

REVIEW PAPER

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SPORT MANAGEMENT THEORY, RESEARCH, AND PRACTICE: SPORT MANAGEMENT AS PROJECT MANAGEMENT IN MARTIAL ART CURRICULUM

Abstract

Members of the sport management academic community have diligently debated theory development in the discipline and the place of sport management in academia. One common theme includes the challenges of developing an all-inclusive theory of sport management. The lack of academic sovereignty and the absence of a clear and distinct theoretical foundation have hampered the development of a sound theory of sport management. Due to the challenges with theory development and a clear direction of sport management as a unified academic discipline, one should consider the nature of sports and recognize the practical and academic relationship between sports management and project management. Sport management as project management is a new direction for the discipline and is a means to establish a common understanding of sport management in a practical and academic sense.

Key words: *sport management, theory, theory development, projects, project management*

INTRODUCTION

Scholars of sport management have zealously attempted to develop a distinct theory of sport management. Theory development has been hampered by the lack of academic sovereignty and the influence of outside academic disciplines. In addition, the successful development of a theory has been hindered by the nature, types, and forms of what one may consider sports. The intent of this work is to evaluate the specific reasons why a theory of sport management has not been developed and why a single theory of sports management will most likely never exist. Moreover, the intent is to propose that sport management in reference to martial art curriculum be categorized as a project management focused academic discipline, based on the practices and models of project management.

RESEARCH METHODS

Lack of Academic Sovereignty

Cunningham (2013), Doherty (2013), Fink (2013), and Irwin and Ryan (2013) outline the importance of identifying and developing a theory of sport management, martial art curriculum being no exception. Specifically, the need for a theory is relevant to current

research, practice, and teaching in the discipline (Cunnigham, 2013; Doherty, 2013; Irwin & Ryan, 2013). On the other hand, Chelladurai (2013), Cunnigham (2013), Doherty (2013), and Fink (2013) agree that developing one sport management theory that is all-encompassing is an arduous task. Even though Cunnigham (2013), Doherty (2013), Fink (2013), and Irwin and Ryan (2013) recognize the challenges with martial art theory development it is evident that scholars are seeking answers to develop a theory that will establish the sport management community as a theory based discipline among other theory based academic disciplines.

Akademiske discipline Academic disciplines

According to Doherty (2013, p. 5), "The strength of an academic discipline is its distinct body of knowledge that is not covered by another discipline." University sport management curriculums and degree programs are mainly based on academic subject matter with roots in other academic disciplines, theories and practices. Disciplines such as law, sociology, fiscal management, marketing, ethics, and leadership are the basis for the majority of sport management post-secondary courses and programs. The outside disciplines are based on theories, which influence not only the teaching, research and practices in their specific fields, but also sport management. In a sense, the outside disciplines define the sports management curriculum and research.

Academic phenomena and concepts

Doherty (2013) states that academic disciplines include phenomena that are based in academic theory, research and scholarship. The academic phenomena contribute to the strength and viability of the specific academic discipline, and the development or strengthening of academic theory (Doherty, 2013). The viability of an academic discipline is based on the correlation between academic theory, research and scholarship, and the identification and relevance of the discipline's specific phenomena (Doherty, 2013). Furthermore, Chelladurai (2013) notes that theory development involves identifying and comparing discipline specific phenomenon through scholarly research.

With this in mind, Zanger, and Groves (1994) review the feasibility of developing a sports and leisure management specific theory. The work includes identifying a framework based on issues and related components of sport and leisure management. The issues and components of sport and leisure management identified in the research include, "...liability, profits, image, social responsibility, change, management philosophy, organization, working conditions, marketing, selling, legal issues, resources and reputation" (Zanger, & Groves, 1994, p. 61). These elements fall in other general academic disciplines, such as law, human resources, marketing, public relations, management, financial management, and ethics. Based on these findings it is evident that the attempt to identify a framework for theory development in sports and leisure management, martial art courses in particular, established that the significant issues and components have roots in other academic disciplines (Zanger, & Groves, 1994).

Theory Adaptation

When reviewing the influence of outside academic theories on sport management it has been considered appropriate to use and adapt other academic disciplines' theories; however, this can inhibit the development of sports management as a stand-alone academic discipline (Doherty, 2013; Fink, 2013). Doherty (2013) notes that "While both extending and generating theory make a contribution, the latter stands apart in that it involves building truly domestic or indigenous theory that is founded on the phenomenon of interest in sports management" (p. 10). Fink (2013) concur and argues that sports management as an academic discipline may be diluted when other academic theories are applied to sports management research.

