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Industry Interactions and Their Influence on Dreams, Goals, Work Interests, and Vocational Attitudes of Sport Industry Job Seekers

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Abstract

The sport industry is filled with passionate job seekers (e.g., Todd & Andrew, 2008) who often craft lofty future work desires and idyllic dreams (Odio et al., 2014) but little is known about how these are shaped over time. Previous studies noted how plans of sport job seekers often change after encountering realistic information about the actual work in sport (Koo et al., 2016; Todd et al., 2014). This urges a closer examination of the way in which sport job seekers interact with the industry in a continuous, iterative way and how that impacts vocational attitude and imagination. The findings point to industry interactions being positively related to job seeker's future work self, career identity, and career optimism and negatively related to career reconsideration. Implications for sport industry human resource managers are discussed.

Keywords: *industry interaction, vocational attitude, career identity, future work self, career optimism, career reconsideration*

The sport industry is known for employees and job seekers who are passionate about their work (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016; Swanson & Kent, 2016; Todd & Andrew, 2008). This passion, when housed in job seekers, seems to produce explicit future work desires, dreams, and even career-related fantasies. For example, in the context of sport job searching, multiple interviewees in the early job seeking stage expressed robust career goals such as “owning the Chicago Bulls” (Odio et al., 2014, pp. 50–51). However, sport job seekers may discover that their first internship—even a satisfying one—does not always provide the hoped-for work self that was anticipated, leading scholars to report a disconnect between that (seemingly pleasant) experience and one’s intent to enter the field (Koo et al., 2016; Magnusen & Todd, 2015). Moreover, Todd et al. (2014) highlighted the way imaginings regarding future sport industry work can influence intentions and attraction, and how those change in response to the presentation of realistic job information. Often job seekers in sport are unclear about what it means to work in the sport industry. Given such observations, it is not surprising that some hiring managers in sport report nearly 75% of applicants are not qualified (Clapp, 2018), which burdens human resource managers during the processing, filtering, reviewing, and screening stages of the hiring process.

Although vocational attitudes, desires, and even sometimes lofty career imaginations are commonplace among sport industry job seekers, not much is known about how they are shaped. The pre-employment internship is one time when some (university trained) job seekers experience the realities of a sport workplace and the assumptions they previously made about work are tested (Cunningham et al., 2005; Odio, 2017). However, empirical conclusions on the matter are mixed. Koo et al. (2016) reported most interns were satisfied with the work, but surprisingly, this did not translate into desires for full-time employment in the sport industry. Similarly, an intern from Odio et al.’s (2014) study experienced a misalignment and stated that he “was already searching for jobs outside the sport industry” (p. 49). Ultimately, a pre-employment experience alone may not be sufficiently able to produce positive psychological responses leading to future work desires and intentions of sport job seekers.

An internship is often a singular experience occurring along the spectrum of job searching and vocational attitude formation, and it may not always be in a preferred location, have preferred job duties, or be in a preferred industry segment. Consequently, job seekers may experience misalignment between their realistic experiences on the internships and their idealized or even hoped-for, imagined ones. A more comprehensive, iterative, and reflective process would potentially shape the positive vocational outcomes (e.g., commitment, optimism, clarity) that hiring managers for sport organizations are seeking. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to highlight the way sport industry career interests and positive vocational attitudes are shaped from dynamic and iterative interactions occurring over time.

Continuous Interaction with the Sport Industry

Job seekers tend to explore and interact with vocational environments differently: some of them have a clear direction and act in an intended and systematic fashion, whereas others just randomly explore industry in a fortuitous fashion (Stumpf et al., 1983). In sport, job seekers interact with the industry in many ways, such as investing countless hours searching for desirable openings, reading and processing job descriptions, completing and submitting job applications, interacting with hiring managers, and ac-

