A Conceptual Model Integrating IMOI, Servant Leadership, and Team Charter of Ethics for Sport Organizations

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Recent scandals and unethical events have become all too common across all levels of sport. From recruiting violations in the National Collegiate Athletic Administration (NCAA), to Major League Baseball (MLB) doping scandals, to the National Football League (NFL) and its on-field conduct issues, unethical behavior has seemingly increased in recent years. As the top management teams of sport organizations focus on performance outcomes, these leaders have let unethical behavior slide or have engaged in unethical behavior themselves in order to gain greater on-field achievements. This calls attention to the leaders of these organizations and their leadership style.

Much attention has been given in sport leadership literature to transformational and transactional leadership styles and their effectiveness in achieving organizational outcomes (Bass, 1985; Doherty, 1997; Kent & Chelladurai, 2001; Burton & Peachey, 2009; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2012), yet, unethical behavior still persists. Thus, new paradigms of leadership need to be considered to help address the prevalence of unethical conduct in sport. We propose a conceptual model integrating the input-mediator-output-input (IMOI) model of team effectiveness (Iglen, Hollenback, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005) with servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) and Team Charter of Ethics (TCE) as a way to envision rectifying unethical conduct in sport.

It is proposed that the IOMI model of team effectiveness (Iglen et al., 2005) be used as the operational framework by sport management organizations. Using the IOMI model as the base, we then suggest the inclusion of servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977) as an input to the top management team. Servant leadership differs from other leadership styles in that the leader's emphasis is on serving first, then leading second. The leader focuses on developing his or her followers into leaders themselves in order to create a better tomorrow (Parris & Welty Peachey, 2012). This differentiates servant leadership from transactional or transformational leadership (Bass, 1985). These leadership styles focus more on leader-follower exchanges for performance (transactional) or integrating the follower's needs and development into the organization's goals (transformational). According to van Dierendonck (2011), servant leadership consists of the dimensions of empowerment, humility, authenticity, interpersonal acceptance, providing direction, and stewardship. Other scholars have also articulated the potential ethical benefits of leaders embodying a servant leadership style in the sport field, such as intercollegiate athletics, due to its inherent moral grounding (Burton & Welty Peachey, 2013). As such, servant leaders will foster greater ethical behavior on the part of followers.

With servant leadership a key initial input in the IOMI model, we suggest that a TCE serves as a moderator as the sports team (top management team) moves throughout time. The TCE is based off of the team charter by Wilkinson and Moran (1998). Here, the TCE will moderate the sport team's work progress through binding its members to a Deontological view of ethics (Malloy & Zakus, 1995). As defined by Malloy and Zakus (1995), the Deontological view of ethics abides by universal principles of right and wrong. For any sport setting this view is applicable and goes beyond a rulebook. An example of this would be related to Little League Baseball in America, for while teams compete, there are specific age divisions to keep competition fair. Following the Deontological view of ethics would keep in check teams and coaches who attempt to forge birth certificates of older players in order for them to be allowed to play against younger competition to gain competitive advantage. This differs from the Teleological view of ethics which pertains to making a decision based on what will bring the greatest amount of good for the greatest amount of people (Malloy & Zakus, 1995). Thus, we proffer that the Deontological underpinnings are the basis of the TCE that guide the top management team’s actions and decision making throughout the IOMI model, enhancing ethical conduct. Without the TCE, unethical conduct and decision-making will be more prevalent, even if servant leadership is practiced by the top management team.

The final modification to the IOMI model is to include the role of time, to acknowledge that the IOMI model is actualized multiple times as a team works towards its goals. Time is also included to aid in measuring growth of the followers as well as the leader.
This conceptual model will aid sport organizations in operating more ethically, while still adhering to high performance standards within the top management teams. This ethical decision making and conduct can then trickle down to other levels of the sport organization, including on-field performance and conduct. Future research should test the applicability of this conceptual model across a wide variety of sport organization contexts, examining the effectiveness of the TCE and servant leadership in enhancing ethical conduct.