The lack of academic sovereignty is not a one-time occurrence or a minor challenge for sport management. The lack of sovereignty is apparent in sport management research, the attempt

to develop theory, and sport management practices. This is a major challenge for scholars in sport management. Academic sovereignty is not the only variable that inhibits the development of sport management theory. The basic elements of sport management practices, including martial art, also contribute to the uncertainty and direction of the academic discipline.

The Theoretical Dilemma

According to Doherty (2013), “Theory, quite simply, explains how things work and why” (p. 6). For the purpose of this work, things, as included in Doherty (2013), will refer to phenomena/concepts/practices of sport management as they relate to academic research in theory development. In other words, a theory of sport management should explain how phenomena/concepts/practices of sport management work and why. The basis for a theory must be rooted in the observed and researched practices in the field of sports management, the identified phenomena, and established concepts. The major concern with developing a research based theory of sport management includes the questions, 1) Which phenomena?, 2) Which concepts?, and 3) Which practices?

The nature and form of sports

To answer these questions one must review the nature, scope, and forms of sport management. Sport management as a field includes a vast array of sports programming, level of competition, individual versus team sports, demographic factors of the participants, amateur versus professional sports, and international sporting events and competitions. Furthermore, organizations and institutions that offer and oversee sports programs include local/regional private organizations, school districts, colleges/universities, municipal agencies, state organizations, national associations, professional franchises, and international federations. When considering the several types and forms of sports, focusing on martial art in the venue of this paper, and the organizations that influence and manage the specific sports, the ability to identify and narrow the focus of the phenomena/ concepts/ practices of sport management seems almost impossible.

Sports in society

Sports of any kind are influenced by society as a whole. Society specific factors that contribute to the theorist’s dilemma are social, political, economic, and legal elements (Doherty, 2013). The macro level factors significantly influence the practice and management of all types and levels of sports. Sports exists within a greater external environment that influence sports management practices (Doherty, 2013). The number of societal variables that impact sports are extensive, which makes it difficult to identify the specific research based phenomena/concepts/practices of sport management.

Sport management curriculum

Sports management curriculums in colleges and universities are based on several outside academic disciplines. As was mentioned in section 1.1, disciplines such as law, sociology, fiscal management, marketing, ethics, and leadership are the basis for the majority of sport management degree courses and programs. The different subject matter in the field allows for scholars to conduct research that is diverse and permits for insights to several aspects of sport management practices. However, the diversity of the subject matter researched fosters a wide range of topics and findings that polarize sport management into several sub-content areas of the discipline (Doherty, 2013). The subject matter specific research will contribute to the scholarship within a narrow area of sport management. On the other hand, the research also solidifies that the phenomena/concepts/practices of sport management are diverse and that the development of one specific sport management theory is a tireless effort.

New dialogue

It is evident that sport management is facing challenges as an academic discipline. One can argue that research and academic dialogue on theory development and the impact of outside academic disciplines are an attempt to solidify sport management as an independent academic discipline. However, the author of this work suggests that these continued efforts do not contribute value or a deeper understanding of the current status or future of sport management as an academic or practicing discipline. The same debate was emphasized and addressed more than twenty-five years ago (Paton, 1987). Paton (1987) argues, "Due to the disparate pattern of sport management research, the studies as a group do not meet the criterion of reductiveness. Thus, if we were challenged to identify our body of knowledge, it would be difficult to develop a picture of what we know" (pp. 30-31). Continuously coming to the same conclusion, without significant progress, does not foster the growth of sport management as an academic discipline. The academic community of sport management scholars must go beyond traditional aspirations, and recognize that sports management falls in the academic and practical discipline of project management.

Sport Management as Project Management

In the attempt to establish the future direction of sports management, Costa (2005) concludes the following, "Debates about theory vs. practice reflect a concern about whom the field should serve, and what it should seek to achieve" (p.133). To further the review of sports management as it exists today, the author of this work suggests that sport management falls in the academic and practitioner discipline of project management. Munns and Bjeirmi (1996) define a project as "A project can be considered to be the achievement of a specific objective, which involves a series of activities and tasks which consume resources. It has to be completed within a set specification, having definite start and end dates" (p. 81). Moreover, "In contrast, project management can be defined as the process of controlling the achievement of the project objectives. Utilizing the existing organizational structures and resources, it seeks to manage the project by applying a collection of tools and techniques..." (p. 81).

