

The NFL: Can Diversity Really Be Valued in the World's Greatest Meritocracy?

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ABSTRACT

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This study examines the mission and values of the NFL in relation to their diversity initiatives to answer the research question: Does the NFL and its primary stakeholders, being owners, coaches, players, and fans, value “embracing” and “celebrating diverse opinions and perspectives,” manage diversity for the sake of profit, or abide by minimal affirmative action standards, and does that make the NFL and its stakeholders a monocultural, transitional, or multicultural organization? After grouping the NFL’s key participants into five stakeholder groups, the researcher compared the NFL’s stakeholder groups to frameworks developed by Packinthan Chelladurai and found that while the league had made progress in diversifying certain stakeholder groups, other stakeholder groups are still lacking in diversity. The researcher suggests that the NFL needs to take intentional, planned steps to diversify the league so that the league can continue to thrive in future generations.

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Introduction

“Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules, and the reality of the game.” Jaques Barzun, a historian, professor, philosopher, and essayist (among other things), wrote this statement about the game of baseball in a collection of essays titled “God’s Country and Mine” back in 1954. He presented the concept that in order to understand the American people you must understand the game of baseball. At the time, baseball was experiencing its Golden Age and it was truly “America’s Pastime.” Even through the changing social climate of the latter half of the 20th century, baseball continued to be a metaphorical litmus test for society. “Fundamentally, things haven’t changed. Baseball still reflects our society, it’s just that our society has changed,” said Barzun in a New York Times interview from 1981 (Berkow, 1981). The world had changed since America fell in love with the game of baseball. American society desegregated, advanced in women’s rights, found new cultural tastes, and became involved in a Cold War. Minorities were beginning to find their place in the workplace. The world was a different place since Murders’ Row swept the World Series in 1927.

The times, however, have continued to change, and America has a new favorite pastime. According to a Harris poll, football is America’s new athletic obsession. 111.3 million people watched the Super Bowl in 2017 (Number of Super Bowl..., 2017). Now instead of baseball being the analogue for American society, football is the sport reflective of today’s America and, in many ways, a reflection of our way of life.

The National Football League (NFL) produces entertainment through the game of football. The league is made up of 32 teams, each with rosters of 53 players. It is also made up of coaches, owners, and others who make the gears of the organization turn. Positions are filled by

selecting talented people. At least this is what embattled commissioner, Roger Goodell, claims the NFL to be. “You earn your opportunities and you get to keep your opportunities based on the way you perform, ultimately,” said Goodell. He went on to call the NFL a “meritocracy” (Bieler, 2017). Meritocracy, as defined by the Merriam Webster Dictionary, is “a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement” (Meritocracy, n.d.). The idea of a meritocracy, however, is a questionable idea. Malcolm Gladwell, a New York Times best-selling author who specializes in providing a window into the hearts and souls of people and organizations said, “The world is not a meritocracy as much as we may like to pretend it is. And we have a long way to go before we really reward people based on their own merit,” (Gladwell, 2013).

While the NFL characterizes itself as a meritocracy, it also claims to value diversity. Diversity is defined as “any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarity,” (Chelladurai, 2017). According to the NFL’s value of respect, “Everyone matters. Everyone contributes. In a game of X’s and O’s, we embrace all people for who they are regardless of status, title, or background. We celebrate diverse opinions and perspectives...” (MISSION AND VALUES, n.d.).

With this in mind, if the core product of the NFL is players and the games, and the product is based on a meritocracy, does the NFL value diversity, manage it, or simply follow affirmative action laws? The purpose of this research is to analyze the management practices of the NFL as it relates to diversity of each of its primary stakeholders, including the league, owners, coaches, players, and fans. This research is important because systematically analyzing the way the NFL handles diverse opinions and perspectives will create more insight into whether the NFL truly values diversity, manages diversity, or if it simply follows the standard affirmative action

laws. The literature review section of this proposal will give background for each of the primary stakeholders involved in the NFL.

Literature Review

NFL: League Office

The NFL is a non-profit organization that thrives primarily from league dues paid by the teams that make up the league. The league achieves its tax-exempt status by being a 501 (c) organization. The exemption reads: “Section 501 (c) (6) of the Internal Revenue Code provides for the exemption of business leagues, chambers of commerce, real estate boards, boards of trade, and professional football leagues, which are not organized for profit and no part of the net earnings of which inures to the benefit of any private shareholder or individual.” The tax exemption was lobbied for by former NFL commissioner Pete Roselle in the 1960’s. The league fulfills the “not organized for profit” stipulation by paying out exuberant salaries to its executives. In 2009, the NFL earned \$192.3 million in revenue but had \$234.6 million in expenses. \$53.6 million of those expenses was paid to eight executives as salary. Andrew Delaney, a Vermont Law School Student, called the NFL “a glorified tax shelter” (Fredrick, 2012).

Whether the NFL is taking advantage of the US tax code is irrelevant to this research. The information gained by that background is that the NFL operates as a business. Therefore, examining how the NFL handles diversity can be viewed through the same concepts as any business.

It is also to be noted that the NFL is an overarching governing body. While the NFL is made up of the 32 teams and is used to collectively refer to those teams, in the context of this

study, the NFL should be viewed as an entity that is responsible for organizing the teams' schedules, legislating and enforcing rules, providing personnel to broadcast and officiate games, as well as other responsibilities. The league does not control the operations of the individual teams and thus cannot control the hiring decisions of those teams. "I don't get involved in personnel decisions with the clubs. Those are decisions that the 32 clubs are going to have to make individually. They're going to give whatever player they think can help them win that opportunity," said Goodell in a statement to the NFL Network (Bieler, 2017).

