“The bent of human resource theory on gender equality: examining work conditions for female leaders in U.S. collegiate athletic organizations”

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SECTION 1. Macroeconomic processes and regional economies management

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The bent of human resource theory on gender equality: examining work conditions for female leaders in U.S. collegiate athletic organizations

Abstract

The low representation of female leaders is problematic in work organizations. In fact, women historically have had trouble entering the managerial hierarchy of a multitude of industries including the sport industry. Accordingly, the evolution of sport has proffered a diverse array of jobs with growth potential. Despite this, sport remains a male dominated sector where women's perspectives on work issues have not been fully investigated. The purpose of this study is to examine perceived organizational factors impacting the representation of female leaders in college athletics. To promptly investigate issues and concerns of working women in sport, the research focused on human resource management (HRM). This study utilized survey design, specifically snowball sampling, to generated 60 completed questionnaires from female administrators working in U.S. collegiate athletics. A Qualtrics online survey site was created to gather responses. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Demographics showed the level of work experience, position titles, and educational background varied across the sample. Results showed that structures were important factors in recruiting and advancing female leaders, while the 'ole' boys' networks and limited social capital negatively impacted leadership development. In conclusion, leadership opportunities for women in intercollegiate athletics were perceived to be shaped by organizational practices.

Keywords: female leaders, U.S. college athletics, social capital, organizational practices, HRM structures.
JEL Classification: M14.

Introduction

Research aim. Work conditions are instrumental in providing positive job experiences that ultimately heighten career advancement possibilities. The number of professional women seeking career opportunities in collegiate athletics or those already employed in the industry striving for career continues to grow. Eikhof (2012) emphasized that additional research needs to be conducted to appreciate the complexity of workforce development from a gendered perspective. However, there is evidence that research oriented toward workplace diversity and strategic human resource management (HRM) relative to gender has not been fully developed (Martin-Alcázar, Fernández and Gardey, 2013).

Human resource management has a vested interest in research that provides a better understanding of gender equality issues among employees (Parcheta, Kaifi and Khanfar, 2013). Specifically, a gender focus is lacking in the extant literature pertaining to HRM (Eikhof, 2012). This discrepancy is an important oversight, specifically at a time when the representation of female leaders is subpar in work organizations. Sectors such as collegiate athletic organizations clearly exhibit the underrepresentation of women as leaders. This lack of representation in athletics has further resulted in fewer female role models for women aspiring to become leaders and managers. Theoretical research has particularly been underutilized to examine issues on the representation of women (McGregor, 2010). Consequently, the aim of this investigation is to advance the body of research on female leadership in the context of U.S. collegiate athletic organizations.

The initial assumptions of the current paper. The current investigators assumed that the status of women leaders in the collegiate athletics is similar to the representation of this population in other global work organizations. Nucci and Young-Shim (2005) emphasized that sport provides the microcosm for society. Also, the current researchers felt that the depiction of female leaders in the US collegiate athletic organizations is representative of the gender composition in the non-sport related leadership structure. Finally, the representation of female leaders through the lens of human resource theory is assumed to generate additional theoretical insight. A review of the extant research clearly suggested that this theoretical base was not optimally utilized to address gender equality issues (Parcheta, Kaifi and Khanfar, 2013).

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Reasoning for the focus of the current study. Although leadership connotes organizational efficacy, it can heighten travails for women aspiring to enter its ranks. Women represent approximately one-fifth of the chief executive officers of the United States (U.S.) corporate sector while composing 16% of the presidencies at U.S. colleges and universities (Chin, 2011). College athletics is a career area in which women have experienced painful penetration. According to a recent report by Acosta and Carpenter (2015), 22.3% of athletic directors are female, whereas 43.4% of women's sport teams hired women as head coaches. This lack of administrative and coaching representation in athletics has resulted in fewer female role models for women athletes. As such, there was a need to gauge the perspectives of women employed in intercollegiate athletic organizations and the U.S. was utilized as the sampling area.

1. Previous research

Sport is an industry that generates considerable public interest and substantial financial profitability. In support of this immense impact, the Gross Domestic Sports Product (GDSP) in the U.S. was reported at $189.338 billion in 2011 (Milano and Chelladurai, 2011). Although leadership is perceived as having a significant influence on organizational success in the sport industry, gender diversity within its hierarchy is scarce (Burton and Peachey, 2009). As such, the sport industry represents a rich investigative domain for the examination of factors impacting the leadership development of women.

