

Sport Management Research— What Progress Has Been Made?

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This paper discusses the quantity and quality of administrative/management research in sport and physical education. The historical foundations of sport management are reviewed followed by a brief analysis of selected textbooks, and masters and doctoral studies. A shift to a slightly more theoretical perspective of the textbooks was noted. Theses tended to reflect a more theoretical orientation during the post-1965 period. The bulk of the research was descriptive in design and was directed toward post-secondary institutions. A major emphasis was on leaders and leadership behavior. The conclusions suggest that future research should improve the theoretical base and strive to make the knowledge sensible and useful. Additionally, increased attention to noneducational organizations is recommended.

No other subdiscipline within sport and physical education, with the possible exception of exercise itself, has such a long history and tradition as physical education and sport administration/management. Early professional preparation curricula included courses in administration, programs, and facilities. During the first 75 years of this century, the leaders in our field were those whose names were often associated with administration/management textbooks or those who were recognized as significant practicing administrators—Williams, Brownell, Nash, Esslinger, Staley, and more recently Alley, Frost, Wiley, and Zeigler.

A long history does not necessarily connote a distinguished history. When the physical education profession began the great discipline debate in the 1960s, triggered in part by James B. Conant's criticism (Conant, 1963, p. 201), sport administration as a potential subdiscipline would have been ignored or eliminated by many scholars within physical education. We have witnessed a reemergence of sport administration, or sport management as it is more commonly called, during the late 1970s and 1980s. This reemergence has been so strong within our graduate programs that Spirduso (1986), in her presentation at the National Symposium on Graduate Study in Physical Education, identified administration as one of the most frequently declared areas of graduate programs, faculty interests, and

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conferred doctorates. Does this reemergence of sport management permit us unqualified entry into physical education and sport academe? On the contrary! Now we must demonstrate our eligibility through the quality of the research developed within these programs.

This paper will review our current status regarding the quantity and quality of the research. The historical foundations will be reviewed first as a means of providing some perspective. Then, closer attention will be given to the nature of administrative and management research since 1965, and some general conclusions will be developed including comments about strengths and weaknesses. This paper will conclude with a few statements concerning current needs and possible future directions.

The Historical Foundations

The decade of the 1960s may someday be viewed as a pivotal point in the development of our field. Many factors affected the shape of sport and physical education, including pressure to improve all educational programs, a Zeitgeist favoring active life styles, a strong emphasis on science and scientific methods, unsurpassed technological advances, and the renaissance in higher education. One of the major issues in sport and physical education was the onset of the "Great Debate," which forced scholars and practitioners to carefully consider the nature of our field.

The problem of subdiscipline or area definition remains very real. Most traditional administration textbooks of a decade ago ignored management analysis and organization theory (except for a discussion of democratic administration) and paid little attention to human relations. Their major orientation was upon administrative principles, usually developed by authorities in the field, and upon program planning in physical education (Paton, 1970, p. 219). However, the last decade has seen a decided shift in the focus of textbook content.

It is risky to detail events without implying some cause and effect, which here may not be the case, but certain events in sport administration trace back to the mid-1960s. Considerable ferment was generated in the administration area at the University of Illinois during 1965 through 1970. Under the direction of Dr. Earle Zeigler, several students working in sequence completed studies analyzing administrative writing, research, and programs. A theme tended to emerge—that physical education needed a new approach to administration, an approach grounded in administrative theory. Reference is made to the text *Administrative Theory and Practice in Physical Education and Athletics* (Zeigler & Spaeth, 1975) for elaboration of this work.

Following closely behind the Illinois studies was the publication *Administrative Theory and Practice in Athletics and Physical Education* (Hunsicker, 1973), developed out of the 6th Big Ten Physical Education Body of Knowledge Symposium. Textbooks in administration began relying more heavily upon theoretical bases. Some examples might include the following: *Administration: Principles, Theory and Practice With Applications to Physical Education* (Hall et al., 1973), works by Frost and Marshall (1977), Resick, Seidel, and Mason (1979), Jackson's books, *Sport Administration* (1981) and *Leisure and Sports Centre Management* (1984), Zeigler's books, *Decision-Making in Physical Education*

and *Athletics Administration: A Case Method Approach* (1982) and *Management Competency Development in Sport and Physical Education* (Zeigler & Bowie, 1983), as well as *Sport Management* (VanderZwaag, 1984), and *Sport Management: Macro Perspectives* (Chelladurai, 1985).