According to the NFL, its mission is to: "provide our fans, communities and partners the highest quality sports and entertainment in the world, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our values." The values mentioned are respect, integrity, responsibility to team, and resiliency. Diverse opinions and perspectives play a part in each of those values. The NFL also claims that it is the league's responsibility to embrace the platform it has gained. "Every member of the NFL community embraces our unique leadership role in society, and assumes the trust, character, and responsibility that comes with that role. We bring fans and communities from all walks of life together to celebrate a game that is constantly evolving, balancing the authenticity of tradition with the power of innovation," said the NFL's mission and values webpage. Not only does good diversity business practices fulfill those values, but a diverse work force provides benefits that would help accomplish the NFL's mission (MISSION AND VALUES, n.d.).

The Institute of Diversity and Ethics in Sports (TIDES) at University of Central Florida, rated the NFL above average in its diverse hiring practices in its annual Racial and Gender report card, giving them a "B." Richard Lapchick is a human rights activist, foremost expert on sports issues, and is the director at TIDES. Lapchick seeks to answer the following questions using the Report Card. "Are we playing fair when it comes to sports? Does everyone, regardless of race or

gender, have a chance to score a touchdown or operate the business of professional football? The answer is yes for racial hiring practices and not yet for gender hiring practices,” said Lapchick. The league scored an “A” in racial hiring and a “C” in gender hiring, an improvement from 2015. More specifically, the league office got an “A-” in racial hiring practice. The league office also garnered a “B-” for gender hiring practices but the report also acknowledged that women at or above the vice president level in the league office continued to increase since 2016. Women of color also increased as well. The NFL also garnered an “A+” for diversity initiatives. Lapchick believes that the NFL is providing a positive example to the teams that it presides over. “I am concerned that the percentages decreased for women and people of color on NFL teams at the vice-president level and in senior administrator positions. Teams need to follow the example set by the league office, as percentages for women at the team level remain significantly below those at the league level,” said Lapchick (Lapchick 2017).

The league is progressing in racial hiring practices and has racially diversified the league office. Gender hiring practices, however, are entering the league at a slower rate. Overall, the NFL’s League Office is making strides to a more diverse workforce (Chelladurai, 2017)

Owners

Owners are individuals who own a majority share of a team or are part of an ownership group and own 30 percent of the team (Davenport, 2017). Owners are responsible for the stadium, coaches, general managers, personnel, and players for their team (including drafting, trading, signing, and releasing decisions). There are only 31 primary owners, as the Green Bay Packers are publicly owned and have The Green Bay Packers Board of Directors acting in the team’s interest.

Ownership in the NFL lacks racial diversity. 90.4 percent of owners are white. The two primary owners of color are Pakistani-born Shahid Khan (Jacksonville Jaguars) and Asian-American Kim Pegula (Buffalo Bills). Gender diversity is better as 12.9 percent of primary ownership is female (Lapchick 2017).

A deterrence to diversifying ownership is the process of gaining ownership. Bleacher Report, a media outlet that covers all sports, published an article that explains the hurdles prospective owners face. The first difficulty is finding an opening. With only 32 teams, someone must step down for there to be an ownership opportunity. NFL expansion would be complicated. Then another problem is being able to afford the team. Jimmy Haslam paid \$700 million in his first payment to procure the Cleveland Browns. An NFL team in today's market costs well over a billion dollars. Individuals can be from an ownership group, but the NFL created the stipulation that the group must have a primary owner who, as previously mentioned, owns 30 percent of the team. The NFL also allows for owners who have owned or whose family has owned a team for more than decade, to lead with only a 10 percent ownership in the team. The NFL created this rule to prevent large, faceless ownership groups. The Green Bay Packers are exempt because the team predates the rule (Davenport, 2017). The high price of ownership presents a problem to minorities. As of 2013, only 24 percent of millionaires in the United States are minorities (Breakdown of US millionaires..., n.d.). This presents a problem when NFL teams cost billions, but the majority of minorities barely achieve millionaire status.

Then, individuals petitioning for ownership must meet several requirements and go through inquiries from the NFL. One requirement is that the NFL prohibits owners from having ownership in gambling interests or owning another major American sports team unless it is in

either A) the same city as the NFL team that is owned or B) the other team is in a town that does not have an NFL team (Davenport, 2017).

If the candidate makes it through that process, then the other 31 owners vote to approve the purchase of the team. 81 percent of primary team ownership in the NFL is owned by white males. If nothing else, this does not appear to fit with the NFL's value of "embracing" and "celebrating" diverse opinions and perspectives (Davenport, 2017).

Diversifying team ownership could be beneficial to the competition of the league. Diverse perspectives and opinions lead to innovation and better problem solving. Diversifying management also improves the organization's reputation. Diversifying management would lead to innovating team operations, making teams more competitive, and therefore making the league better (Chelladurai, 2017).

Coaches

NFL coaches lead the players in on-field operations. Coaches can give opinions on acquiring/drafting players, but they do not have the final say. They take the players on their team's roster and strategically place them in the best position to succeed. Coaches in the NFL are growing increasingly more diverse. There are eight minority head coaches in 2017 which is an all-time high. There are also three female assistant coaches as well as one of those coaches (49ers wide receiver coach, Katie Sowers) being the first openly LGBT coach (Lapchick, 2017).

Coaching has progressed dramatically. In 2001, 67 percent of players were African-American, but only 2 out of 32 head coaches in the NFL were African-American. Seeing the racial discrepancies, Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr (defense attorney for OJ Simpson), Cyrus Mehdi (civil rights attorney), and Dr. Janice Madden (labor economist) published a thorough report, titled "Black Coaches in the National Football League: Superior Performance, Inferior Opportunity,"

on the hiring practices of head coaches in the NFL. The team found that black coaches on average won 1.1 more games than their white counterparts. Black coaches also took their team to the play-offs 28 percent more often than white coaches. The research team also noted that black coaches do better in their first and last season with a team than white coaches (Duru, 2008).