A study conducted by Sweany (1996) compared the qualifications of male and female directors of intercollegiate athletics to determine if the female athletic directors were more qualified to hold the same position than their male counterparts. In examining the qualifications of both men and women who held athletic administrative positions, the study was inconclusive that one gender was more qualified than the other either educationally or professionally. Concerning leadership behavior, Gabriel and Brooks (1986) investigated female and male collegiate coaches. These investigators examined the behavioral dimensions of 1) training and instruction behavior, 2) democratic behavior, 3) autocratic behavior, 4) support social behavior, and 5) rewarding practice. The investigation showed that there were no significant variations across these dimensions between genders.

According to Rowney and Cahoon (1990), organizational characteristics impact women's progression into leadership. Specifically, human resource management structures have been shown to influence the representation of females in the leadership hierarchy (Moore, Parkhouse and Konrad, 2010). In fact, HRM structures have been seen as both opportunities (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995) and threats (Edelman, 1992) for those women aspiring to become leaders. To fully understand career advancement factors impacting women, there is a need to study aspiring female leaders in male-dominated industries using human resources theory.

2. Research and epistemological approach

Leadership positions have traditionally been dominated by men (Koshal, Gupta and Koshal, 1998). Particularly, women have had difficulty progressing up the leadership hierarchy of intercollegiate athletics due to the male-dominance of the industry and because of impediments in the organizational structure (Moore, Parkhouse and Konrad, 2010). Hence, the purpose of this study was to identify the human resource management practices and related factors that women perceived as assisting their employability in college athletics.

3. Originality of the current paper and contribution to knowledge

The paper's originality stems from human resource management theory and its impact on working women. Also, the focus has a collegiate athletic orientation which is a growing employment sector that has historically been male-dominated. Further, the scope of the paper was leadership which has been adequately examined from a gendered perspective.

4. Research questions

The extant literature suggested there is a continuous debate among scholars regarding the impact of HRM structures on the representation of female leaders. Some researchers purported that these structures are symbolic gestures designed to maintain the status quo (Edelman, 1992). Employers, when encountering minimal resistance, commonly structured HRM practices to inhibit female employees' full participation, thus, maintaining and strengthening male dominated leadership (Crampton and Mishra, 1999). Human resource management structures have traditionally been tall in nature causing women to have a steep climb into the upper leadership hierarchy (Davies and Thomas, 2000). According to Dickens (1998), HRM practices have different implications for men and women. The gender-blind approach to these practices was found to heighten male dominance by creating a tall structure that increased the likelihood that women would encounter resistance from the glass ceiling in pursuit of leadership positions. Experts have categorized the glass ceiling as an invisible barrier preventing women from being appointed as organizational leaders (Pichler, Simpson and Stroh, 2008). Conversely, Schreiber, Price and Morrison (1993) determined that specific HRM gender-conscious structures lessened the presence of the glass

ceiling to augment gender diversity in the leadership hierarchy. Other scholars found a significant linkage between the presence of such HRM structures and the increased representation of female in leadership roles (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995).

RQ1: Do female informants believe that HRM structures were active in recruiting qualified women?

RQ2: Do female informants believe that HRM structures influence the representation of women employed in leadership positions in collegiate athletic organizations?

According to Eagly and Karau (2002), the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders postulated that incongruity exists between female gender roles and the time commitment required in becoming a skilled leader. Eagly and Karau (2002) explained that prejudice manifested, because women were perceived as less favorable than men as potential occupants of leadership roles. These beliefs were often evoked by the incongruities between work/life balances that commonly manifested among those with leadership responsibilities. According to Guillaume and Pochic (2009), time availability and mobility requirements were identified as salient factors in career promotion considerations, as women progressed through the leadership hierarchy. The inequalities in domestic duties can create conflicts with the traditional management and leadership roles (Guillaume and Pochic, 2009). In fact, one of the most common self-imposed career advancement barriers for women in the literature is reported to be family and household commitments (Boone, Veller, Nikolaeva, Keith, Kefgen and Houran, 2013). Moreover, Boone and colleagues (2013) suggested that organizations assist female employees in controlling these self-imposed career advancement obstacles.

