ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

An Applied Approach to Understanding People and Groups

Christopher R. Barnhill
Natalie L. Smith and Brent D. Oja

► **Learning Objectives** After reading this chapter, students should be able to:

- Explain the history of organizational behavior study in sport.
- Discuss the concept of positive organizational behavior.
- Explain why working in sports is unique.
- Discuss the concepts of legitimacy and isomorphism.

1.1 What Is Organizational Behavior?

Organizational behavior is a robust paradigm that has predominantly grown from the fields of psychology and sociology. Broadly, the study of organizational behavior seeks to inform scholars and practitioners about employees' thoughts, attitudes, and actions and their interpersonal relationships within a given organization. These areas represent essential facets of the daily lives of employees. Thoughts, or cognitions, encapsulate how one thinks and their various opinions and held beliefs. For example, the recognition of membership with a sport organization, a major component of social identity theory, is a critical thought for an employee who identifies with the organization. Suppose an employee does not believe they belong with an organization. In that case, it will be difficult for them to engage or even enjoy working for their employer fully.

Attitudes and emotions can determine the quality of sport employees' experiences. Suppose an employee is upset or in a foul mood. In that case, there are likely to be negative repercussions for the employee and their coworkers. For example, try to imagine a time when you had to work with someone who was consistently angry. Did any of those emotions impact your emotions? Conversely, employees who nearly always come to work with a positive attitude are likely to be well-received by others. Emotions are contagious, and having positive emotions in a workplace helps to create a constructive workplace environment. Behaviors (actions), as one might assume, are also critical to sport organizations. The sports industry is known for its constant change and movement; having employees with the desire and ability to react quickly and tend to a situation is vital to sport organizations' livelihood. Similar to the value of positive emotions, relationships with others can promote a promising organizational culture. Working with colleagues who are difficult to interact with makes for a difficult day at work. On the other hand, working with those you genuinely enjoy can help sport employees

get through the long hours and ups and downs of life in the sports industry.

You might ask yourself, "Does this really matter… it's just work?" Consider your previous work experiences, whether or not they took place inside or outside the sport industry. Did you enjoy going to work each day? Did you have a poor relationship with your supervisor(s)? Did you get along with your coworkers? Was the work meaningful and enjoyable? You may have different answers for each of those questions, but if you take the time to reflect on the importance of each question, you will begin to see the value in organizational behavior. Personal experiences and relationships with coworkers are a hallmark of research within organizational behavior, and this is due to the importance of the topic regarding organizational effectiveness. While scholars of organizational behavior are concerned with organizational outcomes, they also seek to improve employees' work experiences. Given this concern, organizational behavior scholars have developed mechanisms to improve employees' experiences by enlisting concepts such as leadership, diversity, and interpersonal skills (all of which are covered in this textbook). This chapter begins with a brief introduction to organizational behavior in sport, followed by an overview of an exciting new concept that is beginning to gain popularity in sport management, positive organizational behavior. Then, sport managers and employees will be discussed, with the intention of providing a glimpse into what is required of various sport organization employees. This chapter concludes with a presentation on some of the external influences (and their impacts) on sport organizations.

1.1.1   History of Organizational Behavior in Sport

The field of sport management's initial focus was on the management of sport organizations, and organizational behavior was a primary topic. Early scholars such as Chelladurai, Slack, and Zeigler all brought forth critical discoveries that helped inform our understanding of how sport organizations are managed and how such organizations' management can be improved. Initial studies included topics such as leadership, work environment factors such as stress, burnout, and motivation.[1] Perhaps due to the heavy influence of coaching in sport, leadership has long been a popular topic within sport management. Forms of leadership, including transformational leadership and transactional leadership, often in the form of coaches and athletes, have seen a steady stream of scholarly attention. Chelladurai's[2] review of the Leadership Scale for Sport also included an argument to expand the scope of leadership within sport. Since then, theories involving leadership in sport have evolved and moved into exciting new areas, including leader-member exchange, servant leadership, authentic leadership, psychological contracts, and political skill. A recent review of leadership literature in sport by Welty Peachey, Zhou, Damon, and Burton[3] details the growth and expansion of leadership in sport. As leadership has been a core feature within sport organizational behavior, an entire chapter of this book is dedicated to the topic.

Leadership might be the most prominent area of research in sport organizational behavior but is not the only area with a long history of scholarship. Scholars have begun to explore other areas of organizational behavior in sport, including diversity, motivation, organizational structures, attitudes, and communication. All of these topics, plus many others, will be covered in this book.

