

Do Athletic Department Mission Statements Influence Employees' Perceptions of Psychological Contract Fulfillment?

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Abstract

Mission statements are utilized by organizations to influence perceptions of key stakeholders, including employees. For more than two decades, scholars theorized mission statement content influenced employees' psychological contract terms and perceptions of fulfillment although empirical research remained limited. Athletic department employees function to fulfill the mission of their department and host university. Utilizing a large sample of employees from National Collegiate Athletic Association athletic departments, this study explored how mission statement content influenced employees' psychological contract terms and perceptions of fulfillment.

Introduction

Defined as, "individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between the individual and their organization" (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9), psychological contracts provide a paradigm for scholars and practitioners to critically analyze the employee/employer relationship. As an extension of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960), psychological contract theory explores the nature of implied understandings that govern employees' relationships with their organization. Rousseau (1989, 1990, 1995) reconceptualized psychological contract theory, shifting the focus of study from traditional transactional arrangements to perceived agreements that encompass transactional and relational expectations of employees. The reconceptualization also placed emphasis on employees' perceptions of an exchange agreement over the firm's view of an actual agreement. Following Rousseau's (1995) seminal work, scholarly interest in psychological contract theory burgeoned, becoming influential among practitioners and organizational behaviorists (Zhao, Wayne, Glibkowski, & Bravo, 2007).

Psychological contracts of employees are complex, containing numerous terms and expectations for their employer to fulfill (Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Rousseau, 1995). Individual employees may be more aware of, or place greater emphasis on certain terms over others, further contributing to the complications employers may have in understanding or fulfilling employees' expectations for employment (Bunderson, 2001; Chaudhry, Wayne, & Schalk, 2009; McInnis, Meyer, & Feldman, 2009). Despite recognizing the multifaceted nature of the construct, research exploring psychological contract development and issues related to employer communication has received little attention from scholars. Quality of organizational communication and clarity organizational messages are often cited as important in the development of realistic, better understood psychological contract terms, as well as employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment (De Ruiter, Schalk, & Blomme, 2016; Delcampo, Rogers, & Jacobson, 2015; Restubog, Bordia, Tang, & Krebs, 2010). However,

empirical research examining the effectiveness of various communication channels on psychological contracts is largely absent from the literature.

Channels through which organizations communicate can range from directives issued by upper level managers to posts on sponsored social media websites. Although use of specific communication mediums may vary from one organization to the next, most offer publicly accessible mission statements (Stallworth Williams, 2008). Building on numerous definitions in the literature, Stallworth Williams (2008) defined mission statements as “conveying a corporation’s nature and reason for being, this statement may also outline where a firm is headed; how it plans to get there; what its priorities, values, and beliefs are; and how it is distinctive” (p. 96). Organizations employ the mission statement to influence perceptions of stakeholders, including employees (Brown, Yoshioka, & Munoz, 2004; Klemm, Sanderson, & Luffman, 1991).

To date, no studies have explored links between mission statement content and psychological contract terms of sport organization employees. Outside of sport, two studies exploring effectiveness of organizational communication included mission statements within their model (e.g., Guest & Conway, 2002; Turnley & Feldman, 1999). However, neither fully explored the role of mission statement content on employees’ development of psychological contract terms or perceptions of organizational fulfillment. Literature examining information seeking and sensemaking behaviors of employees support a potential relationship between employees’ interpretations of mission statement content and terms of their psychological contract (Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011). The current study aimed to address gaps in the literature by exploring how interpretations of psychological contract content influenced collegiate athletic department employees’ terms, as well as their perceptions the organization fulfilled its psychological contract based obligations. College athletic department employees were selected as the population for this study because they work for unique organizations that often develop their own mission statements (Ward & Hux, 2011), but also function within the mission of the university (Davis, Ruhe, Lee, & Rajadhyaksha, 2007). As employees of these semiautonomous subunits, athletic department employees may be influenced by both university and athletic department mission statements.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