Researchers found collegiate athletic administration to be a sector where incidents of role prejudice confront female leaders (Burton, Grappendort and Henderson, 2011). In the athletic training profession, work-family challenges were identified as self-imposed impediments on women's aspirations to become head athletic trainers (Mazerolle, Burton and Cotrufo, 2015). According to Molina (2013), improving work/life conditions reduced role incongruences among women aspiring to positions of leadership with educational sports organizations. Specifically, findings from Molina (2013) suggested that female athletic administrators at the collegiate level possessed a degree of role congruency.

RQ3: Do female informants believe that women have obtained role congruency as leaders of collegiate sport organizations?

Concerns about being typecast or degraded by peers or superiors can cause women and other minorities to modify their professional goals. Specifically, stereotype threat has been found in careers that compare women to men (von Hippel, Issa, Ma and Stokes, 2011). Further, von Hippel and colleagues (2011) discovered a conflict between stereotype threat and a women's identity as a female employee that decreased perceived likelihood of achieving career goals. According to von Hippel, Issa, Ma and Stokes (2011) and von Hippel, Zouroudis and Abbas (2003), female leaders experienced performance decrements when exposed to stereotype threat conditions. However, these investigators emphasized that when leadership proffers a transformational sense that serves beneficial to women, female leaders have been shown to incur an increase in performance. Further, stigma consciousness has also been identified as a self-perceived barrier that can limit women's career progression. According to Pinel and Paulin (2005), women were more likely to recognize employee discrimination that negatively influenced job attrition instead of focusing on developing long-term careers.

In intercollegiate athletics, an aspiring athletic director is commonly required to have insider responsibilities to make career progression through the organizational ranks (Hoffman, 2011). However, Hoffman (2011) further elaborated that this internal development can lead women to be vulnerable to gender stereotyping. Women, therefore, can legitimately possess concern over the consequences of aspiring to become a leader in college athletics. Involvement in athletics for women has traditionally spawned incidents of stereotype threats. According to Hively and El-Alayli (2014), female athletes performed worse than men on a difficult task when a stereotype threat existed. Furthermore, Heidrich and Chiviacowsky (2015) suggested that stereotype threats significantly affected the learning of sport motor skills of women.

RQ4: Do female informants believe that stereotyping limits women's capabilities to be leaders in collegiate sport organizations?

RQ5: Do female sources believe that stigmatization limits women's capabilities to be leaders in collegiate sport organizations?

Lockwood (2006) emphasized the concept of successful organizations investing in leadership development. In consideration of developing effective leaders, Waldman and Balven (2014) gave attention to macro and micro elements within the group of leaders. In this analysis, the focus was on the development of female leaders rather than the development from the macro senses. Human capital is an instrumental factor in the preparation of women for leadership positions (Sandler, 2014). Women who reached the top leadership rung of organizations were found to possess a specialized knowledge base.

RQ6: Do female informants believe that they receive sufficient leadership development from their respective institution to become leaders in collegiate sport organizations?

When a person begins to pursue a career as an intercollegiate director of athletics, she or he enters a relationship-building quest (Paquette, 2015). Moore, Gilmour and Kinsella (2005) emphasized the benefits of networking in providing women with equal access to leadership positions in college athletics. Despite this, evidence suggested that women had restricted access to networks oriented toward the athletic administration profession. Quarterman, DuPreé and Willis (2006) identified the 'good 'ole' boys' networks as a salient constraint to the increased representation of the female athletic director. The 'good 'ole' boys' networks existed due to the homogeneous reproduction of the leader of athletic organizations. In their seminal work, Stangl and Kane (1991) suggested that the lack of women as leaders within collegiate athletics relates to homogeneous reproduction among its superiors. According to these scholars, this procreation was a process whereby dominants reproduced themselves based on social and physical characteristics. In other words, the male leadership was replicated by appointing and progressing a majority of men into athletic administration.

RQ7: Do female informants believe that professional networks inhibit women's progression into leadership positions in college athletics?

RQ8: Do female informants believe that the 'good 'ole' boys' network' inhibits women's progression into leadership positions in college athletics?

