Resource Leveraging in Organizational Recruitment: Development and Testing of a Recruitment Model in NCAA Men's Basketball

Marshall Magnusen, Baylor University
Charn McAllister, Florida State University
Hunter Taylor, Baylor University
Pamela Perrewé, Florida State University
Gerald Ferris, Florida State University

Management/leadership Saturday, June 4, 2016 Poster
Abstract 2016-235 8:30 AM (Legacy North)

The recruitment and selection of personnel is a vital function of successful organizations as it provides the talent through which firms can achieve a competitive advantage over other organizations in their industries (Barney & Wright, 1998; Ferris et al., 1999). Similarly, the recruitment of athletes is critical to the success of athletic organizations; the effectiveness of teams’ recruiting efforts is reliant upon coaches’ ability to identify and leverage salient information about potential recruits (Magnusen et al., 2014; Treadway et al., 2014). Absent these key pieces of recruiting information there is nothing for a coach to leverage. The research model developed and tested in this study attempts to improve our understanding of effective recruiting by examining a variety of factors that may lead highly rated high school athletes to select and officially commit to particular colleges and universities that have made them official scholarship offers. More specifically, the purpose of the present investigation is to test an empirical model of various factors that the Top 100 male NCAA Division I basketball recruits (from 2010 – 2014) may have considered when selecting a university.

The various theoretical perspectives found in the extant education, management, and sport literatures reinforce the challenges of recruiting, the complexity of student-athlete college choice decisions, and how it is doubtful that a single theory can adequately explain recruiting effectiveness. Some recruits seek a school that will offer the best chance at making it to the professional level. Other recruits may consider the probability they will receive a degree and find employment upon graduation. Therefore, what is incorporated into the present study is an integrative theoretical perspective drawn from Magnusen et al.’s (2014) critical review of recruiting in college sports. They adapted and expanded the Berkson et al. (2002) reputation/information framework to a sport context so as to better account for (a) what college choice factors are decidedly important to student-athletes (recruits), and (b) how recruiters (coaches) organize and leverage relevant pieces of college choice information to persuade recruits to sign with their schools.

The reputation/information framework (Berkson et al., 2002) is grounded in an organization-based recruitment perspective, and it elucidates the importance of effective recruitment programs in maximizing job candidates’ job offer acceptance in a highly competitive marketplace. Central to the framework is information because it was argued to be at the heart of a job applicant’s level of attraction to an organization, and both job attributes and organizational reputation were specified as key sources of information. Persuasive communication by recruiters was offered as a specific mode of information transmission that helps business firms leverage reputation information as a strategy to attract and then sign top talent.

Combining an awareness of the various studies that have empirically examined student-athlete selection factors with an understanding of the reputation/information framework (Berkson et al., 2002), Magnusen et al. (2014) created a model that concurrently accounts for prevalent job choice theories, explains how these theories can be operationalized, and discusses the processes through which recruiters may use such information to maximize recruitment effectiveness. Specifically, they consolidated research about college choice factors into three categories of information that could leveraged by recruiters: Athletic, Academic, and External. Athletic factors included variables pertaining to a head coach’s win record and athletic program characteristics (e.g., conference championships). Academic factors included areas such academic reputation and post-graduation career opportunities. External factors referred to variables (e.g., a school’s location) that are largely out of the control of recruits and institutions.
Information that may predict where a recruit commits to play basketball was represented by 25 variables that were divided into one of the three aforementioned categories. Archival data were obtained through the use of various online (e.g., ESPN.com, NCAA.org, 247sports.com, Scout.com) and in-print (e.g., U.S. News & World Report) resources. ESPN.com, for example, maintains a yearly database of high school basketball players that includes athletes’ recruiting rank (i.e., 1-5 stars), position played (e.g., guard), universities visited, the university they signed with, and their hometown. Data were collected on the top 100 male high school athletes recruited to play collegiate-level basketball for each year from 2010 to 2014 (N = 500).

Binary logistic regression analyses (Hosmer et al., 2013) using maximum likelihood estimation were utilized to predict to what extent each of the included variables affected the likelihood of an athlete selecting a particular university. The three types of variables were entered into the regression as predictors of athletes’ decision to sign with a university. Recruit-specific data were fixed across all potential university options for each athlete. Similarly, for each year, university-specific data was constant and did not vary between athletes. Geographic proximity was calculated for each athlete-university dyad. Athletes’ decision to sign with a university precludes them from signing with other universities, and thus, the observations and associated error terms across athletes’ decisions are not independent. Comparable to previous studies (e.g., Dumond et al., 2008), we adjusted the covariance structure via the working correlation matrix to account for the lack of statistical independence. All other variables (i.e., athlete-university matched) are assumed to be statistically independent across athletes.

The model correctly predicted 68.3% of male athletes’ decisions. The results demonstrated that geographic proximity (b = -.01, p < .01) was a significant predictor of university choice. Universities with top-100 academic reputations were more likely (b = .11, p < .05) to be selected. Male athletes also tended to be drawn to basketball programs with large fan bases as indicated by athletes being more likely (b = .06, p < .05) to select programs noted as being in the top 10 in attendance during the past five years. Variables indicating basketball programs’ performance presented seemingly mixed results. Male athletes were more likely (b = .11, p < .01) to select basketball programs with recent top 10 finishes, but were less likely to select programs that recently had won national championships (b = -.12, p < .05). Likewise, universities from conferences with several teams appearing in the Elite 8 (b = -.03, p < .01) were less likely to be chosen by male athletes. Previous studies (e.g., Dumond et al., 2008) analyzing high school football recruits found similar results, and argued that recruits are hesitant to sign with top programs for fear of not receiving playing time on the court/field.

This study contributes to the personnel selection and recruitment literatures by identifying several key factors within the recruiting process and consequently, improving recruiters’ ability to identify and leverage critical factors when attempting to attract recruits. For example, seemingly inconsequential factors like the geographic proximity of a university to recruits’ hometowns can have a substantial impact on recruits’ decisions. This finding can be generalized to more traditional recruiting situations as well. Business organizations may do well to follow the examples of collegiate recruiters and focus more heavily on local and regional talent; recruiting is expensive and attempting to attract individuals more likely to join an organization is the most economical and efficient course of action.

In closing, this is the first study that has investigated the recruitment efforts of collegiate basketball teams with an emphasis on exploring how those processes can help inform work organization practices. Recruiting strategies found to be effective in NCAA Division I athletics may inspire new recruiting processes and staffing efforts in non-sport and sport business organizations.