

Theoretical Developments in Sport Management

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Introduction

In the first review of this section of the Digest, Dr. Girginov provided a thorough review of theoretical developments in the field of sport management. Leaving aside the debate of whether sport management requires its own theory(ies), what we have seen develop in this still nascent field is a diverse area of theoretical applications with sociological, psychological, and political science traditions to name a few. All articles in the journals reviewed provided a rich review of concepts and/or theoretical frameworks—grounding the empirical work with carefully constructed theoretical foundations. Yet, we must be cautious of developing an echo chamber where we constantly rely on familiar theoretical frameworks. As such in this second review I explicitly identified articles that aimed to apply or develop new theoretical frameworks or concepts. Seven papers were included in this review that were published in *Communication & Sport* (1), *International Journal of Sport Policy & Politics* (2), *Journal of Sport Management* (2), and *Sport Management Review* (2).

Advances in theoretical developments in sport management

Brown-Devlin et al. (2021) adopt presence theory—a sense you are with others while interacting through virtual and social media; and social identity theory—the self-categorization and membership individuals seek and recognize; in their survey design study of global social TV usage during the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in PyeongChang South Korea. These theoretical frameworks are applied to test the hypothesis that increased social TV usage predicts increased social presence outcomes which increase levels of fandom and identification. Brown-Devlin et al found a significant relationship between social TV use, social outcomes, and social identity. The social outcomes of sociability, social capital, and social presence were all influenced by social TV use. However, perceived social presence did not influence the level of an individual's national team identification or Winter Olympic fandom. That is, identity as a fan of a national team or the Winter Olympics was not shaped by the feeling of being with others—the authors suggest social presence may not be critical to fan identity formation. The authors highlight the importance of considering motivational and psychological aspects of consumers of social TV and recognizing the diversity and complexity of the changing social media landscape when examining the importance of social networks and fandom.

Harris et al. (2021) adopts a governance theory perspective of network governance in international sport by adopting Bergsgard's (2018) analytical framework to examine power and governance in international sport. Harris et al argue it is Bergsgard's emphasis of the political and institutional nature of power relations within policy networks that provides a new lens to examine governance and sport considering historical and contemporary circumstances. They adopt this framework to examine the

Russian Doping scandal (RDS) the state sponsored doping program exposed after the 2014 Olympic Games in Sochi. Data collected from organizational reports, press releases, interview transcripts, whistleblower testimony, and newspaper reports were analyzed Using Bergsgard's framework to explore the power dynamics between various stakeholders to uncover why the RDS happened, how events occurred, and what conditions underpinned these events. Findings support arguments presented in the governance literature that suggest within networks there are asymmetrical power relations—in this case the IOC can influence the World Anti-doping Association and International Federations to achieve its own policy objectives and interests. For Harris et al (2021) the usefulness of Bergsgard's framework is in its multidimensional approach to unpacking the exercise of power by the IOC relative to other stakeholders in response to the RDS.

Lucas and O'Connor (2021) adopted a critical analytic lens to examine Sport for Development (SFD) policy implementation and impact for Indigenous Australians. In this paper the authors analyzed the content of three critical policy documents aimed at 'closing the gap' for Indigenous Australians. Using six guiding questions in Bacchi's (2009) *What's the problem represented to be?* (WPR): What's the problem represented to be in a particular policy? What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem? How has this representation of the problem come about? What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? What effects are produced by this representation of the problem? How/where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated, and defended? Lucas and O'Connor found that sport policy documents articulated a policy narrative aligning with public policy objective supporting the positive discourses of sport for Indigenous Australians yet neglecting the representation of Indigenous voices and community interests. Using Bacchi's (2009) framework the authors' critical examination of "the 'power of sport' narrative" supports previous research that highlights neo-colonial policy objectives and the need to examine further the role of power and resistance from the perspective of Indigenous Australians.

MacCharles and Melton (2021) frame their qualitative study of gay men working in the sport industry using life course theory to understand how the stigma associated with being gay shaped their career in the sport industry. Building on the work of Elder (1975), Giele and Elder (1998) and Edler, Johnson, and Crosnoe (2003) the authors examine the context of the social pathways taken and the importance of life-span development, agency/choice, the context of time and place, timing of events, and linked lives—or interactions and relationships. They argue life course theory will help explain the circumstances that shape the career paths of gay men in the sport industry. In their application of life course theory, MacCharles and Melton (2021) explore how sexual stigma shapes the career trajectories of gay men in the sport industry and in particular the importance of interactions with others and the meaning given to identity in sport shapes career and self-identity. The authors highlight the importance of the narratives of

marginalized groups in the sport industry and apply a valuable framework to enhance understanding and practice.