Minority coaches (especially African-American coaches) suffer from two major setbacks; racial stereotypes and lack of networking. The first setback comes from the stereotype of African-Americans being inferior in their intellect that has been ingrained in multiple generations. Intellect is an important strength for a coach. Louis Harrison Jr, a professor at the University of Texas whose studies are focused on race identity and choices, stated in an article, "Historical and social factors that have constrained African Americans' access to education are intertwined with stereotypical views of African Americans' abilities in the classroom as well as in the realm of sports." Stereotypes like these are hard to avoid because they have been passed down socially, and even individuals who do not intend to impose racial bias do so unintentionally. This stereotyping has molded the perspectives of the public. In Harrison's article, a participant was quoted saying, "There are more blacks that play sports than whites, well there is in basketball... seems like white guys coach and ownership and all that." The ingrained stereotypes have created racial roles that are hard to break (L.H, 2004).

The other major problem is a lack of networking. Owners contact other owners and different coaches when looking for someone to fill a coaching position. Bill Walsh, father of the west coast offense and Hall of Fame coach explained the process as "a very fraternal thing. You end up calling friends, and the typical coach has not been exposed to many black coaches." The issue is that if a minority coach is not already in the "fraternity" then they would have a hard time getting recognized (Proxmire, 2008).

The findings led the team to the conclusion that, even though black coaches performed better than the white coaches, black coaches had a harder time getting and keeping a coaching job. Findings from the report spurred the NFL into forming a “Committee on Work Place Diversity” spearheaded by Steelers’ President Dan Rooney. The recommendations from that committee turned into the Rooney Rule. The Rooney Rule forces owners to interview a minority coaching candidate before making any hiring decisions. It also establishes a data bank of assistant coaches/coordinators for NFL teams considering coaching candidates and “allows early interview opportunities for assistant coaches of playoff teams.” By approving this rule, the league acknowledged the under-representation of minorities in coaching, but the rule only forces a team to interview a coach and cannot force the hiring of a minority coach. Opponents of the rule see the measure as something teams comply with but that doesn’t go far enough to guarantee minorities coaching jobs (Proxmire, 2008).

An example of this is when former Detroit Lions President, Matt Millen, failed to interview any minorities in pursuit of head coach Steve Mariucci. Miller’s intent to hire Mariucci was known publicly and it discouraged five minority coaches from interviewing with the Lions. Mariucci was a successful coach and perfect fit for the program, so the prospect of locking him in led to the Lions hiring Steve Mariucci without interviewing a minority candidate. This in-turn led to disciplinary action from the NFL. The rule does not have set instruction on disciplinary action, so the commissioner at that time, Paul Tagliabue, publicly reprimanded the Lions organization and fined Millen \$200,000 that he had to personally pay. The issue exposed by this incident is that the NFL cannot legislate a rule forcing teams to provide “meaningful” interviews to minority candidates (Proxmire, 2008).

The Rooney rule did succeed in solving the issue with networking. Not only are the owners required to interview minority candidates while searching for coaches, but the NFL also maintains a data base of assistant coaches and coordinators to give minorities more exposure.

The NFL also followed up with several other initiatives to help minority coaches gain experience and help open the door into the league. The most notable is the Bill Walsh Diversity Fellowship Program. The program gives participants access to team training camps, offseason workouts, and mini camps, allowing them to observe the day-to-day operations of the NFL. The goal of the program is to gain its diverse participants a coaching job in the NFL. One of the program's most notable alumni is Jen Welter, who became the first female coach in the NFL (Lapchick 2017).

Diversifying the coaching position in the NFL has led to more competitive teams. In 2005, three African-American coaches (Tony Dungy, Lovie Smith, and Marvin Lewis) won division titles. Then, in 2006, Dungy won the Super Bowl. Diversifying the coaching position has proven to be beneficial to the quality of the league. Differing perspectives and opinions have made teams more competitive (Chelladurai, 2017).

Players

Players are the lifeblood of the NFL. If the games are the NFL's product, then the players are the actors in the show. Becoming an NFL football player is difficult. Only 6.5 percent of high school players move on to the NCAA. Then, only 1.6 percent of NCAA players move on to the NFL. Only 300 rookies make an NFL team each year, but only 150 players make it to their fourth year (Ker-Dineen, 2015).

Like a business, the goal is to have the most talented employees making up the workforce. As previously stated in the introduction, the NFL claims to be a meritocracy, but does that

translate to the players? Colin Kaepernick was a quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, however, he has been unsigned since opting out of his contract following his anthem protests.

Kaepernick filed a grievance against the NFL claiming that the team owners are colluding together to deny him employment. Mark Geragos, one of Kaepernick's attorneys, said: "If the NFL (as well as all professional sports leagues) is to remain a meritocracy, then principled and peaceful political protest—which the owners themselves made great theater imitating weeks ago—should not be punished," (Associated Press, 2017).

Roger Goodell however, claims that the issue is not protest, but Kaepernick's playing ability. Goodell claims that because his league is a meritocracy, then Kaepernick would get his chance if his talent would improve a team. "... if they (teams) see an opportunity to get better as a football team, they're going to do it. They're going to do whatever it takes to make their football team better," (Bieler, 2017).

Another problem facing the diversity of players is stereotyping. 70 percent of NFL players are African-American, which means that the majority of the NFL is made up of a minority people group. That does not, however, qualify as a diverse workforce. If diversity is a "mixture of items characterized by differences and similarity," then the demographic of NFL players poses a problem (Chelladurai, 2017).