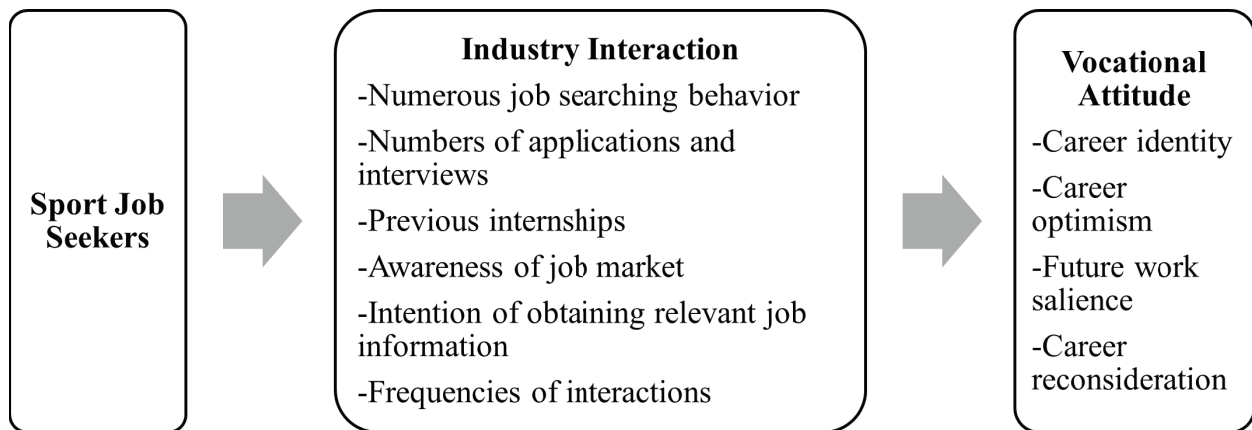
quiring information through many other sources. All of these iterative activities provide the job seeker with information about what various segments of the sport industry are actually like, which in many cases can be very different from how they are actually perceived (a key difference in the sport industry comparatively). The more an individual engages in this iterative process, the more this individual tests actual industry dynamics against perceived ones. For sport jobs, then, these phenomena become obvious and distinct, much more than what the Career Exploration Survey (CES; Stumpf et al., 1983) was designed to cover.

Dynamic and iterative industry interactions capture the cumulative ways that sport job seekers acquire actual industry knowledge over time and how that shapes their future job seeking efforts and intentions, which each successive pursuit relying on the summary conclusions drawn previously. This framework bridges job seekers' collective effort to an extent of a critical stage that combines continuous self-appraisal and numerous external search activities and that fosters the selection of, entry into, and adjustment to an occupation (Bartley & Robitschek, 2000; Blustein, 1989).

Hypothesis Development

Vocational attitudes are the sum of individuals' decision making, comprehension, and planning activities related to a future career (Crites, 1965). In this study, a dynamic industry interaction is proposed to be the driving factor that produces the positive psychosocial vocational responses of sport job seekers. Figure 1 demonstrates how the iterative process of interacting with the industry can shape vocational attitudes. In a sense, it demonstrates a process of them repeatedly validating whether they are who they think they are (identity), whether their dreams are what they truly want (future work salience), and whether they are optimistic and affirmative about their career trajectory (optimism and commitment).

Figure 1
Process of Industry Interaction



Career Identity

Embedded in the concept of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), career identity refers to the degree which “one defines oneself by work” (London & Noe, 1997, p. 62). Specifically, it is “a structure of meaning in which the individual links his own motivation, interests and competencies” (Meijers, 1998, p. 191). This concept represents a particularly important dimension of commitment as identity is inevitably related to one’s dedication. In sport, career identity amplifies people’s organizational identification and emotional attachment toward certain careers. Todd and Kent (2009) conceptualized “positive social identity” that illustrated the existence of extra member attraction and positive vocational attitude via multiple sources. As job seekers interact more often with the industry, their career identities become clear and evident. Therefore, the following is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Dynamic industry interaction is positively related to sport job seeker’s career identity.

Future Work Self

Defined as “an individual’s representation of himself or herself in the future that reflects his or her hopes and aspirations in relation to work” (Strauss et al., 2012, p. 580), future work self helps understand motivation and desired work identities in the future. Future work self tends to be positive in nature because people have the inherent desire to create, pursue, and maintain positive identities at work (Ashforth, 2001). Further, if salient, future work selves are regarded as signs of having clear career trajectory and job seekers’ willingness to pursue such career identity (Strauss et al., 2012). Future work self is also different than career commitment. Whereas career commitment focuses on an actual occupation or job duty that has been chosen and specified (e.g., compliance officer for college sports), future work self focuses on a person’s career prospects by capturing individual’s identification with pictured future working lives (e.g., an imagination of proudly working for Chicago Bulls in general). As sport job seekers continue to interact with the industry, they gradually realize their identity needs by consolidating all the information obtained (including fandom, sometimes), and then are more resolved to fulfill such needs. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth:

Hypothesis 2: Dynamic industry interaction is positively related to sport job seeker’s salient future work self.

