Permeability of Sport Job Sectors: An Analysis of Careers across Boundaries

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Many anecdotal generalizations are made about working in sport. Countless advice columns have espoused that working in sport differs greatly from other fields. Career coaches are available for people seeking a career in the industry, and, when asked, many sport management students claim they would like to have a career working in sport. While some scholarly attention has been given to student entry into a career in the sport industry (e.g., Odio, Sagas, & Kerwin, 2014; Todd & Andrew, 2008) very little empirical research has comprehensively examined careers in the industry.

Studying career movements in the sport industry has implications for how sport organizations plan their human resource management practices (including recruitment and retention efforts), and how sport management programs design the career preparation portions of their curricula. Additionally, this research bears relevance for the sport industry as a whole from a human capital perspective. That is, learning where and when people move in and out of the sport industry will inform scholarship regarding what knowledge is gained, developed and retained in the industry (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006).

The body of literature stemming from boundaryless career theory (Arthur, 1996) has led to the studying of how careers unfold in different industries. Acknowledging that many careers are not likely to be contained to a single organization, this research has in part focused on the internal and external boundaries within and between industries. For example, an examination of careers in Silicon Valley (a clustered segment of the technology industry in Northern California) shows they involve frequently changing organizations; however, once inside Silicon Valley, few careers involve exiting the region (Ganz, Evans, & Jalland, 2002; Saxenian, 1996). Thus, organizational boundaries in Silicon Valley are quite permeable (i.e., easy to cross), but the geographical boundary of the region is not.

The purpose of the present study is to begin an examination of the internal and external boundaries of the sport industry. Specifically, we use secondary data from the resumes of 214 current and former sports professionals to examine which job-sector boundaries are commonly traversed and which are not. Additionally, from this data we are able to compare average and median job tenure, organizational tenure and first-job tenure for each job sector in and out of sport.

Sampling

Information on individuals’ careers was gathered from LinkedIn, an online career-focused social networking website where users list their work-related and education history. The profiles for 236 North American sport industry professionals with between 5 and 15 years of experience were found using LinkedIn’s advanced search features. Included in the sample were people who listed their industry as “sport” and those who were in the “Sports Industry Network” group. From the 236 profiles, 214 were considered codable as they did not include significant gaps (i.e., missing data) in their work history. Each change in job from all profiles was coded into excel with added data including job tenure, whether the change in job also included a change in organization, and whether it included a change in sector (e.g., from a sport organization to a non-sport organization).

Analysis

Profiles were coded and compiled into a database for analysis. Each job change was coded individually and included information such as tenure, and what sector the individual was moving to and from. Jobs were coded into 10 sectors, composed of five identical sport and nonsport sectors: (1) public, (2) private, (3) non-profit, (4) college and (5) events. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were used to sort and analyze the data between jobs in each sector, as well as a more broad analysis of the combined five sport sectors versus the five nonsport sectors.

Results
Profiles of the N = 214 participants included N = 1146 job changes. Included in the coding were 285 sector changes and 656 organizations; meaning the average number of jobs held by participants after obtaining an undergraduate degree was 5.35, over an average of 1.75 organizations. The average job tenure (excluding participants' present job) in the entire sample was 28.27. Average first job tenure was 27.83 months.

The vast majority of jobs in the sample were from the private sport (n=675), private nonsport (n=252), and college sport (n=118) sectors. The other seven sectors ranged from 6 to a few dozen jobs each. Eighty-nine (89) instances of crossing from the private nonsport sector to the private sport sector were recorded, while 52 of the inverse were found. The other most commonly traversed boundary was between the private nonsport sector and college sport sector (19 moves in each direction, 38 total). Interestingly, there were very few moves between the college sport and private nonsport sectors (7 total).

Collapsing the ten sectors into general sport and nonsport sectors, we found that 112 of the 214 participants move from a sport job to a nonsport sector job or vice versa. One hundred ninety-four (194) such moves were made, thus showing that many entered and exited the sport industry more than once. Graphs and tables showing the distributions and descriptive statistics among the different sectors will be included in the poster, as will comparable statistics from the United States Department of Labor.

Conclusion

This study attempted to use an unconventional methodology to examine the boundaries of the sport industry through the career paths of a sample of sport employees. Although some sectors were underrepresented in the sample, we can still analyze where movements happen and where they do not. The results show that while many careers unfold exclusively within specific sectors of the sport industry, a significant number of careers involve moves within sport and beyond. This information should increase sport organizational behavior and human resource researchers' consciousness about careers in sport and perhaps change how we study people working in the sport industry. The field should continue to test the internal and external boundaries of the sport industry, perhaps examining specific boundaries individually, which could lead to a better sense of how to generalize research on employee career paths in sport.