Athletic stereotyping is a problem for all racial groups in the NFL. White players in historically black positions struggle to even make it to the NFL. According to a study conducted by Grant Thomas, Jessica J. Good, and Alexi R. Gross at Davidson College, college coaches favored black athletes in their subjective evaluations, even though white athletes were equivalent to black athletes in their objective evaluation. The study used the running back position (a posi-

tion that is predominantly black) to conduct this study. The stereotype that black players are superior athletes make it harder for white athletes to be noticed. This can be best explained using Monica Biernat's shifting standards model. The model uses stereotype confirmation research and asserts that subjective standards are decided based on stereotypes, allowing for double standards. This concept provides insight on how people make decisions on whether someone possesses a trait based solely on social group and race. The study revealed that coaches would view black players more favorably than white players even though objective evidence was similar, therefore (whether consciously or unconsciously) confirming the stereotype that African-Americans make better athletes (Thomas, 2015). Stereotype confirmation, however, is a two-edged sword when dealing with positions that have more responsibility. In an article published in the Howard Journal of Communications titled "Roughing the Passer: The Framing of Black and White Quarterbacks," Eugenio Mercurio and Vincent Filak found that white quarterbacks were generally described to be less athletic but made smarter plays whereas black quarterbacks were not considered as mentally prepared but were superior athletically (Mercurio, 2010).

Fans

Demographically, NFL fans are representative of the US population, meaning that most NFL fans are white. According to Nielsen Media Research, 70 percent of NFL viewership is white. Also, according to University of California, Berkley professor emeritus Edward Blakely, 80 percent of NFL game attendees are also white. The reason for this, he surmised, is due to the cost of attendance (Kertscher, 2017). According to the Census Bureau's latest report, African-American households bring in \$36,898 on average per year, not allowing African-Americans the economic freedom to attend games. Hispanics are in the same situation, grossing only \$45,148 a year (Semega, 2016).

Hispanic viewership is the only viewership that fails to represent the US population. While 18 percent of Americans are Hispanic, they only make up 9 percent of NFL viewership. The NFL could reach this untapped market by diversifying their workforce to be more inclusive to Hispanics. Hispanics are largely underrepresented in the NFL with only 1 percent of players, 3 percent of coaches, and 3 percent of assistant coaches being Hispanic (Kertscher, 2017).

A more diverse workforce could better reach the Hispanic community and create a larger market for the NFL. Also, the cost of game attendance alienates minorities who have generally lower incomes. Ticket prices are not set by the NFL, so the teams would make the decision to set their prices to accommodate a more diverse market (Chelladurai, 2017).

Thesis Statement/Thesis Question

The NFL states that its core values are respect, integrity, responsible team work, and resiliency. In particular, their value of respect says, “Everyone matters. Everyone contributes. In a game of X’s and O’s, we embrace all people for who they are regardless of status, title, or background. We celebrate diverse opinions and perspectives. We honor hard work and commitment. Every contribution makes us better.” That being said, does the NFL and its primary stakeholders, being owners, coaches, players, and fans, value “embracing” and “celebrating diverse opinions and perspectives,” manage diversity for the sake of profit, or abide by minimal affirmative action standards, and does that make the NFL and its stakeholders a monocultural, transitional, or multicultural organization?

Methodology

Definition of Terms

- Diversity: is any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities (Chelladurai, 2017).

- Meritocracy: a system in which the talented are chosen and moved ahead on the basis of their achievement (Meritocracy, n.d.).
- Benefits of Diversity: capitalizing on the diverse talents and perspectives in order to solve organizational problems and enhance the effectiveness of organizational processes (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Valuing Diversity: genuinely accepting diversity as a given, recognizing the advantages of a diverse workforce, and clearly understanding that benefits of diversity can be derived only through appropriate managerial practices (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Managing Diversity: ensuring that the variety of talents and perspectives that already exist within an organization are well utilized (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Affirmative Action: a government policy aimed at eliminating the discriminating effects of managerial policies and practices that preclude equal employment opportunities for all without reference to group membership (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Inclusivity: requires recognizing differences while perceiving them as part of the whole (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Monocultural Organizations: emphasize one culture and expect the employees of different backgrounds to adapt to the dominant culture.
- Multicultural Organizations: all cultural backgrounds are valued and accommodated (Chelladuri, 2017).
- Transitional Organizations: in between (monocultural and multicultural), are changing in order to accommodate the increasing diversity in the workforce and customer base (Chelladuri, 2017).

Analytical Frameworks

The researcher will systematically use Chelladuri's frameworks to determine whether the NFL and its primary stakeholders value diversity, simply manage it, or abide by minimal affirmative action standards. This insight will better help the researcher define the NFL and its stakeholders as either monocultural, transitional, or multicultural organizations.

Organizations that truly value diversity appreciate the differences that a diverse workforce brings and sees it as the company's moral obligation to have and maintain a diverse workplace. The goal for an organization who values diversity is that workers from all backgrounds feel valued. Different people groups can still maintain their cultural identity and can help shape the company. The different groups are joined together by the organization's set of values. The goal is to include everyone, not to force different groups to assimilate into the organization's already existing culture. This benefits the organization by not only making workers feel valued but also allowing a workplace where workers can freely share their ideas to improve the company.

Organizations that value diversity are multicultural by definition. Multicultural organizations know that diversity is key to the success of the organization, but also values diversity because it is the ethical thing to do. These organizations have a multicultural leadership group where the power is shared equally. Multicultural organizations are proactively looking to include workers and clients to create a sense of unity and are willing to be vocal about social oppression. Doing these things help multicultural organizations maintain a strong communication between groups and a sense of community without making people groups assimilate into the company's culture. Multicultural organizations also have a clear stance on prejudice and discrimination and is willing to publicly address any issues of discrimination in their own organization and reprimand anyone involved in discrimination (Chelladuri, 2017).

