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Theory of Work Adjustment and Student-Athletes' Transition out of Sport

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Student-athletes have a significant amount of responsibilities, both in the sporting and academic worlds. While research shows that student-athletes can learn transferable skills from competitive sport, other factors (e.g., high athletic identity, lack of time/commitment to non-sporting events) may impact their transition out of collegiate sport. Additionally, there is a lack of standardized approaches to assisting student-athletes with their eventual retirement from competitive sport, despite most student-athletes having the ability to plan for it before graduation. This study examined the potential use of Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969), a vocational theory that distinguishes itself by emphasizing the “mutual responsiveness” of the environment and the individual. The purpose of the study was to gain a consensus on the importance, applicability, and potential use of core elements of TWA with student-athletes. A three-round modified Delphi panel was used and included experts (with at least 10 years of experience) from the fields of academic advising, sport psychology, and counseling psychology. The results indicate endorsement of certain elements of TWA; however, further research should examine the role of values and overall practical implementation in our academic and athletic departments.

Keywords: collegiate student-athletes, transition out of sport, career transitions, theory of work adjustment

Student-athletes put a significant amount of time and effort into their sport throughout their athletic career, even attaining an identity that encompasses their athleticism known as *athletic identity* (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Murphy, Petitpas, & Brewer, 1996; Webb, Nasco, Riley, & Headrick, 1998). Student-athletes, especially those who begin to play competitively at a young age, gain a sense of self from their sport (Beamon, 2012; Baille & Danish, 1992) which can be strengthened throughout their lives by their family and friends (Fuller, 2014). Therefore, in order to improve upon and maintain high self-esteem, they prioritize factors in their lives to improve sport performance. However, only an estimated 3.42% of collegiate student-athletes continue to play at a professional level in American leagues (NCAAa, 2015). Furthermore, those who do play professionally may have relatively short careers (average length of athletic careers in American professional leagues ranges between 3.5-5.6 years; RAM, 2014). Athletes' extended commitment and dedication to their sport can be helpful in competition, but may also limit or hinder their exploration of the world outside of sport due to that very commitment (Beamon & Bell, 2002; Fuller, 2014; Harrison, 2000; Murphy et al., 1996).

Typically collegiate student-athletes (in season) spend 4 hours a day in sport related activities, 6 hours in academic-related activities, 7.5 hours sleeping, and 6.5 hours engaged in either maintenance or leisure activities (Chen, Mason, Middleton, & Salazar, 2013), spending an overall average of 20 hours per week in their sport. Consequently, Kelly and Dixon (2014) noted that student-athletes struggle to engage in the full college experience (i.e., missing out on a variety of social and academic experiences due to athletic obligations). Overall, the lack of non-athletic exposure and high athletic identity can negatively affect transition out of sport when that time comes (Beamon, 2012; Brown, Glastetter, Fender, & Shelton, 2000; Murphy et al, 1996; Wooten, 2005). Ultimately, we know that transition out of sport is inevitable; all athletes retire at some point. Therefore, how can we assist athletes in planning for their foreseeable transition out of competitive sport into other work environments, even as they strongly identify as athletes?

Transitions are universal events that occur in any stage of life. They are complex processes that are made up of a variety of factors, including psychosocial and situational factors (Schlossberg, 1984; Stambulova & Alfermann, 2007). Transitions out of a chosen field, or retirement, occur at any age, not just in latter stages of life. It is considered "a point of transition from an activity in which there has been a commitment of time and energy and role identification" (Baille & Danish, 1992, p. 77). Student-athletes experience such transitions when they retire from competitive sports. However, there is no standard approach to evaluating this transitional process (Wylleman, Alfermann, & Lavallee, 2004) nor are there standard routines in assisting student-athletes for this transition (Fuller, 2014).

General transitional research demonstrates that preparing and increasing resources before a transition can be beneficial for individuals to achieve a successful transition (Boerner, 2011; Chow, 2001; Fuller, 2014; Lally, 2007; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). Despite this recommendation of preparation, researchers have found that student-athletes that transitioned out of collegiate sport experienced a variety of psychological responses such as confusion, grief, loss of social support, feelings of failure, depression, and isolation (Blinde & Stratta, 1992; Falls & Wilson, 2013; Fuller, 2014; McKnight et al., 2009; Petitpas, Brewer, & Van Raalte, 2009; Taylor & Ogilvie, 1994), in addition to having lower levels of career maturity (Brown & Hartley, 1998; Linnemeyer & Brown, 2010; Murphy et al., 1996). Although these responses vary

depending on the individual, it has been found in research to be a noteworthy concern (Wylleman et al., 2004). As suggested by researchers, this concern may be addressed by preparing student-athletes before they transition out of competitive sport (Lally, 2007; Lavelle & Robinson, 2007; McKnight et al., 2009).