Another exciting aspect of studying organizational behavior in sport is the diverse set of participants available to researchers. Previously, fitness and college recreation employees have been studied under the umbrella of sport organizational behavior. Recent trends in sport management have been concentrated on interviewing and surveying collegiate and professional sport employees. As sport organizations increase the value they place on their employees, and by extension, expand their scope and capabilities, there will likely be increased efforts to study the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of sport employees.

The important thing to keep in mind as you read this book is that sport management has changed dramatically since its inception, and it is almost assuredly likely to continue to evolve as we gain a deeper understanding of sport organizations and their employees. Many new exciting horizons await scholars and practitioners for further study and application to the sport workplace. One of those areas is positive organizational behavior, of which we will turn to next.

1.1.2 Positive Organizational Behavior

An emerging paradigm in organizational behavior is known as positive organizational behavior (POB). This concept has been championed by scholars such as Fred Luthans, Bruce Avolio, and Carolyn Youssef-Morgan (although many other scholars have endorsed this approach to OB). One of POB's main functions is to create a growth approach for organizations but, more specifically, employees. Within POB, scholars seek to advance employees' functionality and thereby promote a competitive advantage for organizations.[4] As such, POB has been defined as[5] "the study and application of positively orientated human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace" (p. 59). In short, POB focuses on positive personal capabilities in order to improve the experience of the employee and simultaneously supporting the organization. While POB scholarship is inclusive to any positively focused endeavor, specific theories have emerged from the paradigm.

▶ **Psychological Capital** An individual's positive psychological state of development is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.

1.1.3 Psychological Capital and the HERO Model

Human capital[6] is a form of personal resources that are used to improve one's circumstances. There are numerous forms of human capital. For example, intellectual capital is known as "what you know" or social capital, known as "who you know." These forms of human capital are quite common. One of the more developed constructs to surface from POB is known as *psychological capital* which explores "what one can become." Psychological capital offers a new means to develop employees to meet their full potential.[7] Psychological capital is "an individual's positive psychological state of development characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success[8]" (p. 2). As one can see, there are currently four components to psychological capital, which stand for the HERO within (i.e., Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism). Although Luthans et al. have called for other constructs (e.g., courage, authenticity, and creativity) to be studied within psychological capital, little is known about how such constructs can serve employees and organizations, specifically in the sports industry.[9]

Yet, sport organizational scholars have begun to examine psychological capital within the sports industry. One of the leading scholars in this area of sport management is Dr. Minjung Kim, who has published several studies of conceptual and empirical nature. Dr. Kim's work

includes the development of HEROES, which is similar to the HERO model previously described, but the HEROES model has been developed specifically for sport organization employees. Interestingly, concepts such as meaningful work and a supportive organizational climate have been found to improve the hope, efficiency, resilience, and optimism of sport organization employees. More so, having such capacities can improve sport employees' well-being and job satisfaction.[10] Psychological capital is also being expanded specifically in the sports industry by infusing the concept of authenticity to psychological capital.[11] In this work, the authors argued for creating A-HERO by stating that being true to oneself (i.e., authenticity) is a vital component of psychological capital. As such, employers and employees should begin to consider how they present themselves and behave at work. Being authentic to one's self could have positive influences on their well-being. As scholars begin to explore new concepts such as psychological capital and authenticity (of course, many other variables are being investigated), a unique opportunity is created for sport organizations to grow and prosper, not only financially, but culturally. Both scholars and practitioners need to find common ground and merge their interests, and POB represents one method to deliver positive influences on sport organizations and employees.

1.2   Managers and Employees

If you are reading this book, you have likely considered what life would be like as an employee of a sport organization. Employment opportunities in sport are numerous, yet they are still difficult to acquire. To better understand what is required of sport organization employees, this portion of the chapter is designed to provide you with a better understanding of sport organization employees' qualifications and job experiences. What follows is a brief description of who sport organization employees are and then an explanation of what their roles consist of by providing a detailed account of their various duties.

1.2.1   Who Are They?

Employees of sport organizations are generally thought of as anyone employed by an organization in the sport industry, but there are a few caveats to that statement. Most scholars in sport organizational behavior would not consider professional athletes to be "sport employees." Instead, an emphasis has been traditionally placed on the managerial and administrative employees. Generally, administrators are those in an organization who create and design policies, rules, campaigns, and so on. The managers are the employees who carry out the policies or campaigns and are in charge of implementing the administrators' directives. Hence, the popular term "middle-management" is often associated with those who carry out the boss's orders but have little if any authority to make large-scale decisions on their own. Many studies, particularly in the leadership context, examine the leadership style of an athletics director (i.e., administrative) and the influence of that leadership on the employees of the sport organization (i.e., managerial). It is important to note that other areas of sport organizations' personnel are also studied, including entry-level employees and interns.

