

Sport Opportunities in Intercollegiate Athletics: Using Ethical Theory and Structured Models to Assist in Responsible Decision Making

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Intercollegiate athletics administrators face many difficult and complex issues throughout the course of their careers, often with few resources available to them for assistance. The purpose of this presentation is to introduce the Responsible Decision Making Model for Athletics (RDMMA) and examine its application within the context of intercollegiate athletics and sport opportunities. The RDMMA provides a framework from which to organize information, ensure all constituencies are considered, save time in decision making, and evaluate intended and unintended consequences of decisions. Researchers, as well as practitioners, trying to balance the conflicting values and multiple priorities (i.e. balancing budgets, being competitive in football and basketball, and complying with Title IX) in intercollegiate athletics will find this model useful in analyzing difficult issues. This presentation will provide background information on current pressures in intercollegiate athletics, briefly review concepts related to ethical theory and moral reasoning, introduce the RDMMA, and then suggest the use of this decision making model to assist in responsible decision making. The overarching goal of this presentation is to provide a tool to assist intercollegiate athletics and university administrators who face decisions related to sport opportunities. Many existing theoretical decision making models were used as a guide in the conceptualization of the RDMMA. Specifically, Robbins' Rational Model of decision making (Hums & MacLean, 2008) is used as the foundation. Additionally, concepts related to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), particularly focusing on Stakeholder Theory, were used in the development of this model (Donaldson & Preston, 2008; Gully, Stainer, & Stainer, 2006). Trevino's (1986) Person-Situation Interactionist Model of Ethical Decision Making; the work of Cavanaugh (1990) on ethical decision making; Strong and Meyer's (1992) Managerial Decision-Making Model (1986); and Gully et. al's (2006) Responsible Decision-Making model were also essential in developing the RDMMA. Relying upon the prior work mentioned above, the researchers developed the RDMMA in order to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The RDMMA consists of eight steps and is derived from existing research in the areas of rational decision making and socially responsible (ethical) decision making. The eight steps identified as key to sound decision making in intercollegiate athletics are 1) identifying the problem, 2) identifying the decision objectives, 3a/b) recognizing key stakeholders and identifying influences, 4) gathering and reviewing information, 5) identifying hurdles, 6) identifying and assessing alternatives, 7) making a responsible decision, and 8) monitoring and evaluating outcomes. An illustration and explanation of the use of the decision-making model will be provided through use of a case scenario as it relates to the provision of sport opportunities in intercollegiate athletics.

Given the complex environment athletics directors must navigate, these collegiate sport leaders must be thorough and thoughtful in their decision making. Decisions made by them are often subject to significant public scrutiny. When athletics administrators make decisions, those decisions should be made in a responsible, organized, and transparent manner and should take into account the needs of key constituents. Using the decision making model suggested in this presentation can help athletics directors fulfill these responsibilities and bring existing academic theory into intercollegiate athletics management and leadership practices.