One tool that is not readily available in the vocational literature in assisting student-athletes in transitioning out of sport is the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA; Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). One key component that separates TWA, what is categorized as a Person-Environment correspondence theory (P-E), from other theories is the concept of “mutual responsiveness” (Dawis, 1980), which describes the mutual fulfillment of both the individual and work environment. While other P-E theories focus on how an individual fits with the environment, TWA equally emphasizes matching the environment to the individual. For example, most theories focus on what the person can bring to the working environment (i.e. experience, skills, knowledge) whereas TWA also emphasizes what the working environment can do for the person (i.e. reinforce individual values). Within TWA, there are four main elements: (1) the individual’s skills/abilities, (2) the individual’s values, (3) the environment’s requirements, and (4) the environment’s reinforcer system. According to Lofquist and Dawis, two main indicators of a successful work relationship are *satisfaction* (well-being of the individual) and *satisfactoriness* (adequate performance in the environment). Satisfactoriness is attained when the individual’s skill set matches the environment’s work requirements and satisfaction occurs when an environment reinforces the individual’s values (Hesketh & Griffin, 2005). Therefore work adjustment is the product of both satisfaction and satisfactoriness or what Lofquist and Dawis have termed *tenure*, the length of time a worker stays with a job. In other words, TWA focuses on what the working environment brings to the individual as well as what the individual brings to the working environment.

Using the TWA framework, student-athletes develop and refine sport-specific skills and traits/life skills learned through sport. These skills include physical and psychological abilities such as hand-eye coordination, speed, tactical thinking, etc. and life skills such as communicating, decision-making, as well as interpersonal (working with other) and intrapersonal (increasing self-awareness; Camire, Trudel, & Forneris, 2012). As such, the sporting environment may reinforce student-athletes’ values such as competition, health, camaraderie, etc. (MacLean & Hamm, 2008) Literature has focused on transferable skills that athletes acquire throughout their competitive careers such as strong work ethic, perseverance, accountability, leadership, balance, commitment, and the ability to overcome opposition (Jordan & Denson, 1990; McKnight et al., 2009; Nathanson & Kimmel, 2008). However, literature on values and environmental reinforcers is scarce, despite potentially being an important factor.

TWA was created out of vocational rehabilitation research to determine how effective rehabilitation programs were at matching occupations for individuals with disability (Lofquist & Dawis, 1969). It is a proactive theory that can be used to anticipate and cope with adjustment, or any type of general change or modification in one’s area of work. Thus, researchers have studied the use of TWA in retirement counseling by focusing on the balance between the skills of the retiree and the requirements of the working environment, as well as identifying any values in the post-retirement environment that were lost from the retiree’s career transition (Harper & Shoffner, 2004; Hesketh, Griffin, & Loh, 2011). Given that transition out of sport is a form of retirement, the purpose of this study was to examine the potential use of TWA for those transitioning out of collegiate sport.

An additional purpose of this study was to determine what information and resources were being used to help student-athletes with their transition out of sport. Universities and athletic departments currently have several services to assist student-athletes in their daily lives, although the type of resources may depend upon the type of university and sport (e.g., Division I, II, or III and revenue vs. non-revenue-producing sport). While collegiate athletes in general are competitive and have a strong desire for athletic success, institutions may differ in their overall perspective on academics and sports. For example, Division III institutions tend to have different emphasis on sports than Division I institutions that are generally highly concerned with athletic success and marketing (Chen et al., 2013; Pflieger, Katz, Schaeperkoetter, & Bass, 2015). Consequently, the student-athletes and athletic departments from different divisions may vary in their philosophy of academics and sport which may affect services that are provided.

One of the most commonly recognized programs for student-athletes through the NCAA was titled CHAMPS/Life Skills (Challenging Athlete's Minds for Personal Success). CHAMPS/Life Skills was created in 1991, used in all three NCAA divisions, and supports five foundational principles: academics, athletics, personal development, career planning, and community service (NCAA, 2008). The program has experienced modifications over the years and is currently in the process of a collaboration initiative with administrators to "reinvigorate the Life Skills mission for student-athlete wellness" (NCAA, 2015b, para. 2). Without a more standardized approach, different universities have been choosing and implementing their own programming to address the needs of their student-athletes, although as Kelly and Dixon (2014) noted, these programs tend to be "too general to reach all student-athletes" (p. 499).

While there is no uniform assistance for collegiate student-athletes, the topic of career termination has become a popular topic for American professional leagues. For example, TAP (the NFL Transition Assistance Program) provides free education to recently retired professional football athletes and their spouses on topics such as "physical, psychological, and social aspects of transition" as well as career development and financial success (NFL, 2013). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the National Basketball Players Association (NBPA) provide information about post-retirement issues and opportunities to further formal education through their career programs (Pavlidis & Gargalianos, 2014). Professional leagues have been attempting to provide much needed information about career termination and may include elements that can translate to the collegiate level, especially since collegiate careers tend to be finite (Fuller, 2014).

At the collegiate level, there are many people involved in assisting student-athletes in both their academic and sporting endeavors, including academic advisors for athletes, licensed psychologists, and sport psychology consultants. One such way to evaluate the perceptions of student-athletes is to survey those who assist them throughout their collegiate career on what techniques they currently use, and gain their opinion on the use of certain vocational theories. Therefore, the goal of this study was three-fold: (1) to explore current discussion on student-athletes transitioning out of collegiate sport (2) to analyze if elements of TWA were being used and how often, and (3) to identify experts about the importance, applicability, and potential use of the elements of TWA with said population. For the purpose of this study, *important* is defined as significant/noteworthy, *applicable* is defined as pertinent to the specific population of student-athletes, and *potential use* is defined as probability of being used by the participant.

