Sport Leadership

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Introduction

This edition of Sport Management Digest's Sport Leadership section leads off with a review of the leadership research published in 2023. Since the previous edition, one work by Kang and Svensson (2023a) was published that related to sport leadership in the *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM). When reviewing the selected journals for this issue of Sport Leadership, it became apparent that compared to other content areas, leadership research in and around sport can be sporadic in nature. With one article for the current issue, it appears that an overarching trend for sport leadership research is that topics come in clusters. Much of the recent research has focused on shared leadership, social construction of leadership, and the intersection of leadership with groups or organizations around the world. As such, the current edition will review the work of Kang and Svensson (2023a) and then present a recap of sport leadership research from 2023 to illustrate the current trends and where the research stream may head next.

Advances in Sport Leadership Research

Kang and Svensson (2023a) continued their line of research, which examines shared leadership within the sport-for-development (SFD) context. While their previous work examined the benefits of shared leadership in the SFD space (Kang & Svensson, 2023b), their more recent work honed in on identifying the antecedents of shared leadership around the sport for development and peace (SDP). They accomplished this work through 30 semi-structured qualitative interviews involving personnel from two SDP collaboratives under a larger SDP umbrella foundation, the Laureus Sport for Good Foundation. Through an inductive coding process for data analysis, Kang and Svensson (2023a) identified four antecedents for shared leadership for SDP. These themes included strategic planning, support from vertical leaders, shared events, and personal characteristics of members. Within the strategic planning theme were several approaches to help facilitate strategic

planning as an antecedent to shared leadership. These approaches were designated multiple leaders, collective decision-making, and leadership transitions in the collaboratives. Of note is the collective decision-making and designation of multiple leaders as these approaches naturally lead into a shared leadership model where leadership functions are distributed across all members in a group rather than the traditional vertical leadership model of one central leader (Kang & Svensson, 2023a).

Kang and Svensson's (2023a) findings bring to light an underexplored area of shared leadership, that is the "how" behind creating or developing shared leadership, specifically in the SDP space. As the authors noted, much of the shared leadership research in sport is still in the early stages of understanding and application. However, as their research contributed to this stream, scholars in the sport leadership context now have several antecedents to use as a framework or comparison as shared leadership research evolves. Kang and Svensson (2023a) contributed key theoretical benefits to the shared leadership stream by identifying antecedents to shared leadership. Further, as the authors mentioned, there are significant practical implications for their work as well. Notably, SDP organizations continue to explore and desire ways to create and enhance shared leadership in their organizations, especially considering that some organizations may be limited on resources. Thus, being able to not only garner the benefits of the individual leaders feeling more invested in the organization through shared leadership, but the organization also itself can save resources or strain on leadership through this model by not having to hire additional personnel or risk burnout of leaders that may come from a traditional vertical leadership structure.

Overview of Sport Leadership

Throughout 2023 sport leadership research has spanned various contexts and methods as scholars continue to make strides in expanding our knowledge of sport leadership across the world. For example, Kang and Svensson (2023a; 2023b), O'Boyle et al. (2023), and Saxe et al. (2023) all used qualitative methods to examine leadership and yet, the contexts spanned Australia, US National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), and SPD organizations. Additionally, van Dalfsen et al. (2023) relied on quantitative methods to examine and develop a scale for measuring

shared leadership in youth sport in the Netherlands. Further illustrating the various contexts that were studied through sport leadership in 2023 are the specific organizations that made up the above-mentioned studies. O'Boyle et al. (2023) focused on board members of an Australian nonprofit sport organization. Saxe et al. (2023) specifically explored turnover in NCAA Division I swim coaches. Kang and Svensson (2023a; 2023d) examined US-based SDP organizations or collectives for both of their works, and as mentioned above, van Dalfsen et al. (2023) took to studying youth sport and shared leadership.

Reviewing the sport leadership research noted in this current edition as well as the previous edition led to several key insightful trends of what scholars have deemed important by seeing what areas continue to be studied. The SDP space is one that has garnered scholarly interest for quite some time (Welty Peachey et al., 2015) and continues to offer a rich context through which to explore both traditional and non-traditional approaches to leadership (Kang & Svensson, 2023a). Beyond the SDP organizations, shared leadership also remains at the forefront of several studies (Kang & Svensson, 2023a; 2023b; van Dalfsen et al., 2023). Shared leadership will continue to be an area of interest, particularly in different contexts and cultures as scholars push the boundaries of what traditional leadership theories and concepts have helped us to understand and where emerging leadership theories and concepts, such as shared leadership and followership can fill in gaps and help sport leadership evolve (Damon et al., 2022). Further, the contexts across the world, which present unique opportunities to explore leadership through different structures continues to add valuable insights to sport leadership, such as the work done by O'Boyle and colleagues (2023). In countries such as Australia where sport governing boards are common and influential, it is paramount to continue to explore how members of these boards view, enact, and understand leadership given their keen role in shaping sport for an entire country (or significant sections of a country). Another area that represents a logical sport context to study leadership in and around is youth sport, as van Dalfsen et al. (2023) have done. As the next potential generation of sport leaders or societal leaders, examining the leadership structures and teaching that surround youth sport participants around the world can be of importance. Enhancing leadership, such as through shared leadership at the youth level may have a positive impact on youth sport participants and we can then start to

understand through more longitudinal work just how impactful leadership around youth sport can be later in life. Lastly, as we seem to move away from the foundational ways of examining leadership in sport organizations, such as the input-output type of quantitative methods where a leadership style is the input variable and some mix of leader or follower or organizational outcomes represent the output variable(s), we see specific foci of leadership's influence. Saxe et al. (2023) represent one such specific focus as their work on occupational turnover of coaches enlightens areas in sport where leaders may begin to or already have explored leaving the industry to being more conscious of turning over positions given the continued development of leadership job-related stressor placed on leaders, such as NCAA coaches.

Conclusion

Overall, while this current edition of Sport Leadership surrounded one article from our selected journals, it offered the opportunity to connect all sport leadership research from these journals throughout 2023 and bridge some themes from 2022. Looking ahead, sport leadership continues to offer emerging areas of research with both theoretical and practical implications. It would seem easy to forecast a continued emphasis on shared leadership in the near future, possibly in different contexts that have yet to be studied. Governing boards of sport entities also continue to offer a natural context through which sport leadership can be studied or used as a lens to study acting leaders in national sports. Lastly, as we continue to emerge from COVID-19 and face outcomes such as burnout and turnover among sport practitioners, sport leadership research will need to be keen on factors contributing to this trend as well as factors that may potentially mitigate this trend. Also, of interesting note is to monitor which sport contexts may be most susceptible to turnover and burnout and which contexts are less susceptible to these phenomena, and how we can study these organizations to potentially help the leaders and organizations facing increasing turnover and burnout.

Annotated Bibliography

Kang, S., & Svensson, P.G. (2023). The antecedents of shared leadership in sport for development and peace collaboratives. Journal of Sport management, 37(6), 417-428. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2022-0303

Researchers from the US examined SDP collaboratives for potential antecedents to shared leadership. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews with 30 participants, the authors were able to identify four antecedents. These four antecedents were strategic planning, support from vertical leaders, shared events, and personal characteristics of members. The study added contributions to the academy's understanding of shared leadership by being one of the first to examine what themes or factors contribute to allowing shared leadership to be developed in a sport organization.

References

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