In their examination of the relationship between stakeholder representation on governing boards, McLeod et al. (2021) examine supporter representation using social exchange theory (SET) to interrogate how board-level interaction shapes the performance of supporter directors on the board. SET suggests social environments are relational and involve an exchange of rewards and resources and judgement of costs and benefits; of give and take; which may relate to board performance—in this case of supporter (or fan) representation on the board. This research contributes to the governance literature and advances SET by focusing on a particular type of board member—the supporter representation—a common board member role in European football clubs, yet a role rife with challenges in establishing trust and confidence in abilities as a board member. The authors extend the SET literature through their finding of the concept of “buy-in” as a critical component of the social exchange process. Their work highlights how SET helps understand the relational nature of board governance and indeed any type of stakeholder interactions.

In their examination of the gender structure of national sport governing bodies (England Golf and Lawn Tennis Association) in England, Piggott and Matthews (2021) draw on Bourdieu’s theory of practice and his concept of “field” to explore the ways culture—both material and process--and institutions and their taken for granted practices—shape actions and interactions in organizations in a way that maintains gendered structures of domination. In their application of Bourdieu’s theory of practice Piggot and Matthews (2021) are able to examine the complex nature of specific changes adopted by two NSGBs in their efforts to address gender equity and the ways in which this is done such that the taken for granted practices that support male dominance in leadership positions is maintained and unquestioned.

Svensson et al. (2021) contributes to the theoretical development of human resource management in their examination of employee engagement as a concept that may help explain the link between employee motivation and outcomes in the sport for development (SFD) context. Engagement theory—the consideration of an employee’s psychological state in terms of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement dimensions provided the foundation to examine the relationship between employee engagement motivation, turnover intention, innovative work behaviour, and nonprofit performance for SFD workers in the United States. An electronic survey was sent to over 1,000 employees in various national agencies in the SFD field. A response rate of 18% or 199 completed surveys indicated that respondents indicated engaged SFD employees reported higher levels of psychological wellbeing, innovative work behavior, and perceived organizational performance. In addition, these employees reported lower levels of turnover intention. The authors’ highlight that these findings are important for the SFD context where employees face intense work environments, are overworked

and poorly compensated. As such, understanding the investment of mental and emotional energy as well as the willingness to act in ways that defines a positive employee experience extends the literature on employee wellbeing and contributes to understanding employee retention in fields that are demanding on employees.

Conclusions

In this section, the aim is to assess the state of the art of theoretical development—the articles presented above give us a sense that there are many opportunities to broaden the theoretical foundations of research in sport management. It is important to recognize the contributions and limitations of the theoretical advancements being made in sport management. Theory driven research is the foundation of each of the articles, with a particular interest in advancing the practice of sport management and its various sub-disciplines—consumer behaviour, governance, and critical management studies. However, it will be important to follow through with more testing and exploration of new theoretical arguments to continue to advance knowledge in sport management and its various sub-disciplines.

Annotated Bibliography

Brown-Devlin, N., Devlin, M.B., Billings, A.C., & Brown, K.A. (2021). Five rings, five screens? A global examination of social TV influence on social presence and social identification during the 2018 Winter Olympic Games. *Communication & Sport*, 9(6), 865-887. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167479519899142>

In this study the researchers applied social presence theory and social identity theory to examine if social TV engagement impacted social presence and social identity. Data was collected using an online survey of participants (n = 2,245) in six countries: Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Sweden, and the United States. Participants were asked about their social TV usage and scales assessing social capital, sociability, social presence, and fandom were also included on the questionnaire. Quantitative analysis on the survey results revealed little support for the hypothesis that social presence—the feeling of being with others—did not influence identification with the national team or with the Winter Olympics. The authors conclude that a feeling of being with others is not critical for fandom or identity—they surmise that perhaps fandom is already at play when social presence is perceived by entering into virtual sporting environments with others. The study highlights the importance of social TV and technological advances for consuming events and the need for organizations to recognize and invest in understanding the impact of this technology on their consumers. However, the study whilst framed using new theoretical understandings, does not advance our theoretical understanding.

Harris, S., Dowling, M., & Houlihan, B. (2021). An analysis of governance failure and power dynamics in international sport: The Russian doping scandal. *International*

Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 13(3), 359-378.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1898443>

Using Bergsgard's framework which incorporates Lukes' three faces of power and Bourdieu's symbolic power, the authors conduct a document analysis of the Russian Doping Scandal (RDS). Adopting this framework, the authors are able to examine three levels of power—direct/formal; institutionalized/informal; symbolic/discursive providing an account of the structural, political, and institutional processes that underpin governance and policy networks. The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the RDS as articulated in official and media documents. Whilst the sources of data are a limitation of the study—the theoretical contribution of bridging governance theory with an analytical tool such as Bergsgard's (2018) framework the authors are able to illuminate how power was exercised in the policy network. While the authors' articulate the practical value of applying the framework—they do not delve into the theoretical developments offered through their empirical investigation.