Psychological contracts

Psychological contracts serve a schema through which employees can interpret organizational messages, change, and disruptions (Chaudhry, Coyle-Shapiro, & Wayne, 2010; Parzefall & Coyle-Shapiro, 2011; Rousseau, 2001). Messages received from the organization regarding changes or disruptions may result in perceptions of fulfillment or breach of the psychological contract, or a recalibration of the perceived exchange relationship depending on interpretations of the employee (Pate, 2006). During periods when psychological contracts are incomplete, or are in development, employees seek information from sources both within and outside the organization to make sense of their workplace environment (De Vos, Buyens, & Schalk, 2003; De Vos & Freese, 2011; Lee, Liu, Rousseau, Hui, & Chen, 2011; Tomprou & Nikolaou, 2011). Information received during periods of sensemaking will be incorporated into psychological contract terms if the employee believes it constitutes part of the exchange agreement (Rousseau, 2001). Future perceptions of psychological contract breach or fulfillment will be based on whether the employee believes the organization satisfied its obligations, as well as other contextual factors including organizational communication (Morrison & Robinson, 1997).

Psychological contract fulfillment is defined as the extent to which the employee believes their organization has fulfilled its obligations (Lee et al., 2011). Only recently recognized by scholars as a unique variable (Conway, Guest, & Trenberth, 2011), psychological contract fulfillment has received less attention in the literature than its closely related variable, breach. Lambert, Edwards, and Cable (2003) posited that it is possible to fulfill certain aspects of an employee's psychological contract but also fall short of other perceived obligations. For example, it is possible to fulfill employees' expectations of the organization to support community service, but breach expectations to supply career training. This idea was supported by the work of Conway et al. (2011). Utilizing a longitudinal design, this study found differential effects associated with breach and fulfillment inconsistent with a linear continuum. Outcomes associated with breach were stronger and instantaneous, but generally impacted employee attitudes for short time periods. Perceptions of fulfillment had a smaller, positive effect on affective outcomes, yet the impact was felt much longer by employees. Although psychological contract fulfillment is considered a different variable than breach, much of the literature treats employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment as the opposite of breach and inferences are often made regarding its outcome (e.g., Bal, Chiaburu, & Jansen, 2010; Zhao et al., 2007).

Having a clear understanding as to psychological contract fulfillment as a variable independent of a psychological contract breach is important as fulfillment is associated with several positive outcomes for the firm. Such outcomes include innovative behavior (Li, Feng, Liu, & Cheng, 2014; Modaresi & Nourian, 2013), organizational citizenship (Henderson, Wayne, Shore, Bommer, & Tetrick, 2008; Modaresi & Nourian, 2013; Turnley, Bolino, Lester, & Bloodgood, 2003), and in-role performance (Conway & Coyle-Shapiro, 2006; Henderson et al., 2008; Li et al., 2014; Turnley et al., 2003). Perceptions of fulfillment are also positively associated with attitudinal outcomes, including organizational commitment (Conway et al., 2011; Kraft & Kwantes, 2013; McInnis et al., 2009), satisfaction (Conway et al., 2011; Lambert et al., 2003), and trust (Lapalme, Simard, & Tremblay, 2011).

Psychological contract fulfillment has been measured in one study conducted in a sport organizational setting. Harman and Doherty (2017) found psychological contract fulfillment was positively related to satisfaction and commitment of volunteer youth coaches. Research examining the related construct, psychological contract breach, indicate sport organizational members are affected by their perceptions of the how their organization has fulfilled its obligations. Perceptions of psychological contract breach in sport has been shown to affect organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational trust, and turnover intentions (Bravo & Won, 2009; Dhurup, Keyser, Surujlal, 2015; Kim, Trail, Lim, & Kim, 2009; Won & Pack, 2010). These findings are important contributions to the literature. Attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employees are linked to organizational success (Doherty, 1998; Koys, 2001). However, scholarship exploring organizational communication and information seeking behaviors of employees, often postulated as antecedents to psychological contract fulfillment, are nonexistent in the sport based psychological contract literature.