Method

Given the past research on student-athletes and the impact of athletic identity on career maturity, TWA and retirement counseling, and the unknown connection of student-athletes' transition out of sport within the TWA framework, there is a need for exploratory research within the area of transition out of collegiate sport. Therefore, the Delphi technique was chosen for this study, as it is an exploratory, multi-stage survey design that seeks to gather information from a specified group of individuals characterized as experts to address a particular issue where no consensus has been achieved yet (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975; Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011). The identified strengths of the Delphi technique are that “n heads are better than one” and that an unbiased collection of randomized expert opinion can have high reliability (Dalkey, 1969). The number of experts on a Delphi panel varies as researchers have not reached a consensus on the ideal number of participants (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). However, one of the original suggestions was to have 10-15 identified experts in the related field (Delbecq et al., 1975), while another researcher concluded that accuracy of data increases with 11 or more members (Dalkey, 1969). The procedure in a Delphi study includes anonymous feedback, iteration and controlled feedback between rounds, and statistical group response, or an aggregate of individual opinions by the final round (Dalkey, 1969).

Delphi studies have been used in many disciplines, including sport sciences. Both Costa (2005) and Bowers, Green, and Seifried (2014) used the Delphi technique to gain prospective and retrospective data in regard to the field of sport management. Both research studies used opinions of experts in the field as a “future-oriented making tool” as well as a reflective instrument to analyze the field's trajectory (Bowers et al., 2014 p. 570). As such, the Delphi method was chosen to gain a consensus on the present status of a certain topic (i.e. sport transition) as well as identify points of discrepancy and agreement about the future (i.e. potential use of TWA elements; Costa, 2005).

The current study included a mixed methods approach with both quantitative and qualitative portions. In order to determine the appropriateness of the open-ended questions for the qualitative rounds, a pilot study was conducted using four individuals who as a group had an average of 9.5 years of experience working with collegiate student-athletes as sport psychology consultants, counselors, and advisors. These individuals were chosen from an opportunity sample from the university where the research was conducted and thus were not invited to participate in the full study.

Participants

The inclusion criteria for participating in this study as an expert were (1) holding a current position in an academic college or university and (2) having a minimum of 10 years working with student-athletes. After approval was granted from the institutional review board, participants were recruited from three professional organizational listservs: National Association of Academic Advisors for Athletics (N4A), Division 47 of the American Psychological Association (APA), and SportPSY (a listserv including members of APA Division 47 and Association for Applied Sport Psychology [AASP]). Fourteen individuals initially expressed interest, 11 members met the criteria received a follow-up e-mail for the commencement of Round 1, which included a set of open-ended questions inquiring about the use of each of the elements of TWA and a general question regarding how they discuss transitioning out of sport

with their student-athletes (see Table 1). Those 11 panelists participated in Rounds 1 and 2 and eight from the original 11 completed the study in Round 3.

The 11 expert panelists represented a variety of vocational experiences and training, as well as current positions and duties (See Table 1). Panelists came from eight Division I institutions and three Division II institutions representing all four main geographic regions of the United States. In terms of training background, the panelists represented individuals with doctoral or master's degrees in the following areas: higher education/administration, sport and exercise psychology, and counseling/clinical psychology. Additionally, the panelists had the opportunity to identify (multiple, if applicable) fields of identification and the data indicates an overlap in education and professions for those who are available to provide services for student-athletes (See Table 2). One main criterion for identifying experts is 10 years or more of experience in the related field; the average number of years of panelists working with student-athletes in the study was 14.72, with a maximum value of 28 years. Overall, the panelists of this study represent a range of institutions types, geographic regions, professions, and educational backgrounds in addition to their extensive years of experience, giving the authors confidence that the panelists comprised a diverse, yet relatable, experienced panel of experts, appropriate for the Delphi methodology.

Procedure

Round 1. The panelists were initially provided with a set of open-ended questions inquiring about the use of each of the elements of TWA and a general question regarding how they discuss transitioning out of sport with their student-athletes (see Table 3). The information was analyzed using qualitative content analysis to identify emergent themes (Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001) in which the primary investigator and a second rater were able to achieve 100% agreement rate. Twenty-four distinct statements were generated from the data in Round 1.

Round 2. In in second round, the panelists were provided with the 24 statements and asked to rate each statement in terms of importance, applicability, and potential use on a Likert scale of 1-5 (with one representing *not at all* and five representing *very*). After each statement, the panelists were given the opportunity to provide an anonymous rationale for their rankings. These rationales were compiled into an analysis summary that included a list of the group means and standard deviations of each statement in addition to that panelist's individual rating and the anonymous list of rationales. The purpose of the analysis summary was for each panelist to view his/her scores are in relation to the group and have an opportunity to read others' rationales for their rankings in order to increase the probability of generating consensus (Delbecq, et al., 1975; Graham, 2010; Keeney et al., 2011; Powell, 2003).

Round 3. There were 19 statements that met the cutoff criteria from Round 2 based on the analysis (see achieving consensus below). In the final round, the participants were provided with the analysis summary (individualized to their previous ratings) and given a chance to reevaluate and re-rank their responses using the same Likert scale. This round generated 11 final statements and was considered closure for the study as the participants were given a last look at the data in order to make any desired changes (Delbecq et al., 1975).