From a more individual standpoint, scholars have begun to explore the psychological processes of sport employees. One such area that is receiving growing attention is the relationship between being a sport employee and being a fan of their organization's team(s). There is an old adage in the sports industry: sport organizations do not hire their fans. Many sport management students have been warned *not* to wear their favorite team's jersey to a job interview. The prevailing wisdom is that sport organizations seek to hire employees and *not* fans. They expect their employees to be working during games and not cheering on the team or being distraught after a close loss. This is generally excellent advice, but recent research has been conducted that might tell a slightly different story. Through multiple studies, scholars have begun to posit a new concept that suggests sport organization employees

do not identify as traditional fans of the team, but instead, they feel a strong linkage with sport in general.[12] Put another way, many sport organization employees are drawn to sport and relish the opportunity to be involved in sport. This could explain why so many employees of sport organizations are willing to work evenings and weekends, in addition to working the traditional 40-hour workweek. They may enjoy being a part of a group that values sport and competition.

Another thought-provoking finding concerning sport organization employees is how they react during sporting events. In describing accepted and inappropriate sport employee behaviors during March Madness, participants in a recent study explained that they felt watching the games of March Madness was expected behavior, and focusing on work instead of watching the games would bring concerns about not being able to fit in at the workplace. The study participants explained that there is an appropriate level of decorum, such as getting your job done during games and not being a cheering fan or showing your emotions. Still, it was also crucial for other employees to be interested in sport and stay involved and knowledgeable about the sport organization's team or teams.[13] This dichotomy presents a unique work environment for sport employees. They are expected to follow along with the team or teams, watch major sporting events, but not be emotionally engaged when watching a game while they are "on the clock." The sports industry is undoubtedly unique, and these circumstances are one prominent example of how working in sport is strikingly different from working for a traditional business company.

1.2.2   What Do Sport Employees Do?

Sport employees hold a diverse set of jobs and responsibilities. First, it is worthwhile to re-examine the previous discussion on managers and administrators. Many readers of this book likely seek to, one day, be a leader of a sport organi-

zation (e.g., General Manager, Athletics Director, or Team President). These positions take years of experience to attain (along with a bit of luck and social connections!), which is for a good reason. The people in these positions are required to make difficult and often arduous choices, and having years of experience can go a long way to making the best possible decision for the organization. Individuals at this level of administration are charged with designing the missions and plans of their organizations. This could be a wide-ranging operation to install a new organizational culture, a new marketing plan, or a specific fundraising campaign for a new arena. There are very few of these top-level leadership positions available, and worse yet, there is little job security meaning that if you earn such a position one day, you could lose that job very quickly! Professional sports are rife with examples of executives being removed from their positions after just a few, or even one, season!

The next level of sport employees includes the aforementioned "middle" managers—those employees who carry out the administrators' directives. These positions are often "lost in the shuffle" and not discussed by people outside of the sports industry. These circumstances are why many sport organization employees view their jobs as being "behind the scenes" and refer to their positions as "thankless jobs." This is a grim outlook on life as an employee, but the work environment of sport is not very different from other industries in that middle managers feel undervalued. However, some circumstances contribute to the distinction of the sports industry. One of the more prominent factors is the concept of time. Odio[14] explained how sport is subjected to cyclical and seasonal characteristics, which are due to the nature of sport, more so than other industries. That is, sport revolves around the various seasons for each sport. For example, in collegiate athletics departments, the months of August and September are notoriously busy as many sports (e.g., football, soccer, volleyball) are starting their seasons, and school is beginning as well. Conversely, the months of May and June

are viewed as less hectic as many sports have finished or are winding down, and school is also ending for an extended time. The unique time sequences can add increased stress for employees and further separates sport organizations from those in other industries.[15]

Another layer of responsibility in sport organizations are those completed by entry-level employees and interns. Almost all aspiring sport employees begin their careers as interns, frequently serving as interns multiple times at multiple sport organizations. The sports industry is highly competitive, and it cannot be stressed enough that students who seek entry into the sport organizations should attempt to begin interning while they are an undergraduate student. Interns gain practical experience by performing duties such as selling tickets, assisting in marketing campaigns, helping with gameday presentations, and, in some cases, having duties similar to fulltime employees. While internships are often not a glamorous period in one's professional career, they are a needed step in the process. Beyond the practical experience, which helps students build their resumes, internships also expand students' social networks by introducing them to professionals in the field. Social networks are often the mechanism through which future job opportunities are accessed. While the hours are long and the pay is not great (many interns are unpaid), interning in sport organizations can help to provide a pathway to future employment in the sports industry.

