Competing Values: The Role of Value Congruence in Female Administrators’ Career Advancement

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Socio-Cultural - Work-Life (College Sport)

10-minute lightning talk (including questions) virtual asynchronous

Session: Human Resource Management

Abstract 2020-233

Research has continuously shown that women are underrepresented in leadership positions throughout sport (Burton, 2015). Through an examination of career experiences, researchers have sought to understand how women develop career goals, receive mentorship, and develop skills (Bower & Hums, 2013; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Taylor & Hardin, 2016). Despite continuous efforts to understand the career experiences of women, little work has examined how value congruence influences women’s career advancement in sport. Hancock and Hums (2016) noted that female administrators may struggle with the ‘competing values’ present in intercollegiate athletics. That is, administrators in intercollegiate athletics must grapple with increased pressure to win and pursue capitalistic gains, while maintaining the goal of holistic athlete development (Cooper & Weight, 2011). Ultimately, competing values may deter women from seeking opportunities to advance within their athletic departments, as higher positions may lead to value incongruence (Hancock & Hums, 2016). The purpose of this study is to extend the literature on value congruence, by examining how female intercollegiate athletic administrators’ value congruence influences their decision to advance within their organization.

Value congruence, the degree to which individual and organizational values align, plays a vital role in individuals’ careers. Those with high value congruence are likely to have greater satisfaction in their job and commitment to their organization (Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). To examine value congruence, this study will employ a person-environment (PE) fit framework. PE fit is noted as being a useful framework to understand how one’s values match to their respective organization (Hamm, MacLean, Kikulis, Thibault, 2008; Wealty-Peachy & Bruening, 2012). PE fit consists of five dimensions: person-job, person-organization (PO), person-vocation, person-group, and person-individual (Kristoff-Brown & Guay, 2011). The dimension of PO fit, the congruence between organizational values and individual values (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011), will serve as the primary focus, as our interests are in the relationship between the individual and their organization.

To best support the aforementioned, the research questions to guide the study are: (1) To what extent do female administrators’ values and beliefs align with their organizations? (2) To what extent does value congruence/incongruence facilitate or impede female administrators’ career development? (3) How does a female administrator’s value congruence influence their decision to advance within their organization? (4) What are the barriers and what are the advantages within organizational culture of an athletic department? Following the guidelines presented by Stake (1995), the current research will utilize a case study approach to provide opportunities of gathering descriptions and interpretations of participants through lived experiences. Each participant will have their unique stories to share and how they navigate the issue of personal and professional values (Stake, 1995). The researchers will focus their study at a large Midwestern university through semi-structured interviewing processes of 10 female identifying administrators. In focusing on the specified participants, the gap to be addressed is how women navigate PO fit within athletics. By the proposed implementation, common and differing themes will be presented while the implications regarding continued research among values in women and athletics are discussed.