
Hanhan Xue, Florida State University  
Haozhou Pu, Florida State University  
Matthew Hawzen, Florida State University  
Joshua Newman (Advisor), Florida State University

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Electronic sports (e-sports) is a burgeoning industry with a growing number of professional organizations and tournaments. E-sports games refer to organized multiplayer video game competitions, such as the League of Legends, Dota 2, and Starcraft. On the surface, it is clear that the formation and development of the e-sports field has been largely influenced by “traditional” professionalized sport. For example, e-sports games adopt similar organizing structures, systems, and practices to professional sports. There has witnessed the establishment of a number of professional e-sports leagues such as the Major League Gaming and Electronic Sports League. Global tournaments involving mass spectatorship and luxury sponsorship deals have proliferated. According to a Sport Business Journal report, 205 million people watched or played e-sports games in 2014. Corporate sponsorship of e-sports will total $111 million in North America in 2015 and total prize pool globally in 2015 has reached $165.4 million (Lefton, 2015). Moreover, major e-sports events bring together tens of thousands of fans in stadia around the world, and millions more who follow along at home via Internet streaming. As Taylor (2015) elaborates, e-sports “represents the configuration of competitive video gaming as spectatorial and professionalized sport” (p. 1).

Despite e-sports organizations and tournaments resemble formal structure and forms of professional sports, to what extent professional sport’s logics are imbedded in organizational practices within the emerging e-sports field is still unclear. For example, whether e-sports can be considered as sports remains contested. For many industry executives there still exists a distinction or dichotomy between sports and e-sports (Aaron, 2015). For example, ESPN president John Skipper (2014) described e-sports as something other than sport. However, in 2013 the U.S. government recognized the League of Legends players as professional athletes and went on to award professional sports-type work visas for them to participate in U.S. tournaments.

In this study, we thus draw upon an institutional logics perspective and a specific case study of a major e-sports game—the League of Legends (LoL)—to examine the way in which the logics involved in the field of professional sports affect the organizational practices and culture within the emerging e-sports field. We propose that the LoL, like collegiate basketball, has emerged as an organizational field where a set of e-sports organizations that “constitute a recognized area of institutional life” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983, p. 148): game developers, spectators and fans, professional leagues, teams and athletes, media, and other organizations that produce similar services or products.

Theoretical Framework: Institutional Logics

The institutional logics perspective is used to examine the emerging e-sports field. Institutional logics refer to “the socially constructed, historical patterns of cultural symbols and material practices, including assumptions, values, and beliefs, by which individuals and organizations provide meaning to their daily activity, organize time and space, and reproduce their lives and experiences” (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012, p. 2). In an organizational field, there may exist a single institutional logics or coexist multiple institutional logics (Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012). For example, prior research on sport organizations and institutional logics suggests dynamics in the logics that drive how and why the sports field evolves and changes. While some scholars argue for the emergence of a dominant professional logic over an amateur logic (e.g. O’Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004) or an entertainment and commercial logic replacing a sport-specific quality logic (e.g. Cousins & Slack, 2005), others propose that different and competing logics such as the amateur, professional, and commercial logics coexist through competing sport organizational forms or even within the same organizational structure (e.g. Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Washington & Ventresca, 2008).
A key principle of the institutional logics perspective is that each institution in society has both symbolic (i.e. ideation and meaning) and material (i.e. structures and practices) elements (Friedland & Alford, 1991). The material practices and the symbolic meaning are often intertwined and constitutive of one another. However, the two elements could also become separated or decoupled. For example, the seemingly same institutional practices may be spread through different actors and result in different meanings (Zilber, 2002).

In the context of the emerging organizational field, while knowledge base for practice is uncertain, organizational and individual actors tend to borrow external logics from existing fields or import logics from extant institutions that are affected by the new field (Purdy & Gray, 2009). According to Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury (2012), the effects of societal and external logics on the formation of institutional logics in the emerging field may be mediated through their effects on the construction of symbolic meanings (involving theories, frames and narratives) as well as on the cultural construction of resource environments (including markets, governments, corporations, and informal networks). Further, the opportunities and constraints embedded in resource environments shape the generation of practices in emerging fields.

Case Study Design
Following the institutional logics perspective, we conduct an in-depth case study (Yin, 2013) about an e-sports game—League of Legends (LoL). By incorporating the history, the processes, and the actions associated with the development of this e-sports field, we study the extent to which current logics in sports have influenced the formation of the organizational culture and practices in LoL. We also examine how the symbolic meanings and practices involved in the LoL e-sports are interplayed or separated.

LoL is a multiplayer online battle arena, real-time strategy video game launched by the Riot Games in 2009. It has become one of the most popular e-sports games played at a global level. So far, the game has more than 1,260 tournaments and over 2,700 professional players around the world (Aaron, 2015). It has collectively offered over $19 million in prize pools, and viewership has skyrocketed as well. For comparison, in 2014, more than 27 million viewers watched the LoL World Championship and the average viewership number of the NFL was 17.6 million (Aaron, 2015). In addition, it is not unusual for LoL teams, similar to traditional sports team, to feature athletes, coaches, analysts, sponsors, fans, as well as media contracts and merchandise.

To facilitate the case study, we will first collect extensive documentary data including organizational documents, media releases, social media messages, promotional material, newspapers, archives, and e-sports publications to provide a thick contextual description. Further, we will collect interview data from LoL teams, leagues, players, and online communities regarding participants’ views and experiences about the mission, goals, funding sources, and social, cultural, political and community support and challenges for their development. The primary interview data, along with the secondary data, will be qualitatively analyzed for noting recurrent themes (Patton, 2002) related to the external logics in professional sport, cultural meanings (theories, frames and narratives), resource environments (markets, governments, corporations, and informal networks), opportunities and constrains, and structures and practices in e-sports.

Study Implications
Lastly, the results regarding the way in which the existing logics in professional sports influence the organizational field of e-sports will be discussed. There are some significant implications the study will provide. First, while prior research on sport organizations and institutionalization has largely focused on the changes and evolution within the organizational field of sports (e.g. O’Brien & Slack, 2003, 2004; Washington & Ventresca, 2008), our study seeks to add to the literature by looking into whether and how sports can influence the early development of other organizational fields. Second, although whether e-sports is sports remains debatable, the early development mode of e-sports (e.g. organizational forms of professional e-sports leagues, organizations, and tournaments; media contracts; athlete and coaching training; fans) may show a tendency towards seeking to fit into prevailing sport systems and logics. Sport management scholars may seize on this opportunity to intervene into constructing and guiding the institutional development of the newly emerging, while rapidly growing, field of e-sports. Third, this study can provide intriguing insights on how sport management practitioners might effectively integrate e-sports horizontal administrative and marketing/branding practices, digital event management strategies, and interactive media technologies through investigating the interplays between sports and e-sports.