1.3   External Influences of Organizational Behavior

Sport organizations are highly dependent on their environments in their quest for success on and off the field, and this dependence means that their internal management processes are impacted by their environments. The field of organizational behavior is predominantly focused on the micro- (i.e., individuals) and, to a lesser extent, meso-level (i.e., groups) groups. A related field of study is known as Organizational Theory, which is broader in scope and fixated on the macro-level

(i.e., industry). However, both organizational behavior and organizational theory are interrelated in different manners. In this section, we will focus on how organizational environments affect sport organizations' ability to achieve their goals and the method by which they can organize and perform.

▶ **Resource   Dependency** Organizational attempts to manage constraints and uncertainty that result from the need to acquire resources from the environment.

1.3.1   Resource Dependency

Many theories exist that attempt to explain external influences on organizations, the vast majority of which describe how the organization's environment impacts its capacities, profitability, and maneuverability. Two of the more prominent theories are resource dependency theory[16] and institutional theory.[17] Resource dependency theory is a reasonably straightforward concept in that the theory proposes that organizations depend on and are limited by the resources available to them within their environment to succeed and prosper. In other words, "resource dependence predicts that organizations will attempt to manage the constraints and uncertainty that result from the need to acquire resources from the environment" (p. xxiv).[18] As Pfeffer and Salancik[19] noted, organizational survival is based on the ability to be effective, namely acquiring resources from the organizational environment. The term "resources" is meant to convey anything that is of value to an organization. The phrase "organizational environment" generally reflects the geographic region and the industry of the organization and the practices thereof. Yet, the process of gathering resources is not simple, given that resources within an organizational environment are finite or limited. For example, there are only so many potential fans in a given city or state; therefore, it is unlikely that a professional sport organization will advertise in a neighboring (but separate) city or state to grow their fanbase (i.e., resources). Instead, that sport organization will need to com-

pete with the other sport and entertainment organizations of the city for patrons' business. Another issue with acquiring resources from the organizational environment is that such environments (especially the sport environment!) will experience constant change and require adaptation. For example, a team could win a championship one year and lose many of their best players before the next season. While this might be understandable to most loyal fans, many possible sources of resource acquirement (i.e., other fans) could choose to spend their money (i.e., resources) with a different local team or venue. As you can see, there would be many unique challenges that would face this hypothetical sport organization as they began to prepare for the upcoming season and still acquire enough resources to survive.

1.3.2 Open Systems Theory

Another way to describe how resource development theory is believed to affect organizations is via open systems theory, which describes a process whereby resources are taken in (i.e., inputs), processed (i.e., throughputs), and put back into the environment (i.e., outputs) all within a bounded environment. Importantly, throughputs are what an organization does to manipulate, change, or enhance a given input before submitting it back into the environment, with the hope of the resource becoming an input yet again. Much like resource development theory's emphasis on exchange, open systems theory explains the interdependent activities (i.e., outputs to inputs) of organizations and their environments.[20] Here is an example of how the theory works: a professional basketball team that is preparing for an upcoming season will need to obtain enough resources to pay their coaches, players, and staff, maintain the facility, pay for travel expenses, and a host of other costs. To gather the necessary resources to pay for these expenses, the sport organization will need to go into the external environment and convince people to spend money on team merchandise or tickets to games beyond what they receive from media contracts. With an open systems perspective, fans decide to

go to a game, and purchase tickets would be considered inputs. Once they come to the arena and experience the game, they are considered throughputs. When the contest ends and the fans leave the arena, they are viewed as outputs.

For a sport organization to survive, they need to provide positive experiences during the game, the throughput stage, for those fans to desire to return to another contest on a later date. Therefore, the throughput stage is critical as it provides the link between input and output and allows for the intercedences of resources in a constrained environment. Without repeat customers, and those customers providing positive feedback to other potential customers, it is incredibly difficult for a sport organization to bring in enough resources to pay for their expenses. Consequently, there are several external influences on sport organizations from this perspective. One example is the influence on customer service and outreach as such many sport organizations have entire departments dedicated to community/public relations. Sport organizations also employ large-scale efforts in their marketing campaigns to garner attention and new consumers. These efforts can be seen at the collegiate level of sport as well as the professional level. More so, professional sport organizations have begun to attempt to grow their fanbases internationally.

