Getting Some Action: Building Sport Management Theory and Practice through Action Research

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Method - Qualitative (Other) Saturday, June 3, 2017
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop 11:00 AM
Abstract 2017-332 Room: Harvard

This year’s NASSM Conference marks the 20th anniversary of the Journal of Sport Management special issue (1997, Vol. 11, Issue 1) extolling action research as a vital means to advance the field of sport management. The opportunities to test theory in practice and to build industry-relevant theories were particularly highlighted in that special issue. Over the intervening years, there have been further calls for action research in the field (e.g., Chalip, 2015; Edwards, 1999; Frisby et al., 2005). Yet, in the years since the JSM special issue, reports from only a few action research sport management projects have been published (e.g., Chalip & Hutchinson, 2016; Frisby & Millar, 2002; Rich & Misener, in press; Roach & Dixon, 2006; Taks et al., 2013). This workshop provides perspectives drawn from experiences of the workshop team to make action research practical for sport management researchers.

There are unique challenges in the design, execution, write-up, and publishing of action research, which may seem daunting. Action research is intrinsically messy as it requires fluidity that is both seemingly unconventional and often uncomfortable for researchers. Iterative stages, periodic adjustment, simultaneous use of inductive and deductive theorizing, paradigmatic flexibility, ongoing stakeholder management, and dialectical reasoning (cf. Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985) are characteristics of action research that will be examined through interaction with workshop participants. Examples from action research in sport management will be incorporated to make the workshop practical.

The workshop is divided into two phases. The first phase explores the fluid and cyclic nature of action research design and implementation – comparing and contrasting action research processes to those normally applied in more traditional forms of disciplinary research. The second phase considers the challenges for writing action research reports and manuscripts for publication. The need to blend narratives into presentation of methods and results are noted, and the implications for manuscript preparation and review are illustrated using examples from action research in sport management. These features do not merely make action research daunting to undertake; they make it challenging to write up for publication.

Among the topics that will be incorporated into the conversation are:
• Managing stakeholder relations
• Complexities of researcher roles throughout the process
• Developing an appropriate action research framework
• Negotiating Research Ethics
• Incorporating multiple perspectives
• Ascertaining boundary conditions and generalizability of findings

The fluid and iterative nature of action research necessitate a dialectical interaction among data, theory, and method. It is consequently essential that the researcher be reflective about the ontological and epistemological assumptions that are embedded in the framework they are developing. The workshop concludes with a conversation about the challenges consequently engendered, and the means to capitalize upon them.

Workshop participants will leave with tools to foster effective design, execution, and reporting of action research.