The Importance of Time in Sport Organizational and Human Resource Research

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Management - Organizational Behavior (Other)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
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Sport marketing literature discusses the sport product as perishable and simultaneously produced and consumed (e.g., Gladden & Funk, 2002; Howard & Crompton, 2004) emphasizing the importance of time in sport consumption. Temporal factors are also highly relevant in the management of organizations and people in sport but lack treatment in existing literature. The timing of sports seasons and events can influence the operations, or even the existence of sport organizations, while time also defines the roles for many people working in sports, and can dictate the pace of careers. The purpose of this presentation is to illustrate the importance of time in sport organization and human resource research, and identifying areas for future research.

Research on different types of sport organizations shows how time is a factor that distinguishes them from non-sport organizations. Pulsating event organizations such as the Formula One Grand Prix and Australian Open Tennis Championships have been studied for drastic cyclical shifts in personnel each year (Hanlon & Jago, 2002). Sport team franchises and event facilities encounter similar issues related to their seasonal operations where their human resources fluctuate annually around the playing season. Different issues are present for one-off mega event organizing committees, which unfold over time in a distinct pattern creating unique challenges and responsibilities for the people within the organization (Parent, 2008; Parent & MacIntosh, 2013). The implications of these changes over the lifespan of the organization are underscored by studies that captured organizing committee employees’ reactions to the temporal issues (e.g., Odio, Walker, & Kim, 2013; Xing & Chalip, 2008). However, time can also affect more personal factors such as work-life issues and the perception of their careers (Odio et al., 2013; Xing & Chalip, 2012).

At an individual level, time plays an important role for countless people working in sport. For full-time employees in sport, average organizational tenure is far below the national average in the United States (Odio & Kerwin, 2017). Combined with the literature on the influence of work-life balance (e.g., Dixon, 2009; Dixon & Bruening, 2007) it is clear issues of or related to time play a role in the professional lives of people in sport.

Nonstandard labor, referring to temporary, seasonal, and/or part-time workers, is becoming more common in general (Houseman & Osawa, 2003; Paret, 2016), but has already been a significant part of the labor force for sport organizations through interns, volunteers, graduate assistants, contract workers, and others. For event or youth sport volunteers, ushers and ticket takers, and sports officials, their roles in sport are not likely their primary work responsibility. This is clearly evident in the sample of a recent study of part-time event facility workers where the majority of the employees reported that their job at the facility was supplementing other income (Odio, Goldsmith, & Mahoney, in press). While some research has established the importance of nonstandard labor (e.g., Chang & Chelladurai, 2003), and even established differences in job attitudes (Kim, Jones, & Rodriguez, 2008), few have attempted to fully research the temporal elements involved.

In the social psychology and management literature, temporal factors have been shown to play a role in macro and micro-level organizational theory (Bluedorn & Denhardt, 1988). This research provides a starting point for what could help advance theory in sport management. For example, longitudinal research on predicting job attitudes and turnover over time (Boswell, Shipp, Payne, & Culbertson, 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller, & Wanberg, Glomb, & Ahlburg, 2005) can be adapted to examine the work and career patterns of people in sport. Likewise, studying people’s temporal focus (Shipp, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009) in a cyclical or temporary context may shed insight into the unique aspects of work in sport. Individual’s personal temporal context can also influence how they react to various job designs (Fried, Grant, Levi, Hadani, & Slowik, 2007), which may bear relevance for the various types of roles occupied by nonstandard labor in sport. Sonnetag (2012) outlines four different ways a temporal perspective can be operationalized in management research, including the use of time-related constructs, time-sensitive processes, studying time lags in cause-effect relationships, and by studying the temporal context, which may include...
Looking in the sport context, some research has directly addressed the temporal issues such as Warner, Bowers, and Dixon’s (2012) study of basketball player’s relationships through the different phases of the season and offseason, and MacIntosh and Walker’s (2012) study of the transient nature of fitness employees. However, there are endless opportunities for advancing theory and practice related to the managing of organizations and people in sport through studying additional temporal factors.

Specific examples of how an increased temporal focus can lead to such advances include studying the following: entry, socialization, and exit of short-term positions such as interns and graduate assistants; the fluctuating job attitudes and turnover intentions of seasonal laborers; how volunteers and other workers balance multiple roles; the effect of seasonal fluctuations in workload on work-family conflict; and how time factors into career patterns for different occupations in sport. Research related to temporal issues represents an area where sport management scholars can borrow and adapt research from social psychology and management in order to extend and generate new theories in sport (Doherty, 2013). This presentation will explore larger level perspectives as well as specific examples of how an increased focus on temporal issues can benefit sport management research.