Career Reconsideration

Whereas commitment describes a vocational choice making process and then attaching oneself to that choice (Porfeli & Lee, 2012), reconsideration disengages job seekers from such choice and diminishes their intention to accept such jobs. Specifically, career reconsideration involves “releasing current commitments, comparing and contrasting alternative commitments, and a willingness to conduct in-breadth exploration” (Porfeli et al., 2011, p. 855). Sport internships can result in different levels of career reconsideration (e.g., job seekers exit from the career or alter their career plan; Koo et al., 2016; Odio et al., 2014). Sport job seekers are likely to demonstrate withdrawing behaviors during their early encounters with the

industry, such as internships, due to the incongruence between their dreams and reality (Cunningham et al., 2005). However, continuous, deep-level (in terms of efforts), and long-term interaction with industry, should improve job seekers' perceptions of the career to which they are committed. Therefore, sport job seekers should be less likely to reconsider their career path after prolonged exposure to the industry through dynamic interactions. With that in mind, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Dynamic industry interaction is negatively related to sport job seeker's career reconsideration.

Career Optimism

Career optimism can be defined as "a disposition to expect the best possible outcome or to emphasize the most positive aspects of one's future career development, and comfort in performing career planning tasks" (Rottinghaus et al., 2005, p. 11). It represents the likelihood of one's success or non-failure that he or she judges for himself or herself. Optimism is an attitude, and career optimism directly denotes the level of confidence one possesses in terms of vocational attitude. Like career reconsideration, early encounters with the sport industry are likely to alter job seekers' career trajectory and fine-tune their career optimism (Odio et al., 2014). In this sense, the increased amount of information obtained through interacting with the industry *past the early stage* should boost job seekers' confidence. It should also make them more optimistic about achieving their vocational goals. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is provided:

Hypothesis 4: Dynamic industry interaction is positively related to sport job seeker's career optimism.

Method

Instrumentation

Dynamic industry interaction is a composite measure that accounts for the way a job seeker acquires industry information, assesses that information, and relies on it to shape job pathway intentions during the job search. This sort of measure is helpful to a study about career expectations because sport job seekers often do not have a complete understanding of the targeted job, nor a clear pathway to get there (Magnusen & Todd, 2015; Odio et al., 2014). Accordingly, this measure assembles the iterative exchange processes that occurs over time as job seekers explore opportunities.

Dynamic industry interaction functions with multiple aspects. First, job seekers spend hours searching for jobs, applying to jobs, and interviewing with hiring managers, all of which provide an exchange of industry interactions. Second, cumulative industry internship experiences and previous industry work experiences simultaneously add depth to this internal stock of exposure. Third, by exploring and accumulating job-related information over time, job seekers fill their "knowledge reservoir" based on different levels of satisfaction, quality, and types of such information.

Two instruments along with common job searching behaviors (e.g., numbers of applications, previous internship experiences) were used to address the research hypotheses. These instruments were

Stumpf et al.'s (1983) career exploration checklist (CES) and Strauss et al.'s (2012) networking building index. CES accounts for dynamic industry interaction based on amount of industry information acquired, the extent to which a career in the sport industry has been explored, and job seeker's satisfaction obtained information. Specifically, it addresses the exploration process in terms of where (environment and self), how (intended-systematic), how much (frequency and amount of information), and directness (focus and numbers of occupations considered). A sample item that is about *focus* requires participants to rate "how sure are you that you know the type of job is best for you?" Another sample item about *satisfaction with information* asks the level of satisfaction in terms of information obtained on "The types of organizations that will meet your personal needs." Network building index (Strauss et al., 2012) assesses sport job seekers' planning ability and future employability in a highly competitive market. It represents job seekers' attempt to exchange information through networking, and therefore measures their proactive career behaviors. A sample item is "I am building a network of contacts or friendships with colleagues to obtain information about how to do my work or to determine what is expected of me." To make industry interaction a composite variable, all aforementioned items are standardized to capture different frameworks as well as increase validity prior to data analysis (Fischer & Milfont, 2010).

Four constructs were used to measure sport job seekers' vocational attitude. These constructs include career identity, salient future work self, career reconsideration, and career optimism. Per the source material, all items were measured using 5-point Likert scales. Career identity was measured with four items from Strauss et al.'s (2012) study on future work self. An example item is: "Having a career in my field is an important part of who I am." Salient future work self (Strauss et al.'s, 2012) included four items; a sample item is: "This future is very easy for me to imagine." Career reconsideration was measured using five items from Porfeli et al.'s (2011) Vocational Identity Status Assessment (VISA) to bridge career exploration and career commitment. Last, career optimism was measured with 11 items that are part of the Career Futures Inventory from Rottinghaus et al. (2005) to address job seekers' career planning attitudes.

Participants and Procedures

Job seekers who attended a sport management conference for professional development were the sample of this study. Out of 132 participants who responded to demographic questions ($n = 122$), 56% were male and 77% were White, followed by 10% identifying as Asian and 7% identifying as Black or African American. Moreover, across four different universities, 65% of job seekers were currently enrolled in a bachelor's degree program and 35% in a master's degree program.