Achieving consensus. Achieving consensus was determined by quantitative analysis: statements provided after Round 2 that achieved a mean score of four out of five on the 5-point Likert scale and a panel member agreement of 70% for each item was used for Round 3 as per guidelines provided in the literature (Bulgar & Housner, 2007; Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001;

Shelton, 2010). Determining group consensus in the third round included analysis of the standard deviation of the remaining items - group consensus has been defined as any reduction in standard deviations, “indicating a developing convergence of opinion” (Neimeyer, Taylor, & Rozensky 2012, p. 367). Summarily, lowered standard deviations indicate less variability and less variability indicates collective agreement. Another system to determine consensus used by researchers is the interquartile deviation (IQD), which examines the interquartile range or the absolute value of the difference between the upper and lower percentiles of the responses (Rayans & Hahn, 2000). Values less than one, indicate a higher degree of consensus (Raskin, 1994; Rayans & Hahn, 2000). The change in standard deviation scores between Rounds 2 and 3 was used in addition to calculating the IQD in Round 3 to determine consensus in this study.

Results

With regard to the first research question (to explore current discussion on student-athletes transitioning out of collegiate sport), there is variety in how, when, what, and with whom these discussions on transitions are occurring according to the panelists. In terms of when and with whom, some experts are generating these discussions during the initial meeting with potential athletes during recruitment visits while others are not opening the discussion until junior or senior year in college. In terms of how, there are several avenues being used by the panelists to discuss these topics including: individual weekly meetings, obligatory academic advising appointments, or group presentations either offered to the entire student-athletic body (e.g., workshops, classes) or specific team presentations. In terms of what is being discussed for student-athletes by the current panelists, data was analyzed into four main areas: (1) future vocational skills, (2) general academic information, (3) transitional topics, and (4) identity development. Future vocational skill topics included: skill development (e.g., career networking, resume and cover writing, interview prepping, identifying transferable skills of time management and “being coachable”); general academic information included emphasis on academic advising and graduation requirements; transitional topics included plans after graduation and one identified “preparing to be a professional” class. Topics related to identity development were not described in detail.

In order to answer the second research question (if elements of TWA were being used and how often?), this study used a Likert scale of 1-5 with one representing *never* and five representing *all of the time* to identify the occurrence of TWA elements in transitional discussions by the panel. The element of transferable skills and post-retirement environment were each rated as being discussed sometimes ($M=3.82, SD=1.08; M=3.18, SD=1.17$ respectively); task-requirements of the post-retirement environment were rated as being discussed as rarely ($M=2.4, SD=0.84$); personal and professional values were rated as being discussed sometimes ($M=3.30, SD=1.25$), and matching the values with a new non-sporting environment were discussed the rarely ($M=2.22, SD=1.09$).

As for the third research question regarding the importance, applicability, and potential use of TWA elements, the panel participated in three rounds of ranking statements until consensus was achieved. In the first round, the panelists generated 24 distinct statements. In Round 2, these statements were ranked and five statements were immediately dismissed as not significant due to level of rating ($>4.0/5.0$ by 70% of panelists), leaving 19 statements. Samples of anonymous rationales generated in this round are provided in Table 4. In the third and final round, the veterans demonstrated a consensus on 11 statements (the SDs of these statement

decreased in the final round, indicating agreement; see Table 5). Unfortunately, three panelists did not complete the final round of ratings, despite several attempts to contact them. However, all final statements demonstrated high degree of consensus using the IQD and therefore, the data provided in Round 3 was considered valid. The original 11 statements were categorized under two of the four main elements of TWA, as either important, applicable, or of potential use with student-athletes transitioning out of sport (see Table 6). Furthermore, when the IQD analysis was used as a second measure for consensus, four additional statements demonstrated high consensus in the third round, two statements categorized under the topic of values. Although they did not meet the criteria of a reduced SD between the rounds, they all achieved an IQD less than 1 and therefore considered to be of significance (see Table 7).

Discussion

Overall, data from this study provided a look into what is currently being discussed with student-athletes on the topic of transitioning out of collegiate sport and initial evidence if elements of TWA would be appropriate.

Current Transition Discussions

There is disparity into how, when, and what is currently being discussed with student-athletes. Some panelists stated that these discussions occurred throughout the student-athletes' collegiate career, indicating the perceived importance of the topic, while others reported only bringing up the topic when relevant, which indicates a current lack of consensus as to when to approach this topic. However, one panelist offered a rationale that would capture both viewpoints: "offering life skills courses throughout [student-athletes'] career will enhance the likelihood to 'catch' them when they are developmentally ready to head the message." Additionally, the different avenues being used indicate a widespread utilization of resources but also a further lack of general consensus. However, there is an agreement that these discussions should occur at some point(s) in student-athletes' collegiate careers and should include general topics such as vocational skill development, transferable skills, graduate/education requirements, plans after graduation, and more specific topics related to revenue-producing sport (i.e. money management) among others.

Current Use of TWA Elements

With regard to the second research question on how often TWA elements are being used, only half of the topics presented in TWA are currently being discussed according to this panel. As previously stated, TWA theorizes that matching the four elements - individual's skills and ability to the requirements of the working environment (satisfactoriness) and matching the working environment's reinforcer system to the individual's values (satisfaction) - will result in a successful adjustment (Dawis, 1980). According to this expert panel, only the first part of the theory (satisfactoriness) is discussed through topics of transferable and vocational skills as well as discussing plans for graduation and offering a "preparing to be a professional" class. As one expert stated, "It is useful to teach student-athletes as many transferable skills as possible, but also even more important to spell out how these skills can be used in the real world after sport." Another panelist pointed out:

Oftentimes, athletes say they have no job experience when they leave college because all of their time was spent playing sports...Helping them recognize they do have transferable skills is important. I often tell the athletes that they did work full time in college...as an athlete.

