Sport Leadership

Zack J. Damon

Introduction

This edition of Sport Management Digest's Sport Leadership section includes a total of four articles. There is one article each from *Sport Management Review* (SMR), *Journal of Sport Management* (JSM), *Journal of Global Sport Management* (JGSM), and *European Sport Management Quarterly* (ESMQ). Each article deals directly with a leadership-based research context or theory, or investigates those in leadership positions, such as coaches.

The current compilation of articles offers a mostly qualitative approach to studying leadership as three out of the four articles used a qualitative methodology. While the articles primarily used qualitative approaches, they did span three different countries: including the US, Netherlands, and Australia. Kang and Svensson (2023) used an interpretative qualitative design with semi-structured interviews while also examining the content of documents related to their context; a US based sport-for-development (SFD) organization. O'Boyle et al. (2023) performed a qualitative case study with a focus on current and former board members of an Australian nonprofit sport organization. Next, Saxe et al. (2023) also used an interpretative qualitative design to explore occupational turnover among former US National Collegiate Athletics Association (NCAA) Division I swim coaches. The final article in the current collection used various quantitative techniques to develop a scale aimed to measure shared leadership in the youth sport context in the Netherlands (van Dalfsen et al. 2023). While the current articles skew mostly as qualitative in nature, the cultural contexts that were examined offer a broad array around the world. As detailed above, the contexts included in the current collection include Australia nonprofit sport organization, US SFD organization, the Netherlands youth sport context, and the NCAA Division I context, illustrating a variety of cultural contexts across the world.

The following section provides a discussion on the highlights of each reviewed paper with synthesis to each other or the greater sport leadership research stream where appropriate.

Advances in Sport Leadership Research

Saxe et al. (2023) applied the Transtheoretical Model of Change (TTM) in a novel approach to understanding sport employees' experience of occupational turnover, with a specific aim towards NCAA Division I swim coaches. While the TTM had been utilized in the health behavior and management disciplines for a variety of applications (Grant, 2010; Pennington, 2022), its primary use in sport has revolved around understanding fan attendance (Musgrave et al., 2021) and an athlete's decision and process to retire from a sport (Park et al., 2012). Since the TTM had been successfully applied in these previous contexts and given its framework to

better understand an individual's processes and decision-making thinking behind a significant behavior change, it proved to be an appropriate framework for Saxe and colleagues to use in understanding coaches' voluntary turnover.

Through semi-structured interviews, Saxe et al. (2023) carried out an interpretive qualitative design to gather insights from former Division I swim coaches. Through a thematic analysis process of the data, they found that the coaches carried out the TTM's sequence of: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. However, a valuable contribution from Saxe and colleagues' work is the discovery of a "tipping point" part of the TTM sequence after contemplation and before preparation. While the authors noted that each coach took a different timeline to work through the sequence of the TTM in their turnover process, the tipping point provided unique insight into why a coach would leave their role, especially after having been in the role for considerable time. The tipping point boiled down to an aspect in the decision-making process for the participants in the contemplation phase where "they could or would no longer endure the aforementioned frustrations they experienced in the contemplation phase" (Saxe et al., 2023, p. 264). Often, the frustrations would be homed in by the participants after their season with corresponding emotions intensifying over time. The reasons for the frustration spanned multiple factors for each participant, such as family issues or priorities, a breaking point in coaching, missing major life events, and desperation for a change. Both theoretical and practical implications from Saxe et al's. (2023) work shed light on using the TTM in future research to understand the behavior of coaches and other sport leaders, particularly related to leaving their roles. A key practical implication is realizing that others in similar positions have gone through and will go through phases of the TTM as stressors related to the coaching profession intensify. Thus, those supervising coaches would be well-served to communicate better with their coaches about life situations as well as seek out ways to improve coaching conditions and help minimize tipping points, which lead to the voluntary occupation turnover.

