Kaleidoscope Career: A New Way to Think About the Coaching Profession

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An article in Sports Illustrated emphasized the dynamic, complex nature of the coaching profession when it highlighted that coaches’ pay is increasing and their job satisfaction is decreasing (Wertheim, 2004, para. 6). Coaching is much more than the x’s and o’s. Instead, as an extension of college athletic programs, coaches are responsible to multiple stakeholders (Covell, 2004) like students, donors, and the community. Additionally, the culture of college sports breeds long hours and travel demands for most coaches. It is typical for coaches to work irregular work hours, work Saturdays, Sundays, evenings, holidays, and usually more than 40 hours a week for several months during the sports season (BLS, 2010). It has been shown that careers requiring extensive travel and long and/or irregular work hours often eat into personal life and family time (Dixon & Bruening, 2006; Hakim, 2006). The intense pressure to win and compete in the arms race of college athletics may be a contributing factor to why coaches choose to leave the profession.

The difficult nature of the profession may be further understood by the steady decline of female coaches in college athletics. For example, in 1978, close to 90 percent of female’s coached female sports while as of 2012, this number decreased to 42.9 percent. Also, in 1972, 90 percent of college athletic directors were female. Currently, of all NCAA divisions (I, II, and III), only 20.9 percent of athletic directors at the college level are female (Acosta & Carpenter, 2012).

Despite the plethora of literature studying college coaches in regards to commitment (Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003; Cunningham & Sagas, 2004; Raedeke, Warren, & Granzyk, 2007; Turner, 2001; Turner & Chelladurai, 2005), job satisfaction (Chelladurai & Ogasawara, 2003; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Kim & Cunningham, 2005; Pastore, 1994; Synder, 1990; Yusof & Mohd Shah, 2008), turnover intentions (Cunningham & Sagas, 2002, 2003; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003, Fink, Cunningham & Sagas, 2003; Ryan & Sagas, 2009) and work-family conflict (Bruening & Dixon, 2007, 2008; Dixon & Bruening, 2007; Dixon & Sagas, 2007; Mazerolle, Bruening, & Casa, 2008), there remains a gap in the literature considering the career needs of college coaches. As a result, it is imperative to understand college coaches’ career needs, as this may be a factor in why coaches leave the profession; their career needs are not being met. This review suggests the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) may best explain men and women coaches’ career needs at different points in their lives. This could be groundbreaking in sport and offer athletic administrators a more holistic view of what is important to the coaches they hire at different stages in their careers. The review proposes the KCM be used as a way to assess the career needs of both men and women college coaches.

In response to the New York Times Magazine article, which argued that women “opt-out” of the workforce before reaching top positions in their careers to have children (Belkin, 2003), Mainiero and Sullivan (2005, 2006) felt it was “time to articulate a new model for careers that deconstructs what employees are doing today” (p. 108). After completing a multiple pronged, three-study series, where both men and women’s career transitions and motivations were investigated and compared, Mainiero and Sullivan (2005, 2006) determined men and women describe their careers differently at different points in their lives. Thus the KCM was created in an effort to address workers’ career needs.

The KCM uses a kaleidoscope metaphor to explain shifts in the patterns of a woman’s career. Inside a kaleidoscope there are three mirrors which reflect colors. As the kaleidoscope turns or shifts, the mirrors reflect infinite patterns of colors. The research found during different periods in people’s lives, they have three parameters, or career needs that influence their career development: (a) authenticity, defined as being true to oneself and making decisions that suit the self above others, (b) balance, defined as making decisions so that the various aspects of one’s life, including work and nonwork, form a coherent whole, and (c) challenge, defined as engaging in activities so that one can pursue autonomy, responsibility, and control while learning and growing. Results concluded men follow a traditional, linear pattern, typically staying with a company long-term, and were focused primarily on the challenge need in early and
mid-career. On the other hand, women followed a nontraditional pattern, making career decisions that best fit their lives, with most women early in their career focus on challenge, those in mid-career focus on balance, and women in late career focus on authenticity.

Literature on the KCM is still in its infancy, but of the current literature, the KCM has been used to compare the career needs of women at different points in the career (Cabrera, 2007) and men and women across generations (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher, & Mainiero, 2009), to understand the career needs of women in late career (August, 2011), and to support the emergence of female entrepreneurship in Japan and the United States (Futagami & Helms, 2009; Sullivan, Forret, Mainiero, & Terjesen, 2007). However, there is no literature using the KCM in a sport context.

Therefore, the purpose of this poster session is to (a) share the completed KCM literature, (b) provide definitions of employees’ career needs, specifically the ABC’s of the KCM (authenticity, balance, and challenge), and (c) offer implications for college athletic departments and future directions for research.