The current data supports the use of transitional skills, as an important, applicable, and potentially useful tool as the panelists rated their discussion for these skills the most likely to occur out of the five elements. These findings on transitional skills are supported by the literature, particularly for student-athletes (i.e., the emphasis on the usefulness of discipline, strong work ethic, perseverance, accountability, leadership, balance, commitment, assertiveness, competitive drive, and the ability to overcome opposition; Baille & Danish, 1992; Jordan & Denson, 1990; McKnight et al., 2009; Nathanson & Kimmel, 2008).

Values

As a distinguishing characteristic of TWA, the study also explored the frequency of discussing the topic of values and the matching of those values with a new working environment (satisfaction). While discussions about values were deemed the second most commonly discussed topic of discussion by this expert panel when asked directly, it is surprising that it was not identified as a topic of discussion in the open-ended question section of the study. In fact, it was ranked as being rarely discussed in relation to matching values with a new environment. However, while none of the original final statements including values topics, two additional statements were categorized under personal and professional values of the student-athlete in the final analysis using the IQD. These findings reflect the scarcity of research on values in the student-athlete literature.

Furthermore, varying statements from the panelists indicated that they were unsure how to approach the topic of values. One expert recommended having the student-athletes “create a document identifying professional values” without much detail as to how or when to approach this topic while another panelist recommended “discussing values within the framework of the student-athletes’ academic decision-making process.” A third panelist cautioned that while discussing personal values “is important... [academic] advisors need to be aware of when they are inadvertently providing counseling and when a referral is necessary.”

One logical reason for why discussion around this topic is unclear is that student-athletes may not know what their post-athletic environment (career) will entail, and therefore, will not be able to identify environmental reinforcers for their values. On the other hand, despite being unable to identify a particular career, student-athletes may still benefit from discussing personal values in order to generate a general idea of where one would feel satisfaction in a career. One set of researchers (MacLean & Hamm, 2008) described a variety of values student-athletes find in sporting environments including, but not limited to: compassion, companionship, health and fitness, personal achievement, public image, sportsmanship, team cohesion, and winning. It can be assumed that since values are identified as trait variables that are judged as important by the individual (Dawis, 2005), values are individualistic. Relating back to the literature discussing TWA and retirement (Harper & Shoffner, 2004), understanding the importance of these values and their priority in student-athletes’ lives before transitioning out of sport may assist them in producing ideas for post-transition environments in which they may feel successful.

Identity Development

A noteworthy topic that was addressed by some panel members with their student-athletes was identity development, specifically the potential obstacle of athletic identity. As one panelist noted, “the athlete identity is one-dimensional many times and there is not often time to develop other interests on the college level.” Another panelist stated, “from my experience, student-athletes understand the [transferable] skills that will help them, but may not necessarily be ready to face some of the disappointment of losing their identity of a student-athlete”. While not a specific element of TWA, recognizing identity development has been found to be very useful in the literature review on general transitions; therefore this is an appreciated finding in this study. As previously noted, researchers found that athletic identity may potentially have a negative impact on student-athletes’ transition out of sport (Beamon, 2012; Brown et al., 2000; Fuller, 2014; Murphy et al, 1996). However, through the framework of TWA, one’s identity (i.e., an individual’s skills and values) can be helpful in creating successful work tenure, especially in other competing environments (Fuller, 2014). Therefore, viewing one’s identity as a strength rather than a limitation may be promising in preparing one to transition.

Important, Applicable, and Potential Use of TWA Elements

An added step in the analysis was to examine the difference between what topics were deemed more important, more applicable to the student-athlete population, or more likely to be used. Overwhelmingly (and not surprisingly due to its vast research) transferable skills were included in the most agreed upon important statements with this panel. The important topics of transferable skills include exploring those that are developed through participation in sport and filling in the gap of what they may have left out:

Many student-athletes believe that participating in a sport hinders their opportunities for transitioning to work... however it is extremely important for them to realize the things that they do every day are transferable skills that many employers can view favorably in lieu of job or work experience (anonymous panelist).

This includes helping them identify behavioral skills such as communication and discipline, cognitive skills such as decision-making, interpersonal skills such as teamwork/ability to work well with others, and intrapersonal skills such as self-awareness and persistence (Camire et al., 2012). Other statements deemed important were to compare sporting environment to a working environment (stressing the comparisons of “career to practice, boss to coach, etc.”) and stressing hands on work experience (if appropriate).

Statements that were deemed applicable for student-athletes were not always agreed as important, aside from discussions on transferable skills. These statements were more specific to the student-athlete population, including having discussions on getting used to free time and lack of structure without competitive sports and conducting these discussions through structural organizational activities (i.e., LifeSkills, Professional Developmental Programs). Some statements were directly related to the consequences of transitioning:

The shocking change in lifestyle once competitive sport is over is not talked about often enough with collegiate student-athletes. This transition is difficult to deal with and may lead to poor decision making to fill the time or numb the loss of identity (anonymous panelist).

Fuller (2014) summarized that student-athletes may experience difficulty in seeing themselves as anything other than a student-athlete and may feel “lost, confused, and void of life” when processing their transition (p. 3).

