

The Value of Existing: Local Sport Clubs and Diminishing Dependence

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Organizational theory/culture

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**20-minute oral presentation
(including questions)**

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Purpose of the Study

Despite their pervasiveness, local sport organizations have been considered a “bottleneck” in sport and athlete development initiatives (Balyi, Cardinal, Higgs, Norris, & Way, 2005) and thus are of particular interest to managers working in sport and athlete development realms (Shilbury, Sotiriadou, & Green, 2008; Sotiriadou, Shilbury, & Quick, 2008). Many issues remain to be examined in such organizations, such as resource use/exchange, valuation, and power relations. As Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) have cited value of one’s own existence as one of ten criteria for the development of dependence, the willingness of these organizations to “walk away” so long as outcomes are maintained develops both theoretical and practical applications. Developing a greater knowledge of reality of local sport organizations can help all levels of multi-level governance structures (Shilbury & Kellett, 2006) better deliver value to athletes, coaches and officials. The purpose of this study is to examine the power relationships that exist when the organization does not value its own existence.

Review of Relevant Literature

Local sport organizations are often resource starved (c.f., Sharpe, 2006) and struggle to gain access to the financial, human and facility resources they need to function. Resource Dependence Theory (RDT) (see Pfeffer & Slancik, 1978; Doherty, 1996) provides a lens of inquiry for such situations, allowing for a study of local sport organizations focused on resources, matching the focus of the leaders in these organizations. RDT posits that organizations’ ability to acquire resources is not only instrumental, but existential, “The key to organizational survival is the ability to acquire and maintain resources” (Pfeffer & Slancik, 1978, p. 2). Local sport organizations have a peculiarity in that they need highly specific resources to exist, in the form of sport facilities (Misener & Doherty, 2009). As sport facilities (in general) are essential to the existence of local sport organizations, the relationships required with the organizations that control them creates a potential for high levels of resource dependence, diminishing the organization’s power relative to its environment.

Methodology and Data Analysis

The study uses a case study methodology (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994) to develop an understanding of individual cases in a situation where extant literature does not provide sufficient theoretical grounding for larger scale studies. Two organizations in one Midwestern US city were chosen as cases, ensuring that one individual and one team sport were used (c.f., Enjolras, 2002). Both cases selected were “Board Room” sport organizations, as derived using Kikulis, Slack, Hinings and Zimmerman’s (1989) structurally taxonomy of amateur sport organizations. Three previous years of organizational documents (e.g., By Laws and Minutes) were analyzed to develop axial codes and to provide grounding in the organization in preparation for interviews. Six semi-structured interviews, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, were conducted with Board members of the organizations either in person or on the phone emphasizing the methods by which the organization acquires, processes, and dispenses of resources. All data were inductively and deductively coded using Atlas.ti 6.0 software to preserve chains of evidence and facilitating replicable analysis of texts. Axial codes were categorized and the emerging themes form the basis of the results.

Results, Discussion, Implications and Applications

The initial findings of the study indicate that local sport organizations tend to value their own existence in a limited manner. Respondents have made clear that they value the existence of their organizations so long as a better option for sport delivery does not exist. Leaders of the focal organizations reported that they value the outcomes they are able to generate, and feel that if they stopped doing what they do, those outcomes would cease to exist. However, they readily report that they would walk away from their current organization if a better way to achieve these same outcomes became apparent. In their attempts to acquire resources from their organizational environments, the fact

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that they value their outcomes more than their existence provides these organizations with a powerful position – negating a significant portion of the powerlessness that RDT would predict for such resource-starved organizations.

The current study contributes to the literature on local sport organizations by further developing an understanding of how these organizations negotiate their environments. Such insight can provide managers and scholars with a view to how these organizations can better deliver the outcomes they desire, and how organizations that work with them, such as National Sport Organizations or other community partners may better partner and work with local sport organizations.

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