While Saxe et al. (2023) concentrated on adult coaches, van Dalfsen et al. (2023) studied youth football players (under the age of 17 years old) in the Netherlands to better understand shared leadership at the youth level while also having developed the Youth Athlete Shared Leadership (YASL) scaled. As the only quantitative based study in the current edition, van Dalfsen et al. (2023) not only advanced a new scale but also one in an area of shared leadership, which continues to emerge in both management leadership (Day et al., 2006) and sport management leadership (Billsberry et al., 2018). Further, another unique aspect of van Dalfsen and colleagues' work is the emphasis to understanding the antecedents of shared leadership at the youth sport participant level. Conversely, much of the shared leadership work around sport had been centered on adult team or management contexts (van Dalfsen et al., 2023).

Having used the Shared Professional Leadership Inventory for Team (SPLIT) created by Grille and Kauffeld (2015) and the Six Natural Leaders Questionnaire (SNLQ) by Van Vugt and Ahuja (2011) as the foundation for their work, van Dalfsen et al. (2023) were able to adopt these to the youth football context in the

Netherlands. After both exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were performed on the data as well as related analyses to ensure validity and robust testing, van Dalfsen and colleagues' results illustrated three factors to comprise the YASL: steering, coaching, and intervening. The steering factor included aspects centered on communication among the group to make sure tasks were completed, traditions of the group were upheld, and ensuring that new members knew the group's norms. The coaching factor consisted of the notion of support from player-to-player, helping each other handle conflicts, and not letting each other down. Lastly, the intervening factor centered on communication in the team related to solving any confrontations and having open communication about what is desired and what is not desired. van Dalfsen et al's. (2023) novel work to quantify shared leadership at the youth sport level allows future researchers to continue to explore the phenomenon at this level and use the YASL as a way to examine shared leadership's influence on a variety of youth sport outcomes. From a practical standpoint, this work allows coaches of youth sport teams to recognize the need to allow all players opportunities to share in the leadership responsibility, not just the formal leaders while recognizing that traditional hierarchical leadership structures may not be the best suited.

Continuing with the study of shared leadership in sport, Kang and Svensson (2023) examined its benefits and challenges in the SFD context. Specifically, Kang and Svensson (2023) performed a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews along with analysis of the SFD organization's documents. Kang and Svensson (2023) noted similar needs as van Dalfsen et al. (2023) did in regard to a greater emphasis on understanding shared leadership's role in the sport leadership realm. However, Kang and Svensson (2023) also noted how the SFD context has grown considerably in recent years and thus, a greater need for understanding the leadership processes and constructs in the SFD context to keep up with the growth. Further, a key benefit of Kang and Svensson's recent work is how it built off of previous research, which had called for additional work on investigating how a collaborative approach to leadership in SFD organizations can help them navigate leadership challenges (Kang & Svensson, 2019). This current work specifically looked to find out how SDP leaders perceived a shared leadership approach, and what challenges or benefits such an approach provided for the organization.

Through their findings of analyzing 30 semi-structured interviews and SFD documents, Kang and Svensson (2023) uncovered five themes related to the benefits of shared leadership in SFD: collective impact, network capacity, collective learning, shared responsibilities, and cohesion. These themes illustrated the ways in which a non-hierarchical leadership approach specifically benefitted or improved the leadership process in the US SFD organizations in the study. The themes which emerged related to the potential challenges of shared leadership in SFD were challenging leadership dynamics, a lack of understanding what shared leadership is, inconsistent quality of leadership engagement, and various levels of information sharing throughout the organization. Kang and Svensson's (2023) findings show the push versus pull type of effect at play as the SFD organizations in their study weigh the benefits of shared leadership against the challenges. While some participants noted the positive to sharing in the leadership responsibilities and increasing the

leadership network's capacity, these were also confounded by worry over the challenges related to those in leadership positions and the power dynamics in the current setup as well as those who may be unaware of shared leadership compared to the traditional leadership styles and models currently in place. Implications from this work span both practical and research areas. For practical implications a key note is how shared leadership offers tangible benefits and not ones that would have zero impact on improving SFD practitioners' work. On the research side of implications, Kang and Svensson noted the need to expand who is captured in data collection as leaders in SFD organizations from different levels or from different areas may view the benefits and challenges of shared leadership differently.