Lucas, R., & O'Connor, J. (2021). The representation of Indigenous Australians in sport for development policy: What's the problem? *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 14(4), 587-603, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19406940.2021.1947346>

Adopting discourse analysis and Bacchi's (2009) *What's the problem represented to be?* (WPR) theoretical framework, the authors examine Sport for Development (SFD) policies aimed at Indigenous Australians. Their aim, to uncover the motivations for policy and the discourses influencing policy are explored from this critical lens to uncovering the unquestioned assumptions that underpin problem representation and policy solutions or options. Data were collected from three key public policy documents that articulated public policy concerns and targets for improving sport opportunities for Indigenous Australians. Not surprisingly the authors found a lack of Indigenous involvement coupled with a public policy narrative that touts the success of SFD policy for Indigenous Australians. The authors' however go beyond this description to highlight public policy motives and the power of a 'power of sport' narrative that shapes SFD policy that is unquestioned by policy makers yet makes little inroads into substantial social change.

MacCharles, J.D. & Melton, E.N. (2021). Charting their own path: Using life course theory to explore the careers of gay men working in sport. *Journal of Sport Management*, 35, 407-425. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.2019-0415>

In this qualitative interview study of 12 gay men working in the sport industry, the authors draw on life course theory to understand the relationship between sexual stigma, identity, and career trajectories. Whilst the authors are able to describe how the framework's concepts of time and place; linked lives, and agency help us understand how this sample of gay men navigated their sport industry careers, they do not explore the possibilities for theoretical development of "self" and life trajectory for those who experience sexual stigma. A strong application of a new theoretical lens in the sport

management literature that would be worthy of further nuanced theoretical development.

McLeod, J., Jenkin, A., Walters, G., & Irving, R. (2021). The role and performance of supporter directors: A social exchange theory perspective. *Sport Management Review*, 24(5), 862-885. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1880744>

Interviews with “supporter directors” on governing boards in Scottish football clubs were conducted to understand the role of “fans” as board members contributes to board governance and how social interaction shapes the performance of this particular type of board member. In conducting 17 interviews with supporter board members the researchers found that these board members were able to clearly define their role as promoting supporter interests, providing information, and ensuring fiduciary responsibility. They also reported opportunities and challenges in being able to perform their role and the importance of developing and maintain reciprocal social exchanges with other board colleagues. Their research supports other work applying SET and also extends this work by illuminating the concept of “buy in” as a critical element to ensuring supporter directors are able to make valuable contributions as board members. The authors provide a novel perspective of board dynamics however they do not develop the theoretical possibilities for expanding SET or the place of “buy in” as a critical concept to the board governance process. Which may be of particular importance as more organizations broaden the stakeholders that sit around the governance table.

Piggot, L.V. & Matthews, J.J.K. (2021). Gender, leadership, and governance in English national governing bodies of sport: Formal structures, rules, and processes. *Journal of Sport Management*, 35, 338-351. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsom.2020-0173>

This comparative case study of two English national governing bodies of sport—England Golf and the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) explored the gendered nature of the administrative and governance structures framed by Bourdieu’s theory of practice. Data collected from interviews and documents were thematically analyzed and showed the organizations have maintained gender segregation in their respective governance structures—where males dominated in top level volunteer and paid positions and yet these organizations are sites of contested gender power relations. The authors articulate the strengths and weaknesses of Bourdieu’s theory of practice—highlighting the need for further exploration of transformative change. Whilst Bourdieu’s theory is helpful for understanding and comparing the cases—the author’s pay little attention to feminist research and scholarship that might enrich the understanding of power imbalances and gender equality.

Sevensson, P.G., Joeng, S., Shuck, B., & Otto, M.G. (2021). Antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement in sport for development. *Sport Management Review*, 24(4), 673-696. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14413523.2021.1880758>

In this study, the researchers examine the concept of employee engagement using an electronic survey to a sample of Sport for Development (SFD) employees working in the

United States. The major finding was that a higher level of employee engagement was related to a high level of attachment to the organization's mission, high intrinsic motivation, and internal regulation (the internal value of the activity/action). In addition, SFD employees with high employee engagement showed less intention to leave their position, and higher levels of psychological wellbeing, innovative behaviour, and performance. The author's presented and tested their model of employee engagement—however, there was little discussion of the theoretical developments offered through the study or for future development.