Scholars have suggested clear communication between the organization and employee can limit discrepancies and increase perceptions fulfillment (Brown & Roloff, 2015; Clutterbuck, 2005; De Ruiter et al., 2016; Guest & Conway, 2002; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). Additionally, Van Den Heuvel and Schalk (2015) examined employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment during periods of organizational change. Results indicated that as more information is supplied by the organization, employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment increase. Van Den Heuvel and Schalk's (2015)

findings were congruent with other studies indicating clear communication exchange between employer and employee (Wu & Chen, 2015), as well as quality of leader-member exchange (Henderson et al., 2008), influence employees' perceptions of fulfillment. One key source of communication from the firm is the mission statement.

Mission statements

Bartkus, Glassman, and McAfee (2000) stated, "mission statements...enable current and potential employees, managers, suppliers, customers and investors to self-select into the firm (to determine whether they want to get involved with it)" (p. 27-28). Distinctiveness among firms demands variation in mission statements across organizations. Yet, several themes identified as common to most mission statements relate to issues often found in employees' psychological contracts, including discussions of the firm's commitment to financial sustainability, desired public image, organizational philosophies, self-concept, and corporate ethos (David, 1989; Pearce & David, 1987; Stallworth Williams, 2008).

Relevant to the population of this study, university mission statements have been found to address a myriad of topics ranging from specific learning goals to ethical development (Meacham & Gaff, 2006; Taylor & Morpew, 2010). Notably, themes of service are common among baccalaureate institutions in the United States (Taylor & Morpew, 2010). A diversity of topics is generally found among mission statements of intercollegiate athletic departments as well (Ward & Hux, 2011). Commitments to community service and personnel development are also referenced regularly in the mission statements of collegiate athletics departments (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011; Huml, Svensson, & Hancock, 2014; Ward & Hux, 2011). Barnhill and Brown (2017) found athletic department employees develop psychological contract terms related to community service, possibly indicating influence of mission statements on organizational members.

Literature from both mission statement and psychological contract scholarship indicate a relationship between mission statement content and psychological contract development. Unfortunately, both empirical studies exploring the relationship are extremely limited. Neither Guest and Conway (2002) nor Turnley and Feldman (1999) focused specifically on the role of mission statements. No studies to date have examined links between specific content within mission statements and development of specific psychological contract terms, however numerous scholars theorized that mission statement content can influence psychological contract expectations (Parks & Schmedemann, 1994; Rousseau, 1995, 2001; Rousseau & Greller, 1994). All of the scholarship relating psychological contracts and mission statements is becoming increasingly dated, further complicating possible inferences.

Athletic department employees may be exposed to the university or athletic department mission statements via orientation activities or organizational meetings. Additionally, these mission statements are often publicly available through a number of sources including the university and/or athletic department website (Taylor & Morpew, 2010). Based on the theoretical literature and limited generalization of Guest and Conway (2002), two hypotheses were developed.

H1: Athletic department employees' interpretations of the athletic department mission statement content will influence development of specific psychological contract expectations.

H2: Athletic department employees' interpretations of the university mission statement content will influence development of specific psychological contract expectations.

Mission statements and perceptions of fulfillment

Guest and Conway (2002) found top-down organizational communication, including mission statements, to be less effective in altering employees' perceptions of breach or fulfillment relative to other job-related communication. However, studies focusing on the effects of perceived mission statement fulfillment seemingly contradict Guest and Conway's findings. Suh, Houston, Barney, & Kwon (2011) utilized a large sample (n = 3,999) to explore employees' perceptions of mission statement fulfillment on psychological and attitudinal outcomes. A fully mediated model indicated significant positive relationships between perceived mission fulfillment and feelings of mission engagement and organizational identification, and a negative relationship with emotional exhaustion. These variables mediated affective commitment and turnover intentions. An alternate model tested by Suh et al. (2011) indicated a direct, positive relationship between perceived mission fulfillment and affective commitment. A similar study revealed perceived mission fulfillment as an antecedent of workplace engagement (Karatepe & Aga, 2016). Although these studies do not indicate mission statements affect perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment, parallels can be drawn between the outcomes of perceived mission statement fulfillment and outcomes of psychological contract fulfillment. Specifically, employees may develop psychological contract terms related to their expectations the employer fulfill the organizations mission.