The last article in the current edition centers on leadership among a governing board in an Australian nonprofit sport board. O'Boyle et al. (2023) performed 12 semi-structured interviews to gain insights into the relationship between intra-board leadership at a national board level to the leadership capacity across a federal network (inter-board). Similar to the previously noted shared leadership, O'Boyle and colleagues integrated collective leadership in their framework. Collective leadership spawns from a social construction of leadership approach (Billsberry et al., 2018) while also spanning a multilevel process approach to leadership (Welty Peachey et al., 2015), and along with previous leadership research on governing boards in Australia, provided a context-specific framework for this case study. Through the thematic analysis of their data, O'Boyle et al. (2023) found four main themes emerged: leadership roles of the board, intra-board collective leadership, inter-board collective leadership, and leadership behaviors and actions across individuals and organizationally.

Expanded findings related to the above themes included an ambiguous understanding of what leadership roles in sport governance boards pertain to beyond the fundamental functions of the governance board itself. O'Boyle et al. (2023) also found that collective leadership did not always span across the network compared to the intra-board collective leadership. This resulted in stunted growth of collective leadership culture at the inter-board network. Ultimately, a significant benefit of O'Boyle and colleagues' (2023) work is the advancements made to the working model of leadership in non-profit sport governance put forth by O'Boyle et al., 2019. The specific refinements to the model include a need to distinguish the roles on the boards between governance roles and leadership roles. Further refinement included the need to trust and share information across both intra and inter-board contexts. Specifically, sharing information would increase trust across the boards and help embed collective leadership across board members. Lastly, O'Boyle et al. (2023) offered refinement to the previous model based on their current case study to emphasize four leadership theory underpinnings to continue to explore in future research: leader-member exchange, shared leadership, collective leadership, and facilitative leadership. Each of these four theoretical underpinnings would help address areas of growth of understanding in future iterations of the model, such as interpersonal relationships through leader-member exchange, which could positively address the issue of inter-board collective leadership following intra-board collective leadership.

Conclusion

Overall, the current collection of articles offered a focus primarily on emerging areas of leadership in sport as it relates to shared leadership. Three of the four articles incorporated shared or collective leadership as the main sport leadership theory, which may signal a continued shift of research focus in the field away from the traditional leadership styles to these emerging theories and approaches to incorporate non-formal leadership positions into leadership practice. The work of O'Boyle et al. (2023) related to governance boards in Australia denotes the importance of how understanding leadership within governance structures and duties will shape how an entire country's sport governance and leadership network work together from board to board. Kang and Svensson (2023) and van Dalfsen et al. (2023) furthered the emphasis on shared leadership across US SFD contexts and youth sport in the Netherlands, respectively. Both studies added significant information to the growing sport management shared leadership foundation and no doubt will be building blocks for future research in this area. Lastly, Saxe et al. (2023) delved into the voluntary turnover phenomenon of US NCAA Division I swim coaches; a key topic as turnover across multiple sport organizations and levels of leadership continues to be a troubling issue as societies continue to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and working conditions are evaluated by employers and employees alike in sport.

Annotated Bibliography

Kang, S., & Svensson, P. G. (2023). The benefits and challenges of shared leadership in sport for development and peace collaboratives. Sport Management Review, 26(3), 383-404. DOI: 10.1080/14413523.2022.2085430

Researchers from the US explored the concept of shared leadership within sport-for-development organizations in the US. Through a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, themes related to benefits and challenges of shared leadership in the sport-for-development organizational context emerged. Themes related to benefits included collective impact, network capacity, collective learning, shared responsibilities, and cohesion while themes related to challenges were challenging leadership dynamics, a lack of understanding what shared leadership is, inconsistent quality of leadership engagement, and various levels of information sharing throughout the organization.

O'Boyle, I., Shilbury, D., & Ferkins, L. (2023). Leadership in and out of the sport boardroom: New empirical insights. European sport management quarterly, 23(1), 188-206. DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2020.1838591

Researchers from Australia investigated collective leadership in Australian nonprofit sport governance boards. Through a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews, their findings included intra-board collective leadership

potentially being disconnected from inter-board collective leadership from governance board to governance board throughout the federation. Such a disconnect can lead to issues in trust and communication. However, the study advanced a previous model which detailed the integration of various leadership theories to Australian sport governance boards.