RQ9: Do female sources believe that the accruement of social capital helps women to achieve their career goals in college athletics?

5. Methodology

5.1. Design. A survey design was employed to examine perceptions of female leaders in college athletics. Participants were women working within collegiate athletics in the United States. This group was targeted because of its awareness of successes and challenges within this industry for females, and the ability to share insight for other women looking at this particular career field. The Qualtrics online survey site housed the questionnaire and began with an Informed Consent form. Sampling was conducted utilizing the snowball method with the questionnaire being available for completion over an entire month.

The sample participants included female administrators at NCAA institutions of various student body sizes. Further observation revealed a sample of 60 individuals completing the survey. All of the respondents held positions with various titles of leadership responsibilities within collegiate athletic departments.

Demographic information identified 87% of respondents to be Caucasian, 10% to be African-American, and 3% other races. The average annual salary was $65,000 with 87% of respondents reported having completed a graduate degree. Overall, these women are educated and currently employed in the collegiate athletics field. Their current job titles span a broad range of levels from Athletic Intern to Athletic Director with the length of employment varying from as little as a few months to 30 years. When asked specifically about their current position in collegiate athletics, 70% of respondents checked their positions to be Administrative, 27% within Compliance, and 24% within Marketing/Sales/Fundraising.

5.2. Instrumentation and procedures. A survey form was created to query elements of career advancement amongst women in college athletics. Hums and Sutton (1999) employed a similar survey tool which was modified to fit the current online survey process. The survey instrument used rating scales to assess concepts the extant literature identified as impacting the representation of women in college athletic leadership positions. Specific measures are in Table 1.

Table 1. Survey measures

♦ Effectiveness of organizational structure in assisting the recruitment of qualified women. (1 = Not effective, 5 = Highly effective)
♦ Effectiveness of organizational structure **in assisting in advancing qualified women into its leadership.** (1 = Not effective, 5 = Highly effective)
♦ Effectiveness of the organization in understanding the need to have a career/life balance. (1 = Not effective, 5 = Highly effective)
♦ **Conflict between your professional and personal goals.** (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ Organization provides leadership development opportunities. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ Stereotyping **limits one's desire to be a leader.** (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ **Stigmatization limits one's desire to be a leader.** (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ Organization invests in one's leadership development. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ Professional networks help one's career growth. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ The 'good 'ole' boys' network inhibits your career growth. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ One's accruement of social capital is sufficient for achieving one's career goals. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)
♦ One's organization considers and supports one's work/life balance. (1 = Strongly disagree, 5 = Strongly agree)

6. Data analysis

Sixty percent of individuals who began the questionnaire completed it in its entirety offering investigators 60 completed surveys to analyze. Data gathered from the 60 participants provided insight into the experiences of women employed in collegiate athletics. Information collected from the online surveys was analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and central tendency measures (Creswell, 2015).

7. Results

Human Resource Management structures, role congruency, perceptual threats, leadership development, and social accruement were utilized to classify the results.

7.1. HRM structures. Results from the survey indicated that most respondents believe that their HRM structures to be active in recruiting qualified female personnel. The mean score supporting this belief was 3.87 (1 = Not effective, 5 = Highly effective) (RQ1). Also, respondents felt that their HRM structures were useful in assisting qualified female employees into positions of leadership. Results showed a mean score of 4.00 (1 = Not effective, 5 = Highly effective) (RQ2).

7.2. Role congruency. Results revealed that 57% of those surveyed felt their organization has been active in understanding the need to have a work/life balance. Also, 52% of respondents suggested that there was no conflict between their professional and personal goals. Twenty-one percent of the interviewees were unsure whether their employers considered and supported their work/life balance (RQ3).

7.3. Perceptual threats. Sixty percent of the respondents disagreed that stereotyping limits their desire to be leaders (RQ4). Results also showed that 62% opposed that stigmatization limits their willingness to be leaders (RQ5).

7.4. Leadership development. Fifty-three percent of those participating indicated that their organization invested in their leadership development (RQ6).

7.5. Social accruement. Seventy-seven percent of study participants felt professional networks inhibited their career growth (RQ7). Further examination revealed 42% had their career growth negatively impacted by the 'good 'ole' boys' network (RQ8). Moreover, 40% of the respondents were unsure if their social capital accruement was sufficient for achieving their career goals (RQ9).