Of worthwhile significance were the statements that are of potential use by the panelists. The majority of panelists, by the nature of the number of years in the field, are in positions of authority and influence (seven panelists are a Director, Assistant Director, or Associate Director). These statements rated for potential use may carry the most weight since they were ranked as a group to be potentially useful for student-athletes. The first category of statements that may be potentially used is transferable skills (i.e. having discussions on transferable skills and filling the gap for what the student-athletes may have left out). As one expert stated:

Many student-athletes are unable to gain related professional experience during their collegiate careers due to time limitation because of their sport. Due to this lack of practical experience, it is essential that they understand how to market themselves based on transferable skills they have developed through their athletic participation. These are conversations we need to have with our student-athletes, from the time they are freshman to the time they transition out of sport.

The second category is decreasing high athletic identities by assisting student-athletes in getting involved in activities outside of athletics. As one panelist report, “if [the assistance] is not offered, [student-athletes] may never have been able to discover [other interests].” Several panelists noted limitations of time while still encouraging more flexibly identities:

While athletics takes up a large percent of a student-athletes’ time, it is important them to become involved in activities outside the sport and classroom... once a member of these organizations, it is also important for the individual to take an active or leadership role.

The third group of statements is categorized under preparing for a new work environment, which includes encouraging hands-on work experiences. However, as several panelists agreed, hands-on work experience “is often not possible due to sport-related demands”. Even more specifically:

Student-athletes are often put in situations where they have little voice. Certain majors and careers go unexplored because of their practice schedule or not knowing how to advocate for their own interests. Often, eligibility and retention are more important than finding a career fit.

Overall, these statements provide the makings of guidelines of what assisting student-athletes could potentially entail.

Concluding Thoughts

Referring back to an initial question, how can we assist student-athletes in planning for their foreseeable transition out of competitive sport into other work environments, even as they strongly identify as athletes? Instead of finding ways to transition completely out of the athletic role, how can we help athletes use the skills, roles, and values they already possess in order to prepare for this transition? As one panelist noted:

Many student-athletes recognize the importance of their skills after they leave college. Developmentally, they often do not understand this while they are competing, but do after leaving sport. It would be great if *we* could determine how to increase awareness *during* their competitive years.

This study provided initial evidence into the use of TWA elements (matching individual's skills to the requirements of the working environment and matching the working environment's reinforcer system to the individual's values) with transitioning out of collegiate sport. The data supports existing literature on the importance, applicability, and use of discussion related to transferable skills and requirements of the working environment. There is inconsistent data on the use of values. Matching values to the environment's reinforcer system was not rated as important; however, the topic of values was rated as commonly used, although only when directly asked. Apparently, these panelists recognized some worth in discussing student-athletes' values however the process of conducting these discussions may not be known. Therefore, the study generated subsequent questions.

One notable question that resulted from this study is what are the professional responsibilities of providers who work with student-athletes on transitioning topics? One statement that was ranked as important, applicable, and of potential use by the expert panelists is to have these transitional discussions conducted by a career expert, indicating a call for university departments to recognize this position:

This [position] would be invaluable to have... because [student-athletes] often have no direction even when they have picked a major. They also do not know all that is out there to choose from... and a designated staff member for student-athletes will help with this (anonymous panelist).

Another panelist stated that this discussion should be a department-wide task instead of being designated to one person. While these panelists offer suggestions for the athletic department to offer these services specifically for student-athletes, another subsequent question is what information is being provided to student-athletes about general career guidance services. All university students have access to general academic advisors and university-based career centers that can provide these services as well, as one panelist pointed out that "encouraging the student-athletes to utilize the career center is important."

Several panelists stated the impact of their direct approach: one panelist stated, "I find when I stress the skills [student-athletes] are learning, they gain more perspective," while another panelists stated, "just the act of discussing these issues can raise awareness." Yet another panelist precisely stated, "any way we can connect these ideas to the real working world after leaving college is important." While statements from this study provided worthy insight into

what is being discussed, remaining questions are: What are the obligations of providers? What information should be standard in discussions for all student-athletes transitioning out of sport? When should these discussions take place?

The topic of transitioning out of/retiring from sport has been recognized as an important topic in the top professional leagues in the United States. As previously noted, the NFL, NBA, and IOC have programs in place where professionals assist in that transition. In the current climate, each collegiate institution has its own programming for student-athletes. It may be worthwhile to take the considerations of our experts to design a more unified approach to transitioning out of collegiate sport, much like our professional leagues.

Limitations

As a Delphi panel, there were several limitations as well as strengths of this study. One common limitation of Delphi studies is to unintentionally influence the feedback of the panelists (Hsu & Sandford, 2007) or hinder dissent (Bowers et al., 2014). In order to avoid favoritism or partiality towards particular findings, the primary author purposefully made all initial questions open-ended and did not include any identifying information in the analysis summaries so that the data was collected anonymously and equally.

A primary limitation may have been the timing and length of the study which may have impacted attrition. Data collection occurred over three months which included the conclusion of the fall semester, winter break, and the commencement of the spring semester. Since all panelists follow a college semester schedule, the timing may have hindered participation. Additionally, Hsu and Sandford, (2007) recommend using the least amount of rounds possible for a Delphi study. Retrospectively, the study may have been appropriate to have two rounds of qualitative analysis with a third round of quantitative as the overall length may have attributed to participant attrition as well. Although the lowered number of responses may have impacted the data in the final round, additional analyses using the IQD demonstrated high consensus with the final statements.