Saxe, K., Beasley, L., Taylor, E., & Hardin, R. (2023). An investigation into voluntary occupational turnover of sport employees using the transtheoretical model of change. Journal of Sport Management, 37(4), 256-271.

Researchers from the US took to studying voluntary turnover of sport employees at the US NCAA Division I level. Specifically, the study looked at former Division I swim coaches and concluded that a new tipping point phase in the Transtheoretical Model of Change to be a key finding in why and how sport employees voluntarily leave their positions. While the rest of the model's phases were also found, this tipping point phase is one that provides a foundation for future research to expand beyond Division I swim coaches.

Van Dalfsen, G., Van Hoecke, J., Westerbeek, H., & De Bosscher, V. (2023). The development of a scale to measure shared leadership in youth sport. Journal of Global Sport Management, 8(1), 73-94.

Researchers in the Netherlands examined the notion of shared leadership in youth football across teams in the Netherlands. Using previous scales that individually studied aspects of teams and leadership, respectively, the researchers were able to combine items and statistically validate them as a new scale to measure and assess youth shared leadership in sport. The YASL provides further insight into the growing body of literature related to shared leadership in sport, with a novel approach to examine it at the youth sport level.

References

Billsberry, J., Mueller, J., Skinner, J., Swanson, S., Corbett, B., & Ferkins, L. (2018). Reimagining leadership in sport management: Lessons from the social construction of leadership. *Journal of Sport Management, 32*(2), 170–182. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2017-0210

Day, D., Gronn, P., & Salas, E. (2006). Leadership in team-based organisations: On the threshold of a new era. *The Leadership Quarterly, 17(3),* 211–216. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua. 2006.02.001

Grant, A. (2010). It takes time: A stages of change perspective on the adoption of

workplace   coaching skills. *Journal of Change Management, 10(1),* 61–77.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/14697010903549440

Grille, A., & Kauffeld, S. (2015). Development and preliminary validation of the

shared   professional leadership inventory for teams (SPLIT). *Psychology, 6(1),*

75–92.   https://doi.org/10.4236/61008

Kang, S., & Svensson, P. G. (2019). Shared leadership in sport for development and

peace: A conceptual framework of antecedents and outcomes. *Sport*

Management Review, *22*(4),   464–476.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2018.06.010

Kang, S., & Svensson, P. G. (2023). The benefits and challenges of shared

leadership in sport for   development and peace collaboratives. *Sport*

Management Review, *26*(3), 383-404.

Musgrave, J., Jopson, A., & Jamson, S. (2021). Travelling to a sport event: Profiling

sport fans   against the transtheoretical model of change. *Journal of Hospitality &*

Tourism Research, 45(7), 1237–1259. ttps://doi.org/10.1177/1096348020915255

O'Boyle, I., Shilbury, D., & Ferkins, L. (2023). Leadership in and out of the sport

boardroom: New empirical insights. *European sport management quarterly, 23*(1),

188-206. DOI: 10.1080/16184742.2020.1838591

Park, S., Tod, D., & Lavallee, D. (2012). Exploring the retirement from sport decision-

making   process based on the transtheoretical model. *Psychology of Sport and*

Exercise, 13(4),   444–453. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2012.02.003

Pennington, C.G. (2022). Applying the transtheoretical model of behavioral change to establish   physical activity habits. *Journal of Education and Recreation Patterns, 2(1),* 11–20.

Saxe, K., Beasley, L., Taylor, E., & Hardin, R. (2023). An investigation into voluntary occupational turnover of sport employees using the transtheoretical model of change. *Journal of Sport Management*, *37*(4), 256-271.

Van Dalfsen, G., Van Hoecke, J., Westerbeek, H., & De Bosscher, V. (2023). The development   of a scale to measure shared leadership in youth sport. *Journal of Global Sport   Management*, *8*(1), 73-94.

Van Vugt, M., & Ahuja, A. (2011). *De natuurlijke leider.* Bruna Uitgevers.

Welty Peachey, J. W., Damon, Z. J., Zhou, Y., & Burton, L. J. (2015). Forty years of leadership   research in sport management: A review, synthesis, and conceptual framework. *Journal of Sport Management, 29*(5), 570–587. https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2014-0126