8. Discussion

The extant literature suggested there exists a continuous debate among scholars regarding the impact of HRM structures on the representation of female leaders. Some researchers purported that these structures are symbolic gestures designed to maintain the status quo (Edelman, 1992). The current survey results provided support for the outcomes of previous studies (Konrad and Linnehan, 1995; Schreiber, Price and Morrison, 1993) showing that structural inventions are positively perceived as broadening leadership possibilities for women. The current findings, however, suggest that impediments such as stereotype threats towards women are not keeping women from pursuing leadership opportunities in college athletics. Furthermore, stigma consciousness does not seem to prevent women from seeking gainful employment in the collegiate athletic work environment.

Women who reached the top leadership rung of organizations had a specialized knowledge base (Lockwood, 2006). The current study outcomes imply that survey respondents feel that employers are providing the necessary leadership development opportunities to facilitate their progression into leadership. This organizational support contributes to the development of a specialized knowledge base.

The current study supports the career advancement benefits of social capital for women eager to progress their careers in intercollegiate athletics. However, outcomes suggest women are concerned that male-dominated networks are impeding women's progression into the leadership hierarchy. The current findings suggest significant concern over the presence of the 'good 'ole' boys' networks inhibiting the mobility of women into positions of leadership. The investigators feel that these challenges have raised trepidations among aspirants about whether females' social capital supplies are adequate to accomplish leadership goals within the intercollegiate athletics setting.

8.1. Implications for theory. Although descriptive in nature, the current study has implications for theory. First, it suggests that examinations of women's challenges progressing into the leadership hierarchy be multivariate in nature. Second, the study adds theoretical insight to important debates about HRM structures and role ambiguity while expanding the knowledge base on leadership development, stereotyping, stigmatization, and social capital, as these constructs relate to the female leader. Finally, the study proposes to broaden the extant theoretical realm of women as managers and leaders, particularly in sport and entertainment organizations.

8.2. Implications for practice. This study suggests to practicing managers that women's managerial and leadership aspirations are affected by the glass ceiling. Moreover, the investigation implies to aspiring female leaders to expect successes and travails in the pursuit of their career ambitions. Finally, this study proffers perspective on where the potential problems may lie regarding the ascension of women into the leadership hierarchy of contemporary organizations.

9. Limitations and directions for future research

This study provided a thorough and insightful depiction of the female leaders in collegiate athletics. Despite this contribution, there were a few limitations. First, the examination involved a snowball sampling process limited to college athletics in the United

States. As such, the current researchers recommend that proceeding surveys, related to gender and management, be conducted with randomized sampling. A second limitation of this study is the sample size. Because of the limited sample, a detailed descriptive depiction of female leaders was given. Subsequent studies on women in the leadership roles should be inferentially designed to test pressing theories.

Another limitation in the current study is the use of surveys where respondents were asked to self-report. Self-reporting does not allow the investigators to know how truthful or how much thought the subjects may have put into their answers. As such, future investigation should be conducted on the status of female leaders in the international and professional sport communities through the employment of experiments and other creative designs.

Finally, the current analysis focused on recruitment and career advancement of women into leadership. However, issues of remunerations were not considered. Consequently, observations on compensation and other relevant HRM matters related to women in the leadership and managerial hierarchies are suggested as areas for future research.

Conclusion

This investigation added to the existing literature on gender and leadership by focusing on women as intercollegiate athletic leaders. Leadership positions for women in intercollegiate athletics were found to be shaped by opportunities and threats. Specific problems identified are the 'good 'ole' boys' networks and insufficient accumulation of social capital, while opportunities listed relate to the perception that women are being provide training and development support to advance their careers.

In conclusion, this study will serve females seeking careers or professional advancement into the leadership hierarchy by sharing insight from those women who have successfully infiltrated those career spaces. Additionally, hiring managers of work organizations can gather insight as to how to better serve and meet the needs of staff members, regardless of gender. Although this study added to the body of knowledge, continued attention is recommended on the topic of female leaders in competitive employment environments. This population will continue to grow, thus, bringing new problems and perspectives for future managers to consider.

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