Another limitation was the generalizability of the data; since the results are based on the participants in this study, it is not entirely replicable. The size and make-up of the panel is dependent upon the response rate of those invited to participate and may have an effect on the consensus (Bulgar & Housner, 2007; Fleming & Monda-Amaya, 2001). Additionally, the lack of representation from Division III schools from this study may hinder the generalizability for the entire student-athlete population since different institutions have different ideologies, priorities, and attract different types of student-athletes, as previously stated (Chen et al, 2013; Pflieger et al, 2015).

Future Research

As the Delphi method is an exploratory study of current and future trajectories (Costa, 2005), the present data indicates a need for further evaluation on how the elements of TWA can be practically used with student-athletes by generating an instrument to measure its occurrence and effect. Current researchers recommended the use of transition networks lead by athletic departments (Fuller, 2014) or mentoring programs that can address specific needs of individual student-athletes (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Further studies can address the use of this theory in such programs and for specific populations (e.g., revenue vs. non-revenue producing athletes,

Division I vs. Division III, etc.). Furthermore, it was indicated that having an identified staff member to address vocational concerns, not just academic issues, may be useful for student-athletes. Future research can focus on evaluating programs that have an identified vocational staff member or program and/or create pilot programs to evaluate the applied use of the elements of TWA within the student-athlete population. Overall, panelists from the study provided their expert opinion that student-athletes need guidance in their process of identifying their transferable skills, exploring relevant experiences, and preparing for their transition.

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Table 1

Panelist Demographics

	Responses	%
Position		
Director	4	36
Academic Counselor/Advisor	3	27
Associate Director	2	18
Assistant Director	1	9
SPC/Coach	1	9
Department		
Academic Advising (Athletics)	5	45
Athletic Department	4	36
Counseling Department	2	18
Duties (more than one)		
Supervisory Role	4	36
Administrative Responsibilities	3	27
Performance Enhancement/Training with Teams	3	27
Athletic Academic Advising	3	27
Support Programs/Workshops	2	18
Sport Administrator	1	9
Counseling/Assessment	1	9
Alumni connections for student-athletes	1	9
Campus communications	1	9
Highest Education Degree		
Ph.D./Psy.D./Ed.D.	3	27
M.A./M.S./equivalent	8	73
Training and Education (more than one)		
Higher Education/Administration	6	55
Sport and Exercise Psychology	6	55
Counseling Psychology	5	45
Clinical Psychology	1	1
Counseling	1	1
Other	2	18

Table 2
Identified Fields

	Choice #1	Choice #2	Choice #3	Choice #4	Total Responses
Academic	5	2	1	1	9
Counseling/Services					
Sport and Exercise	1	4	2	0	7
Psychology					
Counseling	3	1	1	1	6
Psychology					
*Other	1	2	0	0	3
TOTAL	10	9	4	2	-
*Other:					
NCAA compliance with a large portion working with eligibility issues					
Education at BS level in psychology					
Life/Skills – Job/career placement/alumni affairs/stewardship					

Table 3

List of Open-ended Questions

1. Please describing how you discuss the transition out of sport with student-athletes (including what, when, how, and with whom)
If applicable, please describe how you discuss:
2. Transferable skills (skills that were used to make them successful as student-athletes that can be used to make them successful in their chosen career/non-sporting career)
3. Task requirements of non-sporting careers (what non-sporting environments expect from workers)
4. Post-retirement environment (non-sporting environment when the student-athlete transitions out of competitive sport)
5. Personal and professional values of the student-athletes
6. Matching personal and professional values with the new non-sporting environment

Table 4

Sample of Anonymous Rationales for Ratings

Topic: Discussions about transferable skills
<p>Oftentimes, athletes say they have no job experience when they leave college because all of their time was spent playing sports...I often tell the athletes that they did work full-time in college, as an athlete. Many student-athletes are unable to gain related professional experience during their collegiate careers due to time limitations because of their sport. Due to this lack of practical experience, it is essential that they understand how to market themselves based on the transferrable skills they have developed through their athletic participation. These are conversations that we need to have with our student-athletes from the time they are freshman to the time when they transition out of sport. Many student-athletes recognize the importance of these skills after they leave college. Developmentally, they often do not understand this while they are competing, but do after leaving sport. It would be great if we could determine how to increase awareness during their competing years.</p> <p>It is definitely important to discuss it because very few student athletes have professional sports careers which will carry them into retirement age and almost all will need to find a career to transition into, whether it is immediately after college or down the line once their professional athletic career is over</p>
Topic: Task requirements of non-sporting careers
<p>Just as employers do not always understand the skills that student-athletes have gained, the students are sometimes unsure as to how the skills they have developed are transferrable. It is sometimes difficult for them to equate working with a coach can be used as an example of working with a boss or other related answers to behavioral questions.</p> <p>It is extremely important for [student-athletes] to realize the things that they do every day (attend practice, be on time, balance school and athletics, be coach able, etc.) are transferable skills that many employers can view favorably in lieu of job or work experience.</p>
Topic: Post-retirement environment (new career)
<p>Career exploration is critical; however, student-athletes are often put in situations where they have little voice. Certain majors and careers go unexplored because of their practice schedule or not knowing how to advocate for their own interests. Often, eligibility and retention are more important than finding a career fit.</p> <p>The shocking change in lifestyle once competitive sport is over is not talked about often enough with collegiate student-athletes. This transition is difficult to deal with and may lead to poor decision making to fill the time, or numb the loss of identity.</p>
Topic: Identity Development
<p>From my experience student-athletes understand the skills will help them, but may not necessarily be ready to face some of the disappointment of losing their identity as a student-athlete. For those who struggle with the transition due to this obstacle, it is more difficult for them to transfer the skills they learned while playing.</p> <p>I believe that athletes need to venture out of their athletic circle; however, there is very little time left to do that. I think coaches often make athletes feel bad for wanting that external life and create rules and activities that inadvertently keep them from pursuing an outside life [identity].</p>