Building on the literature indicating communication as critical to the maintenance of healthy psychological contracts between employees and organizations (Brown & Roloff, 2015; Clutterbuck, 2005; De Ruiters et al., 2016; Guest & Conway, 2002; Guzzo & Noonan, 1994; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998), it may be unwise to write off mission statements as ineffective for influencing employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Scholars have established effective mission statements can be utilized to influence employees' perceptions of the organization and its practices (Bartkus, Glassman, & McAfee, 2006; Klemm et al., 1991). However, scholarship also indicates employees' interpretation of mission statement meaning is more important than actual mission statement text (Weiss & Piderit, 1999). As mission statements are often written to allow for interpretation (Carmon, 2013), it is plausible employees' may interpret the text differently than the organization intended. In addition, organizations often interpret psychological contract terms differently than employees (Robinson & Morrison, 2000). Guest and Conway (2002) relied on organizational interpretations of the mission statement, not employees' interpretations.

To address this apparent gap in the literature, scholars have called for further scholarship exploring the connection between communication/interpretation and mission statement related outcomes (Braun, Wesche, Frey, Weisweiler, & Peus, 2012; Kopaneva & Sias, 2015; Suh et al., 2011). Intercollegiate athletic department employees must interpret two missions. Foreman and Whetten (2002) examined organizations with multiple identities. Congruence between identities can influence employee outcomes. Confusion between which mission to follow may also alter employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

H3: Athletic department employees' interpretations of the athletic departmental mission statement will influence perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

H4: Athletic department employees' interpretations of the university mission statement will influence perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment.

Method

Respondents

Email addresses of 5,672 full-time athletic department employees, excluding coaches, were obtained from websites of NCAA Division I institutions. A questionnaire was sent to all emails obtained, with follow-up messages sent weekly over a one-month period. A total of 685 responses were received. Incomplete responses were excluded from our analysis, resulting in 540 usable responses for a response rate of 9.5%. Men comprised 53.9% (n=291) of the respondents, with women comprising 44.1% (n=238) of valid responses. Eleven respondents chose not to reveal their gender. A majority of respondents worked at schools without religious affiliation (n = 443, 82.0%), compared to 91 employees of religiously affiliated schools (n = 91, 16.9%). Respondents were relatively evenly distributed across Division I subdivision (Football Bowl Subdivision = 197, 36.5%; Football Championship Subdivision = 200, 37.0%; Non-football = 134, 24.8%).

Instrumentation

Two items were used to measure employees' interpretations of the mission statements under which they functioned. As references to community service are common to both athletic department and university mission statements (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011; Huml et al., 2014; Ward & Hux, 2011), participants were asked, "Does your athletic department include service as part of their mission?" University mission statement content was determined by the item, "Does your university include service as part of their mission?" Respondents were given the option to respond "yes", "no", or "I don't know".

Psychological contract terms related to service were measured by applying Carroll's (1979, 1991) philanthropic domain of corporate social responsibility to the Psychological Contract Inventory (Rousseau, 2000). The philanthropic domain of corporate social responsibility focuses on the willingness of an organization to act as a benevolent agent within its community (Carroll, 1991). Actions to fulfill this domain may include initiating or engaging in community service as an organization or providing opportunities for engagement by organizational members (Carroll, 1979, 1991). The Psychological Contract Inventory (Rousseau, 2000) allows researchers to measure psychological contract terms through asking participants a series of questions regarding their expectations of the organization to engage in a certain activity measured on a five-point Likert type scale (1 = no expectations, 5 = very high expectations). A sample item asked, "What is your level of expectation of the athletic department to encourage a culture of community engagement?"

Perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment is measured by asking participants to rate the degree to which the organization has fulfilled their expectations of the activities listed in the prior in the psychological contract terms section. For example, one item asked, "The athletic department's fulfillment of my expectation to encourage a culture of community engagement was..." All items related to psychological contract fulfillment were measured on a five-point Likert type scale (1 = much less than I expected, 3 = what I expected, 5 = much more than I expected). Survey items are listed in Table 1.

The Psychological Contract Inventory (Rousseau, 2000) meets the guidelines for psychological contract measurement outlined by Freese and Schalk (1997) and is recommended by Freese and Schalk (2008) as the best method for measuring psychological contract terms due to its

high internal consistency scores, factor loadings, and adherence to theoretical concepts. Construct validity of the expectation and fulfillment items was examined through confirmatory factor analysis. The factor loadings (Table 1) for all items met acceptable thresholds (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Internal consistency of the questionnaire was examined via Cronbach's Alpha. The psychological contract terms scale ($\alpha = .887$) and psychological contract fulfillment scale ($\alpha = .894$) were acceptable as per Hair et al., 2010.

Three potential confounding factors were identified requiring corresponding items. Although results have been inconsistent between studies, gender has been identified as a potential confounding variable in psychological contract research (Blomme, van Rheede, & Tromp, 2010). Thus, one item was included asking respondents to self-identify their gender (0 = female, 1 = male). Religiously affiliated universities often have mission statements that stress community outreach or references to ethics or character (Davis et al., 2007) which could be influential of employee behavior. Thus, respondents were asked to identify if their university had a religious affiliation (0 = no, 1 = yes). Finally, respondents were asked to identify the National Collegiate Athletic Association classification level of their institution. Although, all respondents were from Division I schools, the classification contains three subdivisions (Football Bowl Subdivision, Football Championship Subdivision, Non-Football).

Item	Factor Loading
What is your level of expectation of the athletic department to ...	
Have a commitment to community service?	.846
Provide service opportunities that include employee involvement?	.836
Encourage a culture of community engagement?	.891
Encourage a culture of philanthropy?	.772
Provide service opportunities to student-athletes?	.819
The athletic department's fulfillment of my expectation to...	
Have a commitment to community service?	.843
Provide service opportunities that include employee involvement?	.827
Encourage a culture of community engagement?	.853
Encourage a culture of philanthropy?	.816
Provide service opportunities to student-athletes?	.847

Results

Hierarchical regression was used to analyze data obtained from survey participants. This method of analysis allows researchers to explore linear relationships between independent and dependent variables while controlling for potentially founding variables contained in the model (Field, 2013). The items regarding the mission statements of the universities and athletic departments represent categorical independent variables in our hypotheses. To operationalize the non-dichotomous categorical variables measured in each item dummy variables were utilized (Field, 2013). Separate dummy variables for "yes" and "no" responses were created with "I don't know" held as the constant. A majority of respondents indicated their university mission statement did include service in the mission statement (n = 314, 58.1%) compared to no mention of service (n = 98, 18.1%). The remainder of respondents were unsure of whether their

university included service in the mission statement ($n = 128, 23.7\%$). When asked about their athletic department, 342 (63.3%) respondents interpreted the mission statement to include service. Interpretations that the athletic department's mission statement did not include service were reported by 21.1% ($n = 114$) of respondents, whereas "I don't know" accounted for 15.6% ($n = 84$) of replies.