The trend has been toward a more theoretical approach, including a greater focus on the dynamics of people in organizations, learning experiences designed to actively sharpen administrative skills and competencies, and clearer delineation of management theory applied to sport and physical education. It would appear that the progress has been steady.

One individual who has been a significant force in shaping the direction and thinking within sport management is Earle F. Zeigler. He was the first to chart a new course with the publication of his case method text (Zeigler, 1959) more than 25 years ago. He continued to advance the field with the publication of *Administrative Theory and Practice in Physical Education and Athletics* (Zeigler & Spaeth, 1975), again, a ground-breaking text. The more recent book, *Management Competency Development in Sport and Physical Education* (Zeigler & Bowie, 1983) represented another "first" and was preceded by a re-issue of his case method approach (Zeigler, 1982). Additionally, he was responsible for the development of administrative work at the University of Michigan, establishment and development of a management focus at the University of Illinois during the 1960s, and the sport administration program at the University of Western Ontario during the 1970s.

Contemporary Research

A review of more recent research in the sport management area is an awkward task because of the sheer difficulty of simply defining *management and administration*. Reference can be made to any number of definitions, such as the one accepted by Rockwood (1980, p. 3), who states, "administration can be considered . . . to be all of the processes or activities related to the formation and operation of an organization or a sub-division of an organization," to the one by Jackson (1981, p. 29), who says, "Administration is philosophy in action." Parkhouse and Ulrich (1979, p. 271) tend to accept a definition of management proposed by Gulick as a "field of knowledge [that] seeks to systematically understand why and how men work together systematically to accomplish objectives and to make these co-operative systems more useful to mankind."

The difficulty is compounded when one compares the impressions of research presented by different scholars. On the one hand, Applin (1986) remarked, "sports management is in its embryonic state and almost entirely devoid of research content," while Spirduso (1986), at the same conference, pointed out that administration was one of the most frequently declared areas of conferred doctorates. Perhaps one represents a qualitative point of view and the other a quantitative perspective. It seems worthwhile, however, to review the situation.

Some attempts have been made to assess the research base of sport management. Spaeth at the University of Illinois in 1967 examined the status of research in physical education and athletics. Several of her conclusions were a serious indictment of the field, specifically the following: (a) there was an almost total lack of theoretical orientation in the research design; (b) due to the lack of a theo-

retical orientation, scientific hypotheses were not used; and (c) the research lacked methodological rigor (Zeigler & Spaeth, 1975, p. 44).

Zeigler and Spaeth (1975) compiled a number of studies, including doctoral studies completed at the University of Illinois and elsewhere. The breadth and diversity of the work is impressive. The introductory studies represent some early efforts to deal with the question of theory, including a review of the graduate administration courses in several universities, the previously mentioned review of research conducted by Spaeth, and an investigation of similarities in meanings attached to selected concepts in administrative theory. These early studies were directed toward an assessment of the knowledge. All three were pessimistic in tone and sharply critical.

The studies that followed, however, showed that research appeared to be pursuing new directions. These studies focused on leadership, group cohesion, organizational climate, and organizational communication, as well as economic factors and concerns regarding facilities. Overall, the studies reflect many of the difficulties of conducting management research—inadequate samples, questionable research instruments, difficulty of relating dependent and independent variables, and difficulty of determining adequate measures of organizational performance. In summary, the studies were essentially descriptive.

Given that descriptive research is an important and fundamental first step, the contribution of these studies collectively was that they helped bridge the gap between emerging theories in management and social science and the research being conducted in sport and physical education. This shift in research emphasis, though subtle, was critical. Manifestation of this change can be noted in the sport management texts and monographs of a decade later.

Recent Status

Further review of the sport management research involved two steps. First, an analysis was conducted of a selected listing of doctoral studies prepared by R.H. Paris (1983). A second list of sport management studies was then developed based on a review of *Completed Research in Health, Physical Education and Recreation* (AAHPERD, 1978-84, Vols. 20-26). Paris' list included completed doctoral studies between 1972 and 1978, whereas the second review centered on the years 1978 to 1984. A review of this nature has some limitations. Reports of completed studies by the participating schools were somewhat inconsistent in terms of regularity, a few duplicate entries were discovered, and there was the obvious difficulty of basing the analysis on only a title and an abstract.