Projects and project management

According to Larson and Gray (2014), the definition of the project includes identifying the direction and purpose of the project, identifying project scope, defining operational activities and responsibilities. In addition to the definition of the project, project planning is based on setting time lines and schedules, identifying financial and physical resources, determining staffing needs, and risk assessment (Larson and Gray, 2014). The execution of the project is based on controlling and monitoring of the project, which involves analyzing scheduling and budget management, and the review of the execution of the project in comparison to set project scope and expectations (Larson and Gray, 2014). The closing stage, as defined by Larson and Gray (2014), "Closing includes three activities: delivering the project product to the customer, redeploying project resources, and post-project review" (p. 9). With an insight to the general scope and process of project management one can apply this practical process to the example of a sports management program.

Sport management as project management

To categorize sport management as an academic and practitioner discipline of project management one must review what practitioners do in sports management. It is well known that sports management is a broad and inclusive field; however, it is feasible to define sports management in the terms of projects and project management. The significant majority of sports management practices have a start and an end date. Please consider the following:

- 1) Youth individual and team sports are based on seasons and individual events/games.
- 2) Instructional sports lessons, classes and clinics are offered for a period of time.
- 3) Collegiate athletics involves several sports that are based on seasons.
- 4) Athletic/sports competitions, games, events and activities have a beginning and an end.
- 5) Professional team sports are based on seasons and individual games.
- 6) Team sports include a pre-season, season, and post season.
- 7) Professional individual sports such as Golf, Tennis, and PBA are based on seasons and individual events.
- 8) High school athletics are based on seasons and individual games.
- 9) Special needs programs in sports have a beginning and end.
- 10) NASCAR and Formula 1 are based on seasons with individual events.
- 11) International sporting events, such as the Olympics, world championships, and other international competitions have a beginning and an end.
- 12) Facilities and arenas that house sporting events, matches, games, and programs are influenced by the seasonality of the specific sports.

Based on the 12 general examples it is obvious that the significant majority of sports management activities are based on macro-level projects (seasons) and micro level projects (games, clinics, and competitions) during a specific season. The macro and micro level projects may vary in length and scope; however, each is based on a beginning and an end. The macro and micro level sports projects can also be defined as projects due to the application and use of resources to coordinate and manage the activities. Sports activities are based on the application of resources, such as people, time, money, and equipment. During a season or individual events the effective coordination and management of the resources are the foundation of successful sports programming. These resources are the tools utilized to execute the macro and micro level sports projects.

It is important to recognize that the macro and micro level sports projects do not exist in a vacuum. The outside academic disciplines, such as law, human resources, financial management, leadership, and ethics will have a significant impact on how the macro and micro sports projects are developed, implemented, and executed. The academic disciplines' specific subject matter and theories will not only contribute to overall coordination and management of projects, but will also contribute to sports management as project management research.

Based on the Larson and Gray (2014) definition of project management one can consider the following example. Private and municipal youth basketball programs are offered to the general public throughout communities in the United States. Sports managers that coordinate the youth basketball programs begin by determining the what, where, when, who and how of offering the youth basketball programs. This initial step includes the definition of the project as defined by project management. Based on the definition, the sports managers will identify the specific resources and means to offer and implement the program, which is the planning phase of the project. The execution of the basketball program is the monitoring, coordinating and management of the resources such as staffing, use of facilities and equipment. The closing stage of the program involves playing the games, and offering the participants and parents with a safe and positive experience. Furthermore, the closing phase of the youth basketball program involves ending the season and identifying the successes and challenges during the season (Larson and Gray, 2014).

Anyone with practical experience and background in offering sports programming will understand and recognize that project management is a viable means to define and identify sport management as an academic discipline and practitioner field. This is relevant in any

type and level of sports. With this in mind, the academic community of sport management must consider future research and scholarship from the perspective of sports and project management. The initial step of accepting sport management as a form of project management will allow scholars the opportunity to initiate research and scholarship that will strengthen sport management as an academic and practical discipline.

CONCLUSION

Scholars in the academic community of sports management have made several attempts to unify the discipline under a common theory. However, it is apparent that theory development has been hampered due to lack of academic sovereignty and influence of outside academic disciplines. The successful development of one distinct theory has also been hindered by the nature, types, and forms of what one may consider sports. Due to the challenges with theory development and a clear direction of sports management as a unified academic discipline, one should consider the nature of sports and recognize the practical and academic relationship between sport management and project management. Sport management as project management is a new direction for the discipline and is a means to establish a common understanding of sports management in a practical and academic sense.

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