Hierarchical linear regression was conducted to determine if employees' interpretations of whether their university or athletic departments' mission statements referenced service influenced psychological contract terms. Control variables were entered in step one followed by the university and athletic department mission statement dummy variables in step two. The model explained a small portion of the variance in psychological contract terms of the respondents ($R^2 = .051, \Delta R^2 = .038, F(7, 515) = 3.923, p < .000$). References to service in the athletic department mission statement were significantly related to changes in increased expectations ($\beta = .243, p = .001$). None of the other variables in the model were significantly related to changes in psychological contract terms (Table 2). Hypothesis 1 was supported but Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Table 2 Hierarchical Linear Regression Results: Expectations

	SE	β	p
1 Classification	0.041	-0.021	0.638
Gender	0.062	-0.054	0.223
Religious Affiliation	0.086	-0.004	0.992
2 University Mission - Yes	0.090	0.005	0.932
University Mission - No	0.111	-0.067	0.276
<i>Athletic Mission - Yes</i>	<i>0.104</i>	<i>0.243</i>	<i>0.001</i>
Athletic Mission - No	0.120	0.082	0.242
ΔR^2		0.048	
Adjusted R^2		0.038	

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predicted interpretations of mission statement content would affect employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. Hierarchical linear regression was once again used to analyze the data. The model explained a slightly larger portion of the variance ($R^2 = .080, \Delta R^2 = .067, F(7, 510), p < .001$). Division I classification, perceptions the university mission statement did not include service, as well as perceptions the athletic department mission statement did or did not include service are all significant predictors of psychological contract fulfillment (Table 3). Hypotheses 3 and 4 were accepted.

Chi-square tests were run to determine in the control groups were associated with whether respondents were more likely to interpret the mission statement of the university or athletic department included mentions of service. Division I classification was significantly related to interpretations of service in university mission statements. Non-football (68.7%) and Football

Table 3 Hierarchical Linear Regression Results: Fulfillment

	SE	β	<i>p</i>
1 Classification	0.042	-0.087	0.059
Gender	0.063	0.026	0.560
Religious Affiliation	0.087	0.071	0.122
2 University Mission - Yes	0.089	0.071	0.250
University Mission - No	0.110	0.147	0.015
Athletic Mission - Yes	0.103	0.142	0.042
Athletic Mission - No	0.119	-0.158	0.022
ΔR^2		0.070	
Adjusted R^2		0.067	

Championship Subdivision (60.6%) university mission statements significantly more likely than Football Bowl Subdivisions (50.8%) to include references to service in the mission according to respondents ($\chi^2 = 12.622$, $df = 4$, $p = .013$). Classification had no significant effect on employees' interpretations of athletic department mission statements ($\chi^2 = 3.791$, $df = 4$, $p = .435$). Gender was also not significantly related to interpretations that the university's ($\chi^2 = 1.117$, $df = 2$, $p = .572$), nor the athletic department's ($\chi^2 = 0.931$, $df = 2$, $p = .628$) mission statement. However, employees of religious institutions (university = 91.1%, athletic department 82.4%) were more likely employees at non-religious schools (university = 52.6%, athletic department 60.4%) to interpret references to service in the respective mission statements (university $\chi^2 = 43.984$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$; athletic department $\chi^2 = 17.729$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

This study sought to explore whether mission statements of universities and athletic departments influenced service-based psychological contract terms of athletic department employees or their perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. In contrast to prior research, the current study focused on individuals' interpretations of mission statement content as it related to a specific obligation found in psychological contracts of the population. Service was chosen as the focal obligation given its ubiquitous nature in university and athletic department mission statements (Andrassy & Bruening, 2011; Huml et al., 2014; Taylor & Mophew, 2010) and its role as a component of athletic department employees' psychological contracts (Barnhill & Brown, 2017). The results of this study have implications for both scholars and practitioners.

Specific to scholars, this study adds to the extant literature addressing psychological contracts in finding support for athletic department mission statements as effective organizational communicators, influencing both development of psychological contract terms related to service obligations of the organization and employees' perceptions of fulfillment. University mission statements were less impactful, but still influential over athletic department employees' perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. This speaks to the complexities of psychological contracts. While this study focused on a specific form of organizational communication, the context of this study revealed two separate organizational communications

can simultaneously impact perceptions of fulfillment. As such, organizations should be careful to ensure consistent messaging in all organizational communications in order to influence psychological contracts of employees and avoid cognitive dissonance (De Ruyter et al., 2016). Furthermore, as perceptions of fulfillment or breach of the psychological contract are directly related to important attitudinal and behavioral outcomes, including organizational commitment, satisfaction, trust, and turnover intentions (Bravo & Won, 2009; Dhurup et al., 2015; Harman & Doherty, 2017; Kim et al., 2009; Won & Pack, 2010), practitioners must be aware of the small but significant impact mission statement interpretations may have on employees. Small changes to employees' attitudes and behaviors resulting from psychological contract fulfillment can still have positive benefits for an organization (Doherty, 1998; Koys, 2001).