The list compiled by Paris included 48 doctoral studies completed between 1972 and 1978. It was clear that the tendency to rely upon descriptive research still persisted during that time, since over 75% of the studies employed descriptive methodology. However, the description was generally accompanied by analysis and efforts to understand situational dynamics, as well as attempts to explain phenomena rather than merely reporting status. The nature of leadership and leadership behavior were the primary concerns of the researchers (over 50%). Surveys of policies and procedures were next in popularity, at 25%, with employee satisfaction receiving somewhat less attention.

A review of the dissertation list revealed again that the research design included use of management and leadership instruments borrowed from business and education, thus continuing a trend to strengthen the theoretical foundations of the research. Problems with research design persisted. Samples were generally small, apparently often based on convenience. Procedures most frequently involved the use of questionnaires, and typically results would not be generalizable.

The seven volumes of *Completed Research in Health, Physical Education and Recreation*, 1978-84 inclusive, yielded 122 studies deemed to be administrative or management oriented. Of these studies, 64 were doctoral level and 58 were master's level. The research design employed was almost totally descriptive in nature. Based on limited insight into the studies, it was determined that fewer than 10% made use of other than "categorical" variables. Thomas and Nelson (1985, p. 17) referred to categorical variables as encompassing preexisting differences such as sex, race, age, or years of experience.

Graduate students and college/university faculty appeared to be fascinated with self-study, given that over 60% of theses and dissertations utilized a university sample. The remaining 40% of the studies were distributed between the public schools, recreation agencies, and outside agencies such as sport governing bodies.

From a slightly different point of view, it should be noted that the primary focus of over one third of the studies was on the leader or leadership position in the organization. Another third examined members of the organization, organizational structure, and organizational policies. The final third of the research examined a variety of other topics such as finance, marketing, the role of women, and legal liability.

Several key factors come to light as one reviews the research of the past 15 to 20 years. The post-1965 period saw a discernible change in the management/administration studies as researchers borrowed theories and instrumentation from allied social science fields. In general, basic design did not change and reliance on descriptive approaches persisted. A considerable segment of the research studies examined leadership roles and behaviors, and much of this research was directed toward post-secondary educational instructions. There appeared to be a parallel shift in the orientation of textbooks in the field as well. The more recent texts (post-1975) were clearly based more heavily upon management theory. Will these textbooks lead to improved research? Perhaps by 1995 we will have the perspective to answer this question.

Concluding Statement

Five research characteristics were suggested by Thomas and Nelson (1985, p. 3), outlining that research should be systematic, logical, empirical, reductive, and replicable. The review of the research included in this paper does not suggest that our work has been systematic. Rarely does one find a concentration of studies at one university that would appear to be part of an ongoing research program, or studies from separate programs that appear to be interrelated.

Due to the disparate pattern of sport management research, the studies as a group do not meet the criterion of reductiveness. It is difficult to discern the

development of a general relationship based on individual events or data. Thus, if we were challenged to identify our body of knowledge, it would be difficult to develop a picture of what we know.

Future Challenges

The amount of research relating to sport management is substantial. Scholars in the field appear to be confronted with some major problems, two of which will be briefly addressed here. One concerns the type of research whereas the second problem relates more to the focus of the research.

Administrators and managers tend to be practical people. The day-to-day task of both personal and organizational survival requires such an orientation. Research and theory that will help solve problems, suggest directions, or address real concerns has appeal to them. The success of the Peters and Waterman (1982) book, *In Search of Excellence*, substantiates this statement. The book has sold well because it makes sense out of theoretical perspectives that have application in the real world of organizations. The research design was not tight—but it made sense! There may be a lesson for those of us in sport management: We do need to maintain our theoretical base, but we must make our knowledge sensible and useful.

The second problem, focus of research, develops out of the newer directions our field seems to be pursuing, and job placement. Considerable attention has been given to the question of alternate careers, or careers other than those in the educational systems. Our research has been heavily weighted toward education, higher education in particular. Future projections suggest that we must turn our attention to other areas such as professional and amateur sport organizations and the increasingly diverse organizations in private enterprise.

The concerns of these noneducational organizations may be different; finance, marketing, personnel, and programs may differ from our previous concerns. We may need new curricula and new texts, and our research may need a new direction. We face a significant challenge in the future.

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