The surveys were conducted in an online format to provide maximal accessibility to study participants. Job seekers were randomly chosen from each institution's sport and entertainment management program (or equivalent) to ensure the coverage of different interactive stages. Embedded in Qualtrics, the secured online survey offered a well-structured and easy-to-navigate experience for participants. This approach also simplified the data transferring process and significantly restricted the potential for data tampering.

Data were analyzed using R with statistical programming. Correlations between independent variables (i.e., industry interaction) and dependent variables were constructed. In addition, dependent variables were regressed on the independent variable to reveal the linear relationship.

Results

Regression estimates are displayed in Table 1, indicating that dynamic industry interaction is positively related to career identity ($t = 4.02, p < .001$), future work self ($t = 5.06, p < .001$), and career optimism ($t = 4.42, p < .001$). Dynamic industry interaction was negatively related to career reconsideration ($t = -2.71, p < .01$). Therefore, all four hypotheses were supported.

Table 1

Regression Result of Vocational Attitude on Dynamic Industry Interaction

Outcome Variable	Estimate	Standard Error	<i>t</i> -ratio
Career Identity, Intercept	0.0144	0.0946	0.1520
Career Identity	0.0712	0.0177	4.0200***
Future Work Self, Intercept	-0.2879	0.1088	-2.6460
Future Work Self	0.1031	0.0204	5.0630***
Career Reconsideration, Intercept	0.0497	0.1089	0.4560
Career Reconsideration	-0.0553	0.0204	-2.7140**
Career Optimism, Intercept	-0.1950	0.0986	-1.9770
Career Optimism	0.0817	0.0185	4.4230***

** $p < .01$

*** $p < .001$

The correlation matrix is displayed in Table 2. This matrix demonstrates three positive effects on career identity, career optimism, and future work self while revealing the negative correlation between career reconsideration and other factors. In sum, higher level of industry interaction leads to a more positive and affirmative career identity, a more optimistic career outlook, and a more salient image of future work self. Additionally, the cumulation of industry interaction along with its positively influenced vocational constructs also decreases the possibility of reconsidering job seeker's career choice.

Table 2

Correlation Matrix of Tested Variables

	1	2	3	4	5
1. Industry Interaction	-				
2. Career Identity	0.43	-			
3. Career Optimism	0.46	0.54	-		
4. Future Work Self	0.51	0.54	0.67	-	
5. Career Reconsideration	-0.30	-0.38	-0.73	-0.58	-

Discussion

In this study, the more job seekers dynamically interacted with, digested, and processed experiences in the sport industry, the greater their likelihood of having higher career identity, clear future work pictures, and optimistic perspectives on their working future. They were also less likely to change career trajectories. This result is important because it seemingly counters some prevailing observations about vocational attitude and intention to enter sport jobs that are drawn from sport internship studies (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2005; Odio, 2017; Odio et al., 2014). Namely, dynamic industry interactions can establish a much clearer trajectory for sport job seekers than traditional internship experiences. There are several reasons this might be the case.

Along the spectrum of job searching and vocational attitude formation, internship occurs as merely a dot (singular experience), and it may not always match job seeker's expectation (e.g., location, duty, industry segment). As such, it is common for job seekers to experience misalignment between their realistic experiences on internships and their idealized ones. A process that is more comprehensive, iterative, and reflective may be more appropriate in producing the type of positive intentions (e.g., commitment, optimism, clarity) that hiring managers are seeking. Dynamic industry interactions are valuable because they allow for a more comprehensive and iterative process to occur whereby job seekers acquire and build an inventory of personal knowledge about industry mechanics and where they might best fit into the industry. Prolonged exposure to the industry also permits job seekers to test their idealized work goals/dreams against the canvas of their industry interactions in a dynamic rather than static fashion.

In a practical sense, this study provides an avenue for sport human resource (HR) managers and talent acquisition personnel to better identify job seekers who are committed, seasoned, and salient in their career pursuits. This is important because sport industry HR professionals can have challenges attracting human capital in some segments and the right human capital in others (Magnusen & Todd, 2015; Sutton, 2021), and as noted previously, many in the top-tier segments of the industry often are inundated with files from unqualified applicants (Clapp, 2018). One suggestion would be to incorporate questions during the screening (following Figure 1) that allow the manager to estimate the degree to which the candidate has acquired dynamic interactions beyond the internship, as these yield the type of iterative possessing consistent high levels of career commitment, clearer images of attractive future work framed by actual industry realities, and intentional alignment with targeted work roles.

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