

The Social Construction of Knowledge in the Field of Sport Management: A Social Network Perspective

Catherine Quatman, Texas A & M University
Packianathan Chelladurai, The Ohio State University

**Session 6: Other
Presentation (25-minute)**

Thursday, May 31, 2007

1:00 PM - 1:25 PM

As a relatively young academic discipline, many scholars have noted the astounding growth of the field of sport management over the past couple of decades (e.g., Chalip, 2006, Costa, 2005). In fact, according to Chelladurai (2005) with over 200 universities in North America offering degree programs at the bachelor's, master's, and doctorate levels, sport management "is among the fastest growing areas of study in American universities" (p.5). However, despite its rapid growth and development, the field of sport management has not escaped the "growing pains" that often arise as new fields emerge (Amis & Silk, 2005; Chalip, 2006; Costa, 2005).

Costa (2005) articulated that the varied perspectives pertaining to these issues "are both a symptom and an outcome of the fact that sport management is still a young discipline" (p. 118). Yet, as Costa fruitfully argued and Chalip (2006) expressed, there are advantages to being a younger discipline; specifically the "opportunity to build the discipline's foundation and to shape its future" (p.3). In fact, Costa (2005) contended that empirical and systematic inquiry related to the parameters and implications of such debates are conducive for advancing the scholarly work in the field.

Such critical reflection on the idea space and research practices of academic disciplines is not limited to the field of sport management. Prompted by critical theory and postmodernism, analytical reflection on the state and practices of disciplines is now common among many branches of the physical and social sciences.

Researchers have employed a variety of empirical approaches to evaluate collaboration efforts and the social structural features of scientific disciplines. For example, ethnographic accounts, case studies, document and discourse analyses, and survey methods have all been used in exploratory studies related to specific academic fields (Moody, 2004). Accordingly, several themes emerged from such investigations including increases in collaboration rates (Moody, 2004), theoretical fragmentation (Abbott, 2000), disproportionate production and recognition of the same few scientific "stars" (Merton, 1968), and the balkanization of researchers in a field (Crane, 1988).

In addition to the previously mentioned approaches, recent work in the study of sociology of scientific disciplines has incorporated an emerging methodological perspective: social network theory and analysis (Moody, 2004). While it has long been theoretically posited that scientists greatly influence each other's work (e.g., Kuhn, 1970, Merton, 1968), and that networks of collaboration shape the idea space of a discipline (Crane, 1988; Kuhn, 1970), empirical evidence supporting these notions has been largely derived from ethnographic accounts and smaller groups in specific settings. However, as Moody (2004) emphasized: "Although we might expect the link between networks and ideas to be strongest in small groups, a logical extension suggests that long-term trends in scientific work might depend on the broader pattern of disciplinary social networks" (p. 213).

Incidentally, studies using social network analysis have yet to be explored in any realm of the discipline of sport management. Thus, the purposes of this study are twofold. First, the authors seek to specifically address the question of how is the advancement of knowledge in the field of sport management being collectively pursued? Secondly, the authors intend to introduce social network analysis as a new and promising lens for exploring facets of human behavior to the field of sport management.

Integrating a network perspective and embracing an approach similar to Moody's (2004) study on the social structural evolution of the field of sociology, a network model of co-authorship patterns was generated using several rounds of sampling and archival data collection. The observed network structure was then explored both quantitatively and qualitatively for meaningful patterns.

The results of the study essentially tell a story of the evolution and current state of the field of sport management's co-authorship structure. In addition, several potential socio-structural barriers were identified in the resulting network structure. Among the themes that emerged included the structural dominance of a single institution and the presence of structural gaps between geographic regions. Nonetheless, as this study was exploratory in nature, the themes developed were not meant to be conclusive but rather lay the foundation for future research directions.

2007 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2007)

Amis and Silk (2005) lamented, "Too often our work in sport management has been presented as neutral and value free, with little regard for the historical, social, political, and cultural context in which the work takes place" (2005). Integrating a network perspective, the ideas presented in this study offer a unique and compelling approach toward identifying the social structure and potentially hegemonic tendencies shaping the discipline. The findings of this study are tied to the theoretical implications these structural characteristics may hold for the idea space as well as the growth and progression of knowledge claims in the field. By incorporating some of the techniques of social network analysis into the process of a critical investigation of the underlying structures of the field, it is the authors' hope to insightfully delineate how some of the basic concepts and implications of network analytic techniques can provide an opportunity to explore more diverse and robust research questions in the future.

References

- Abbott, A. (2000). Reflections on the future of sociology. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29,296-300.
- Amis, J. & Silk, M. (2005). Rupture: Promoting critical and innovative approaches to the study of sport management. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19, 355-366.
- Chalip, L. (2006). Toward a distinctive sport management discipline. *Journal of Sport Management*, 20, 1-21.
- Chelladurai, P. (2005). *Managing Organizations for Sport and Physical Activity: A Systems Perspective* (2nd ed.). Scottsdale, AZ: Holcomb Hathaway, Publishers, Inc.
- Costa, C.A. (2005). The status and future of sport management: A Delphi study. *Journal of Sport Management*, 19, 117-142.
- Crane, D. (1988). *Invisible Colleges: Diffusion of Knowledge in Scientific Communities*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Merton, R.K. (1968). The Matthew effect in science. *Science*, 159, 56-63.
- Moody, J. (2004). The structure of a social science collaboration network: Disciplinary cohesion from 1963 to 1999. *American Sociological Review*, 69, 213-238.