Managing diversity is more focused on using diversity to create a more efficient company and is less concerned with the appreciation, inclusion, or morality of a diverse workplace. Managing diversity emphasizes hiring and developing certain skill sets and making policies to achieve objectives. Diverse groups are utilized to achieve certain goals. Leadership is open to different groups and they can affect policies and practices. There is some collaboration between groups, but conversations on important issues are held mostly in groups. This system is ultimately driven by productivity and profits (Chelladuri, 2017).

Organizations that manage diversity are transitional organizations. Transitional organizations see the need for diversity but are more concerned about amplifying the benefits of diversity for productivity and profitable gains, while simultaneously trying to reduce the disadvantages posed by a diverse workforce. In transitional organizations, some minorities can advance in the organizations but must partially assimilate to do so. Minority groups are accommodated and recognized. Transitional organizations have affirmative action programs and tolerance training. In a transitional organization, most ideas and decisions come from management. The traditional culture can be questioned but it often trumps the opposition (Chelladuri, 2017).

Affirmative action is government regulations that try to ensure equal employment opportunities to minority people groups. Affirmative action is more about changing the demographic of an organization and less about how the employees are treated once hired or their opportunity to advance in the company. This hiring practice is driven by legal obligation, instead of by moral or profitability incentives (Chelladuri, 2017).

Organizations that only address diversity by affirmative action are monocultural organizations. Monocultural organizations ignore diversity and only abide by affirmative action because it is a legal standard. Minority groups are kept at the bottom of the organizational chain

and are forced to assimilate in the company's culture. Minority groups are encouraged to be individuals instead of acknowledging their diverse background. Minorities are excluded from leadership and there is a rigid leadership structure. In a monocultural organization, there is communication between minority groups but there is no collaboration between groups. Change is only affected by lawsuits and protests (Chelladuri, 2017).

By using these concepts as a filter, the researcher can begin to characterize the NFL and its stakeholders to answer the research question. Several more questions can be drawn from this framework. Is the NFL and its stakeholders a multicultural organization? Is the NFL and its stakeholders a transitional organization and if so is the organization shifting closer to a multicultural organization or is it reverting to more of a monocultural organization? Is the NFL and its stakeholders focused on meritocracy or diversity? Is diversity and meritocracy naturally opposed to each other? Is the NFL's view of meritocracy based on performance or profit? Is meritocracy real or is it a wistful idea?

These questions will be answered in the form of a critical philosophic essay. To accomplish this, I will research experts and apply their perspectives to the NFL and its stakeholder's hiring practices. The expert's themselves will be analyzed and if necessary modified. Then, using the research gathered, I will create my own perspective analyzing the NFL and its stakeholders.

Conclusion

The NFL states that its mission is to "provide our fans, communities and partners the highest quality sports and entertainment in the world, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our values." The values mentioned include respect which mentions diversity: "Everyone matters. Everyone contributes. In a game of X's and O's, we embrace all people for who they are regardless of status, title, or background. We celebrate diverse opinions and perspectives. We

honor hard work and commitment. Every contribution makes us better,” (MISSION AND VALUES, n.d.). The thesis question is designed to distinguish whether the NFL is truly living out their values or are they simply abiding by the minimal standards set forth by the governing body and the government. There are two central questions found within the thesis that need to be addressed including: does the NFL value, manage, or simply abide by basic affirmative action standards, and does the way the NFL handles diversity make it a monocultural, transitional, or multicultural organization? Each stakeholder group will be examined separately to understand how the NFL’s diversity initiatives impact each of those groups.

In order to answer those questions, the NFL’s affirmative action standards must be examined. What are the NFL’s affirmative action standards based on? The NFL follows the guidelines set out in Lyndon Johnson’s Executive Order 11246, better known as the executive order that brought about Equal Employment Opportunity. Even though this law was created for government contractors most companies voluntarily follow these guidelines for basic affirmative action practices. A synopsis explains that this law:

“Prohibits federal contractors and federally–assisted construction contractors and subcontractors, who do over \$10,000 in Government business in one year from discriminating in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or national origin. The Executive Order also requires Government contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that equal opportunity is provided in all aspects of their employment. Additionally, Executive Order 11246 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from, under certain circumstances, taking adverse employment actions against applicants and employees for asking about, discussing, or sharing information about their pay or the pay of their co–workers,” (U.S. Department of Labor..., n.d.).

The law has evolved from its conception in 1965 to present day. This evolution includes gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and national origin. With these, as well as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as the basis of affirmative action, anything above and beyond these standards would acquit the NFL of simply abiding by affirmative action standards.

NFL's Diversity Initiatives

Coaches

Society's social norms have, as evidenced by the evolution of the Equal Employment Opportunity standards, progressed since the implementation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Equal Employment Opportunity and the NFL is no different. The NFL has had to grow and change just like the United States. The NFL has, however, affected change in society by being progressive in its pursuit of equal employment hiring practices. When the NFL issued the Rooney Rule in 2003, the NFL took an unprecedented approach to ensure diversity in its hiring practices. The standards that the US government imposed on itself and its contractors had inspired a movement of affirmative action policies to help minorities have an equal opportunity at upper-management jobs, but those policies had failed. In 2012, only twenty-one (4.2%), of Fortune 500 CEO's were minorities (DuBois, 2016).

