because people perceive there is a gap of understanding between surface and deep-level diversity. Interestingly, understanding the relationship between deep-level diversity of sport teams should be examined as well.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how club soccer players at a predominantly white division I university in the southwest United States a) recognize deep-level diversity (e.g., personality, values, attitudes, beliefs) and b) determine what environmental factors influence their concept of deep-level diversity. Data collection is based upon semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with 12 study participants. The qualitative questionnaire was created based on the works of Harrison et al. (1998) and Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) to examine the participants’ recognition of deep-level diversity. In addition, the questionnaire was informed by the work of Harrison, Price, Gavin, and Florey (2002) to explore the impact of deep-level diversity. While Harrison et al. (2002) have examined the relationship between team diversity and team performance on the basis of time frame (e.g., actual diversity and perceived diversity), this study plays a significant role in developing the questionnaire as...
Harrison et al. (2002) found there is a notable relationship between deep-level diversity and team performance.

Following the interviews, each were transcribed to understand, analyze, and determine the prevalent themes regarding the participants understanding of deep-level diversity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the time of the poster presentation, the study will be completed; therefore the findings, discussion and conclusion, limitations, and areas for future research will be discussed to build upon our current understandings of team diversity and deep-level diversity. Furthermore, this study will serve as a starting point for teams to mediate social conflict that may be caused by a lack of understanding of deep-level diversity and uncover the impact that deep-level diversity may have on team performance in the aforementioned setting.