The results of the study also indicate employees who interpreted athletic department mission statements as including service were more likely to have greater expectations for their employer to engage in or support community service-based activities. Those who did not interpret the statement as a message regarding service-based obligations were not significantly affected in either direction. As employees may be predisposed to focus on specific terms within the psychological contract (Bunderson, 2001; Chaudhry et al., 2009; McInnis et al., 2009), they may seek out organizational communiques, such as a mission statement, to ensure congruence with their own values. This could potentially bias the employee's interpretation of the statement's context or create greater awareness of its actual content.

In addition, this result has practical implications. Current employees and potential employees will seek communications from an organization that align with the employee's values (De Vos & Freese, 2011). It is in the firm's interest to supply as much information as is appropriate. Van Den Heuvel and Schalk (2015) found that providing such information improves perceptions of psychological contract fulfillment. However, providing such information is not enough. Intentionally vague messages designed to reach broad audiences (Carmon, 2013) may create expectations the organization is unaware of if the mission statement is interpreted in way the firm does not anticipate (Weiss & Piderit, 1999). Incongruence between organizational intentions and employee interpretations can lead to psychological contracts that the organization cannot fulfill (Morrison & Robinson, 1997). To control for this potential issue, athletic departments must be careful to craft mission statements that are clear and less open for mistaken interpretation.

Mission statements are just one form of organizational communication (Brown & Roloff, 2015; Clutterbuck, 2005; Rousseau, 1995; Rousseau & Tijoriwala, 1998). As scholars attempt to further knowledge regarding psychological contract development and fulfillment, research should be conducted to determine how other organizational messages and communication methods affect employees' psychological contract. Although the results of this study were significant, effect sizes were generally small indicating other information sources likely also have a significant role in expectation development. Research examining psychological contract outcomes is well established, but relatively little is known regarding information sources and employees' expectations.

Additionally, the recommendations regarding clear and consistent messaging from organizations would be aided by awareness of the message. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23.7%) were unsure if service was included in their university's mission statement while 15.6% of respondents did not know if service was a component of the athletic department mission. A lack of awareness of service and other socially responsible initiatives has been found throughout the extant literature (Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2008; Brown, Czekanski, &

Schermick, in press), highlighting the need for future studies to explore additional terms commonly found in psychological contracts.

Limitations

Employees' interpretations of mission statements may provide an inaccurate understanding of actual mission statement content. Many participants in the study admitted to being unaware of the mission statement content of their athletic department or university. This may have clouded our results. The same may be true for our low response rate. The rate may have influenced results in a manner that cannot be accounted for. Additionally, scholars should use caution when generalizing these results across sport organizations. Intercollegiate athletic departments are unique in that they are suborganizations within a larger institution. Employees of other sport organizations may not be influenced by two distinct mission statements.

Conclusions

Mission statements offer many benefits for organizations (Bartkus et al., 2006; Stallworth Williams, 2008). When interpreted by an employee in a manner consistent with organizational intentions, mission statements can be an influential avenue to communicate with employees and other stakeholders. Intercollegiate athletic departments, and other sport organizations that intend to serve their community, and that desire to attract employees with similar values, should include clear references to intentions in their mission statements. References to service will build psychological contract terms and influence perceptions of organizational fulfillment. Doing so will likely have beneficial outcomes for employees and the organization as a whole if the organization is truly engaged and committed to service. To fully benefit however, athletic departments, and other sport organizations must make sure mission statements and other communication avenues are accessible to employees, and that employees are aware of the intended message.

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