The NFL enacted one of the first successful attempts at opening up upper-management positions to minorities. Instead of trying to change the hiring criteria of the league, they wanted to change the composition of the employee selection pool to give minorities a chance to gain employment. In a study conducted by the late Cynthia DuBois, DuBois found that there was a higher probability of a minority coaching candidate filling a coaching position in the Post-

Rooney Rule than pre-Rooney Rule (19.6%-21.3% more likely and 19.6% more likely to be hired than NCAA head coaches) (DuBois, 2016).

The Rooney Rule's success inspired U.S. Senator Tim Scott (R-South Carolina) to lead the creation of Senate Resolution 511. The resolution seeks to recreate the Rooney Rule for corporate America. The measure "encourages companies to voluntarily establish a best practices policy to identify minority candidates and minority vendors by implementing a plan to interview a minimum of two qualified minority candidates for managerial openings at the director level and above and to interview at least two qualified minority businesses before approving a vendor contract." The resolution is still a bill, but it has received bi-partisan support in Congress (DuBois, 2016).

Diversity initiatives like the Rooney Rule and the Bill Walsh Diversity Fellowship Program show that the NFL goes above affirmative action standards in relation to the coach stakeholders, but does the NFL do the same with other shareholders?

NFL League Office

According to Lapchick's Diversity Report Card, the NFL league office is doing well at hiring a diverse workforce. They garnered an "A+" in diversity initiatives and an "A-" in racial hiring and a "B-" in gender hiring. Women have risen in upper-management positions in the league office as well as women of color (Lapchick, 2017). The fact that minorities are rising to upper-management positions in the league office indicates that the league office operates beyond affirmative action standards. Affirmative action only covers the hiring practices, but they do not support minorities moving up through the organization. In organizations where affirmative action practices are the only regulations that the organization abides by, minorities do not make their

way into upper management. (put a citation here) Lapchick was impressed with the progress that the league office had made as well. “Teams need to follow the example set by the league office, as percentages for women at the team level remain significantly below those at the league level,” said Lapchick (Lapchick, 2017).

Owners

Those who are making the money, the owners, are the least diverse group of all five of the stakeholders. 90.4% of NFL owners are white while only 12.9% of owners are women (Lapchick, 2017). The process of becoming an owner is very selective and the opinions of current owners are vital to gaining ownership. Anthony Di Santi, global head of sports finance and advisory at Citi Private Bank, said, “When you’re buying a team, you’re not only making a deal between you and the seller, you also have to get the blessing from the NFL. The buyer and seller can agree on price, but if the league doesn’t like the buyer or doesn’t like the price, it’s not going to happen,” (Sullivan, 2018).

This process is not conducive to increasing diversity in the ownership group. There are no policies regarding who buys teams nor are there any breaks for minorities who want in on a team. Minorities are at a disadvantage financially in owning teams and the grueling selection process makes it nearly impossible for minorities to gain ownership.

Players

The players stakeholder group is a little more diverse than the ownership group, but their group is still very black and white. Even though 70% of NFL players are African-American, that does not mean that this group is diverse (Lapchick, 2017). Remember that diversity is a “mixture of items” and that just because a minority is the majority does not mean that the group is diverse

(Chelladuri, 2018). Placing any diversity initiatives on player hiring is dangerous territory, considering that the NFL is a purported meritocracy. Decisions on hiring players in a perfect world would be based on player performance with personality factors taken into account as well. Based on several studies, however, there is athletic stereotyping taking place in the process of recruiting athletes and the player demographic is evidence of the results. Former Dennis Thurman, while talking about the last starting white cornerback Jason Sehorn, said, "If you're white and you're playing corner, it's almost like it was back in the day if you were black and playing quarterback. You're just not going to be given an opportunity to show what you can do. The thinking just isn't open to that," (Reid, 2017).

Fans

The NFL fan base as mentioned before is representative of the United States population (Kertscher, 2017). The NFL has had several events to reach out to minorities in the fan base and commissioner Roger Goodell stated in a report that the NFL was focusing on "serving our diverse fan base," and that, "the future success of our league depends on it," (Schrotenboer, 2014). The Cowboys opened a PINK store in AT&T stadium and the NFL has pushed Breast Cancer Awareness month by wearing pink gloves and cleats in attempts to reach women (Schrotenboer, 2014). The NFL has taken the game of American Football to Mexico to attract Hispanic fans. While these are examples of the NFL reaching out to the minorities in its fanbase, they have not made a move to reduce ticket prices so that more minorities could afford to attend games. Even the attempts to reach women could be simply a possible money grab. The NFL has reached its peak popularity with men (72%) but only 50% of women like the NFL. 45% of the NFL fan base is female so attending to this buyer group makes sense, especially since women have some level

of control in 85% of purchasing decisions with disposable income (Schrotenboer, 2014). With this shareholder, the NFL seems to promote diversity as long as there is a financial payoff.

NFL Diversity Initiatives Managing Diversity

While the NFL as a whole, taking into account all stakeholders, has its problems, it has made attempts to progress beyond the minimal affirmative action standards. This is reflective of an organization that manages diversity. While the league has proclaimed a need for diversity and has taken measures to pursue it within certain shareholder groups (coaches, league office, and fans), however, the NFL has neglected to address the difficulties within the other stakeholders (owners and players). In every situation that the NFL does something to reach out to minorities, there is a potential for profit.

Reaching out to potential fans (or customers) by being inclusive is a basic marketing technique. This is some of the more obvious examples of the NFL profiting off of being “inclusive” and “diverse.”

Some of the less obvious examples include being progressive in coaching and in the league office. Being progressive in diversity is a politically correct and popular concept (especially in upper management and other more “important” figures such as coaches). Taking advantage of these beliefs can lead to loyal fans for the NFL. Generation Z (born mid-90’s to mid-2000’s) makes up 25.9% of the U.S. population and they already wield \$44 billion dollars in buying power. When you factor in their influence on their parent’s purchases the number jumps to \$200 billion (Sehl, 2018). Marketing to this new generation will be key to the survival of the NFL. This generation is also aware and they value companies that share their values.