Table 5

Round 2 and 3 Descriptive Statistics

*Bolded statements achieved group consensus by reduction in standard deviation in Round 3			
	Round 2 (M/SD)	Round 3 (M/SD)	Change in SD
Statement 1			
Importance	4.73/0.65	4.63/0.52	-0.13
Applicability	4.73/0.47	4.5/0.53	+0.06
Potential Use	4.45/0.69	4.25/0.46	-0.23
Statement 2			
Importance	4.50/0.85	4.50/0.76	-.09
Applicability	4.50/0.85	4.57/0.79	-.06
Potential Use	4.50/0.85	4.38/0.92	+.07
Statement 3			
Importance	4.64/0.67	4.50/0.93	+0.26
Applicability	4.45/0.93	4.38/0.74	-0.19
Potential Use	4.45/0.93	4.38/0.74	-0.19
Statement 4			
Importance	4.45/1.04	3.88/0.99	-0.05
Applicability	4.50/0.85	3.88/0.99	+0.14
Potential Use	4.64/0.81	3.88/1.13	+0.32
Statement 5			
Importance	4.27/1.01	4.00/.93	-0.08
Applicability	4.36/.81	3.75/.71	-0.10
Potential Use	4.27/.90	3.63/.74	-0.16
Statement 6			
Importance	4.40/0.84	4.25/0.89	+0.05
Applicability	4.20/0.92	3.88/1.13	+0.21
Potential Use	4.27/1.10	3.88/0.99	-0.11
Statement 7**			
Applicability	4.00/1.00	3.88/0.83	-0.17
Statement 8			
Importance	4.20/1.03	3.5/0.93	-0.10
Applicability	4.20/1.03	3.5/1.07	+0.04
Potential Use	4.18/1.08	3.38/1.06	-0.02
Statement 9			
Importance	4.45/0.69	4.75/0.46	-0.23
Applicability	4.40/0.70	4.25/0.89	+0.19
Potential Use	4.27/0.79	4.25/0.71	-0.08
Statement 10			
Importance	4.18/0.87	4.38/0.92	+0.05
Applicability	4.27/0.90	4.13/0.83	-0.07
Statement 11**			
Importance	4.36/0.67	4.25/0.46	-0.21
Applicability	4.18/0.75	4.00/0.76	+0.01
Potential Use	4.00/0.89	4.00/0.76	-0.13

**Statement 7's ratings of importance and potential use and Statement 11's rating for applicability did not met the cutoff criteria for Round 3

Table 6

Final 11 Statements

	I	A	PU*
Transferable Skills			
1. Discussions about the following transferable skills: leadership, discipline, motivation, communication, hard work, sacrifice, prioritizing, being accountable, discipline, overcoming obstacles, positive thinking, and preparation	X		X
2. Stressing transferable skills that student-athletes are developing through participation in their sport (because they often do not have the opportunity to gain professional experience in a summer job or internship due to the demands of their sport)	X	X	
3. Discussions about asking the student-athletes what they believe are their transferable skills and filling in the gaps of what they might have left out		X	X
4. Using challenging sporting experiences to discuss transferable communication skills of student-athletes and how they may apply to skills in future situations	X		
5. Discussions about transferable skills with student-athletes by an expert in the vocational field (i.e. Career Services)	X	X	X
Post-retirement Environment			
6. Assisting student-athletes with getting involved in activities, social groups, major clubs, etc. outside of athletics (because athletics too often become an identity and they should be well- rounded individuals with other avenues of social support)			X
7. Discussions with student-athletes including getting used to free time and lack of structure without sports		X	
Task Requirements of Non-sporting Careers			
8. Discussions with student-athletes including comparison of sporting environment to working environment (career to practice, boss to coach, etc.)	X		X
9. Encouraging hands-on work experience for student-athletes	X		X
10. Having an identified staff member address career-related tasks for student-athletes	X		X
Setting of Transitional Discussions			
11. Conducting discussions with student-athletes through structured organizational activities (e.g. Life Skills/Professional Development programs, 1st year study courses, etc.)		X	

*Rankings: I=Importance, A=Applicability, PU=Potential Use

Table 7

Interquartile Deviation Scores

Statement	IQD		
	Importance	Applicability	Potential Use
Values			
Discussions with athletes including professionalism (i.e. punctuality, hard work, discipline, etc.)	0.25	0.00	0.50
Discussing values with student-athletes within the framework of their decision-making process in academics/other aspects	0.50	N/A	N/A
Transferable Skills			
Discussions about transferable skills learned from sport and how they are applied towards academics or the workplace	0.50	N/A	N/A
Timing of Discussions			
Discussing these topics with student-athletes all throughout their academic career	0.00	0.50	0.50