Organizational Misconduct within the National Collegiate Athletic Association

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Organizational misconduct is commonly viewed as an issue that reflects upon the entire organization, however, it should be noted that sometimes the acts of small groups and individuals ultimately end up negatively exposing the company (Greve et al., 2010). Greve et al. (2010) defined organizational misconduct as “behavior in or by an organization that a social-control agent judges to transgress a line separating right from wrong; where such a line can separate legal, ethical, and socially responsible from their antithesis” (p. 56). While the majority of the research looked specifically at the misconduct of organizations from a variety of perspectives (Greve et al., 2010; Palmer, 2012), little research has looked at the role of social control agents in regards to organizational misconduct. Social-control agents are entities that represent large populations and enforce the organizational behavior of the firms within a population (Greve et al., 2010). Palmer (2012) noted the examination of the role of social control agents is important to comprehensively understand the causes of organizational misconduct.

One of the concerns of social-control agents and organizational misconduct is the direct impact that agents have in determining what should be considered unacceptable or acceptable behavior (Greve et al., 2010). As Palmer (2012) noted, when social control agents redefine what is right and wrong behavior they can do so by adopting new rules and regulations as well as providing incentives for individuals to come forward with information regarding misconduct by organizations.

What also emerges in the relationship between social control agents and the participants under the influence of the social control agent is the influence that the participants have on the agents that are delineating acceptable versus unacceptable behavior and the enforcement of the penalties for unacceptable behavior. In addition to this influence, social control agents also have to protect their own interests and legitimacy not only to the participants, but also external stakeholders (Palmer, 2012).

The proposed research seeks to ask the following question: how does the competitive relationship between social control agents and potential wrongdoers (i.e., organizations) affect the evolving line separating right from wrong. To answer this question, the proposed research looks at the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and its member institutions where the focus of obtaining additional revenue becomes stronger, there are a higher number of cases involving organizational misconduct, which leads to violations being committed by NCAA member institutions (Winfree, 2008). When intercollegiate athletic departments commit violations, the department is essentially engaging in organizational misconduct. The NCAA established the primary mission of the organization to exist as “an integral part of higher education and to focus on the development of student-athletes” (NCAA, 2014, n.p.). By educating athletic department personnel across the country, the NCAA holds each institution accountable for their actions. As the value and influence of intercollegiate athletics continues to provoke conversation, the increased scrutiny on the growing number of violations committed by NCAA-affiliated athletic departments deserves discussion (Winfree, 2008). These violations include, but are not limited to, issues with recruiting, impermissible benefits, amateurism, and institutional control (Winfree, 2008). It is one of the main responsibilities of the NCAA to reprimand the violating institutions and educate them on how to prevent further misconduct (Winfree, 2008).

As Kipping and Usdiken (2014) stated, understanding the history of an organization or a process can lead to theory development or as a moderator for testing existing theory. Fioretos (2011) defined historical institutionalism as a scholarly approach attempting to understand the groundwork of legacy foundations, grasp the significance of new ideas, and interpret their effect on the status quo. Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003) and Pierson (2004) further noted that historical institutionalism seeks the discovery and identification of the discrete to establish substantive
themes. Within this point, historical institutionalism necessitates considerable attention to the timing and sequence of events because challenges and opportunities provided by society and imposed upon institutions shape human decision-making processes (Pierson, 1996). Historical institutionalism is useful because it respects micro-level processes (Capoccia & Keleman, 2007; Fioretos, 2011) and behavior is viewed as a “function of preferences informed by point-to-point comparisons; that is individuals are thought to balance evaluations of the costs and benefits of adapting to new circumstances with the costs and benefits of maintaining or losing their investments in past arrangements” (Fioretos, 2011, p. 373).

Information regarding competitive relationship between social control agents and potential affect the evolving line separating right from wrong will be collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources. A scheduled trip to the NCAA archive in March 2015 will provide a large amount of resources from official meeting minutes regarding the adoption and modification regarding enforcement standards, a detailed publicly available database regarding the punishment of member institutions that engage in misconduct, and notes from former association presidents regarding enforcement issues within the association. Specifically, we have arranged for the paper inventories of Walter Byers, Richard Schultz, Cedric Dempsey, and Miles Brand and folders on Infractions, Committee on Infractions, Infractions Case Commentary, Infractions Case Appeals, and Infractions Enforcement. In addition to these primary sources from the NCAA archive, U.S. congressional notes will be utilized when government committees were established to examine issues related to NCAA enforcement. Finally, an exhaustive search of major newspapers, common in historical research, will be undertaken to identify and describe public opinions and actions taken by the NCAA and other member institutions.

In order to answer the research question regarding the competitive relationship between social control agents and organizations throughout the NCAA’s history as an interest-based association, the proposed research will use an historical institutional analysis examining the changes in enforcement throughout the history of the NCAA. The findings of this research will have implications for how the NCAA distributes sanctions within the member institutions. Considering that many athletic departments are committing infractions (recruiting, amateurism, illegal financial aid, etc.), the results of this study could help us better understand the impact of organizational misconduct by athletic departments on the NCAA. The results also have important findings for institutions since athletic departments are such a valuable revenue generator. Academically, this research will provide thorough insight into major violations and the evolution of the Committee of Infractions from the past to the present.