Tom Ajello, the chief creative officer at Vivaldi, said: “Brands that stand for diversity, inclusion and equality score well because they fight for the underdog, showing a concern for ‘doing good,’” (Fromm, 2018). In a survey interviewing 1,000 women conducted by Irregular Labs, one respondent said: “Nobody's going to buy a product from a corporation who you know is just out for the money, unless you see them doing good stuff (even if only for the sole purpose of winning trust),” (Sehl, 2018).

Millennials (1981-1996) also have similar purchasing habits, wanting to buy from brands that give back and create a responsible product. Millennials also make up 25% of the population and have \$1.3 trillion in purchasing power (Tjarks, 2018). In response to the wants of the current market, the NFL is selling its progressivism, even if it is “for the sole purpose of winning trust.” The NFL promotes its diversity initiatives that are currently popular (more opportunities for black, female, and homosexual coaches for example), but they fail to address the lack of diversity in its ownership and players. Therefore, the NFL is managing diversity to profit off of today’s marketing demands.

The Culture of the NFL

The second question posed in the overall thesis question inquires whether the NFL is a multicultural, transitional, or monocultural organization. To define what kind of organization the NFL is we will look at the definitions of each organization and compare it to the NFL.

The NFL’s mission statement states that the NFL’s mission is to: “provide our fans, communities and partners the highest quality sports and entertainment in the world, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our values.” The values mentioned include respect which mentions diversity: “Everyone matters. Everyone contributes. In a game of X’s and O’s, we embrace all

people for who they are regardless of status, title, or background. We celebrate diverse opinions and perspectives. We honor hard work and commitment. Every contribution makes us better,” (MISSION AND VALUES, n.d.). This statement is not congruent with a monocultural institution as a monocultural institution would seek to avoid the topic of diversity (Chelladuri, 2017). The NFL also plays international games and there has been talk concerning the NFL’s international expansion. This global perspective is also a trait that distances the NFL from a monocultural institution (Chelladuri, 2017). To be a multicultural institution, however, the NFL must do more than announce the desire or need for diversity.

In determining the cultural structure of the NFL, it is important to examine its culture itself. The NFL has been forthright when dealing with racism against black coaches, but they have not addressed the racism faced by players in the hiring process, nor the lack of diversity in ownership groups. Also, symbols that may be considered offensive to minorities (Chiefs and Redskins) have not been changed (Chelladuri, 2017). The league office has been praised for its progress in diversity in Lapchick’s report which, on the surface, appears to be a victory for diversity in the NFL’s upper ranks. The problem, however, is that the league office may not hold the power that most believe that it does.

To understand power and culture in the NFL you must first decide who holds the power. While many would assume that it is the league commissioner, I would like to suggest that the owners are truly the ones who control the NFL. Owners vote for the league commissioner and they are also the ones who decide if the commissioner’s contract is extended or not. The NFL owners are even the ones who pay the commissioner, and they can vote to raise the commissioner’s salary. All NFL policy and rule changes are voted on by the owners as well (Associated

Press, 2006). With the commissioner sitting over the league office, this grants true control of the NFL to the owners.

This changes how the NFL is judged on its diversity in upper management. If the league office is considered the upper management of the NFL, then it would be fair to say that the power structure is diversified and that the NFL can be considered a multicultural institution. Due to the commissioner's dependence on the team owners, however, it is more logical to conclude that the owners hold more control.

As previously stated, the ownership group lacks diversity, which is a problem if the NFL claims to celebrate and embrace diversity. With the ownership group being the leaders in the NFL's power structure, the NFL seems to be more akin to a monocultural institution than the multicultural institution they claim to be. A monocultural organization would be "white and male throughout," "access limited to 'the club,'" and there would be a "strong hierarchy," (Chelladuri, 2017).

It could be said that there is even a hierarchy in the ownership group itself. According to a Washington Post article, some owners, like Jerry Jones, Robert Kraft, John Mara, and the Rooney's, seem to have more influence than other owners. This would only make sense as these were the owners that prepared and helped Goodell gain the position of commissioner. The article goes on to say that Shad Khan is valued as the NFL's envoy to going international, but he still does not have much pull as an owner. This power structure definitely reflects a monocultural organization (Babb, 2015).

Relations in the NFL is held mostly between owners and the league office. Owners meet with the commissioner and upper management league office workers. These meetings are routinely cordial and does occasionally interact with different groups (mostly coaches).

Major changes, as far as diversity is concerned, have not occurred since the Rooney Rule. Major changes in the NFL are reactionary, after external pressure has occurred. This is exemplified in the way the NFL dealt with the Cochran and Mehri report. The NFL created an unprecedented step in equal opportunity employment, however, it was only after the report showed that black coaches were not given the opportunities white coaches were given. It is also reflected in how the NFL handled concussions. The NFL only took concussions seriously after receiving scrutiny from Congress (Fainru, 2016). This, again, is in character for a monocultural organization.

The NFL in Transition

After observing the cultural structure of the NFL comparing that to the different stages of multiculturalism, the NFL is most closely related to a transitional organization. They announce that diversity is wanted and valued, however there are several instances that the NFL lacks diversity in its decision-making processes. While the NFL has succeeded in diversifying certain aspects of its organization, it is still a far cry from being a multicultural organization.

The NFL is at a crossroads of if it will value or simply manage diversity. While the NFL has announced a need for diversity and has made strides to diversify its stakeholders, they have not lived up to their values thus far. The NFL's cultural structure is in transition, but it still has monocultural tendencies and the measures the NFL has put in place to encourage diversity has only been effective in managing the league's diversity. Moving forward the NFL can implement the following strategies in the future:

Approaches

Status Quo

The simplest plan of action is to simply maintain the status quo. This would still be lucrative and the NFL can be maintained for the foreseeable future (likely to never fade away), however, the NFL's growth could stagnate or even decrease. This newest generation of buyers wants to see social justice, equality, and diversity and they want to support organizations that support those beliefs. Millennials and Generation Z are not easily fooled and could likely see through the NFL's diversity lip service. If these buying habits continue to trend the way they have so far, the NFL will have to eventually answer for its lack of diversity in multiple areas.

Diversify

Another option is to adopt the politically correct approach of fully embracing diversity just for the sake of embracing diversity. The NFL would take measures to truly live up to its value of respect. This would make the critics (prospective customers) happy and thus the NFL would have another several generations worth of fans to thrive off of.

Meritocracy

The last approach is possibly the most challenging, risky, yet rewarding option of all. In this approach the NFL would shift their focus from diversity initiatives and reevaluate their mission and values to create a league that is based solely on meritocracy.

Solutions

Status Quo

To maintain the status quo, the league does not have to make many significant changes. Increased public relations campaigns to focus on the positives of the NFL and its charity work as well as continuing to produce quality broadcasting (games) would be sufficient in retaining what they have at the current moment.

Diversify

If the NFL truly wants to live out its values, then it is important to be intentional in their efforts. The NFL should design a detailed plan that would address the struggles that each stakeholder group faces, and provide specific short term, gradational, and long-term goals. The NFL as an organization would also eventually need to create a set of standards and ethics that would govern each of the stakeholder groups. Those standards and ethics would then need to be enforced by a diverse committee that includes members of the five stakeholder groups. The group should be granted power to inspect the culture and operations of all the teams and the league office and should be given the ability to suggest reprimand if a violation is found. The commissioner's position should also be less dependent on the ownership group and should instead be paid by the league office. This change would allow the commissioner to act in the best interest of the league without the threat of conflict of interest.

Meritocracy

If the NFL is concerned less with profits and its image, and more concerned with the quality of the game itself, the NFL should attempt to create a more meritocratic system. To do this, the NFL needs to own the racism shown in each of its stakeholder groups. Discrimination in this scenario would be pointless as teams would be putting themselves at competitive disadvantage. With success being the main objective, team leadership will work harder to select the best talent based on qualitative data. The NFL as a league office needs to free itself from the ownership group, that way the commissioner and the rest of the office can make unbiased decisions that are in the best interest of the league as a whole.

Ownership should be either abolished or remodeled to resemble something closer to a shared management system more like the Green Bay Packers. The Packers are owned by the fans

but are ran by a President and board members (Davenport, 2017). This system can allow for accountability through a system checks and balances system. If winning and success is the precipice of a meritocracy, then that will be the standard for all stakeholders that operate within the NFL organization, from the league commissioner all the way down to the players. If an individual does not get a team closer to that goal, then they will be replaced. Diversity will not be celebrated just for the sake of diversity as a moral standard, but as a functional tool.

Players will also be given opportunities based on their merit. With today's technologies, player scouting can now be more subjective rather than objective. During football games, broadcasts will feature cameras that can capture the changes in speed of a player running down the field, the shape of a quarterback's throwing motion, or the maximum distance of a kicker's field goal attempt. Now instead of saying that a player has "high top-end speed" and "good acceleration," scouts can give quantitative numbers that can aid in the hiring process.

Recommendation

In congruence with the NFL's current mindset, the best approach for the NFL to take is to diversify the league. The NFL already claims that it values diversity and that they strive to create a more diverse league. As previously demonstrated though, the NFL has not lived up to these values. Intentionally putting together goals and strategy to achieve diversity will finally fulfill the NFL's Mission and Values.

Generation Z makes up 25.9% of the US population and they wield \$44 billion in spending power. When factoring in their influence in their households, their spending power jumps to \$200 billion and those numbers will only grow as Generation Z matures (Sehl, 2018). This is a market that the NFL cannot afford to miss out on. 72% of Generation Z members are willing to

pay extra for brands that support environmental or social change (Forbes, 2018). Generally, Generation Z is willing to spend money and interact with brands that share their values.

While the next generation is predicted to be financially conservative, it is also predicted to be socially liberal too. Generation Z is very concerned with diversity and is also very leery of large organizations in general. The NFL will have to prove itself to this next generation of fans (consumers) (Loehr, 2017).

This course of action will endear the NFL to the newest generation. Just being authentic will make the NFL more attractive to Generation Z. In a study conducted by Irregular Labs, 67% of Generation Z women (and gender non-conforming) surveyed said that corporations that were true to their values and beliefs were “cool,” (Sehl, 2018). “If your marketing makes statements in support of gender equality, make sure you have the corporate culture to back that up,” said Molly Logan, author of the Irregular Labs report (Sehl, 2018). This is particularly persuasive considering that the female market is also a market that the NFL is looking to move into. Truly being committed to making the NFL a diverse league will make major in-roads with Generation Z. This will secure the league another generation of fans for the NFL, all while living up to the values that they have claimed for themselves.

The NFL states in its Mission and Values statement that it values and celebrates diversity, however, they currently do not live up to their claims. Some stakeholders have seen progress in diversifying their group, but other stakeholders, such as the players and the ownership group, lack diversity. The NFL is a transitional organization that manages diversity to satisfy today’s society. While this may have been an effective strategy in the past, the approach is not sustaina-

ble in today's politically correct environment nor will the approach win over a diversity conscious, upcoming Generation Z. To thrive in this socially liberal future, the NFL will need to truly live up to its values and pursue diversity throughout all its stakeholder groups.

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