The National Football League (NFL) plays games each year in the United Kingdom and Mexico. The National Basketball Association (NBA) has attempted to take advantage of its immense popularity in Asia, and Major League Baseball (MLB) has also played games in countries beyond North America. One professional league that has taken advantage of an environment full of untapped resources is the English Premier League (EPL). The various clubs play matches in the United States in the summer months, and they have made a television deal with NBC to grow the popularity of the EPL in the United States. This tendency has extended to collegiate football with the University of Notre Dame playing games in Ireland. Although it would not make much sense for the Denver Broncos to advertise their organization in Kansas City, reaching international markets is one exam-

ple of sport organizations attempting to grow their popularity and reach new resources in the form of fans. The throughput stage is vital to bringing fans back as future inputs, and the throughput stage can be defined by how well a sport organization is run. This concept adds value to the study of organizational behavior. It can help a sport organization become more efficient and provide better services to their fans.

▶ **Legitimacy** A generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.

1.3.3   Legitimacy and Institutional Theory

Institutional theory is the other common form of external control on sport organizations. The institutional theory perspective is concerned not with resource acquisition, but rather with the attainment and perpetuation of institutional legitimacy. Put another way, the institutional theory view is that the appearance as a legitimate entity is valued and drives the success of an organization. Several aspects of institutional theory have had considerable attention and have significant application to the sports industry. These forms include isomorphism and institutional work, both of which will be explained below. But first, the concept of legitimacy needs to be discussed. Suchman[21] defined legitimacy as a "generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574). As such, legitimacy is determined by society and can change depending on the beliefs of society. All institutions (including organizations) seek legitimacy, as it serves as a stamp of approval from relevant groups. Without legitimacy, organizations will predictably suffer. After all, people tend not to do business with organizations that they deem to be not legitimate. Therefore institutional theory posits that legitimacy is the goal of

all institutions, and organizations will alter their practices to achieve and maintain legitimacy. We now turn to two popular theories that describe how organizations attempt to gain and preserve their legitimacy.

▶ **Isomorphism** Organizations tend to appear or behave similarly in order to achieve and preserve legitimacy.

1.3.3.1   Isomorphism
One area of institutional theory that has seen considerable scholarship in sport management is isomorphism, which describes how organizations tend to appear or behave similarly in order to achieve and preserve legitimacy. There are three forms of isomorphism: coercive, normative, and memetic.[22] Coercive isomorphism results from binding rules and regulations that force organizations to become or appear to be similar. An example of coercive isomorphism would be sports leagues with policies that govern uniforms and roster sizes. This presents to the public that all of the teams are part of a larger, equal group of organizations.

▶ **Coercive Isomorphism** Similarities between organizations resulting from compliance to rules and regulation.

▶ **Normative Isomorphism** Similarities between organizations that are the result of commonly accepted business practices, tradition, and industry culture.

▶ **Memetic Isomorphism** Similarities between organizations cause by imitation or replication of successful practices.

Another form of isomorphism is normative, which entails following specific resources such as professional certifications, qualifications, or licensure. An example of normative isomorphism in the sports industry can be seen in collegiate sport. Many athletic departments require a master's degree for head coaches. The last form of isomorphism is memetic, which is true to its

name. Organizations will mimic successful organizations to gain legitimacy. There are numerous examples of memetic isomorphism in the sports industry, much of which is done unknowingly. The NFL is known as a "copycat league" where teams will use plays or design their rosters in an attempt to appear legitimate by following the lead of the most successful teams.

Another example is the explosion of multiple uniforms and helmets in college football made popular by the University of Oregon Ducks. Once the Ducks became known as a successful team and brand, the practice of using multiple helmets and uniforms was accepted as legitimate because of the positive impact it had on recruiting and on the field. Consequently, almost all college football teams now have multiple helmets and uniforms in an attempt to appear to be as similar as possible to a successful team.

1.3.3.2 Institutional Work and Disruption

The final form of institutional theory that will be discussed, although there are many more, is known as institutional work. This form of institutional theory has been described as the means by which institutions are created, maintained, or disrupted.[23] As such, institutional work explains what organizations actually do in their attempts to reach and keep a desired level of legitimacy. New organizations, or those that are reconfiguring, are often in the creation stage where they are likely to engage in memetic isomorphism by organizing their front office staff in a similar manner to already successful organizations by hiring employees with ties to successful individuals. In the maintenance stage, organizations seek to preserve or retain their legitimacy. This is an active process whereby organizations must remain aware of their institutional environment to appear to be legitimate. Also, institutions that have gained legitimacy will perform rituals that support the existing belief and rule systems.[24] Put another way, these organizations will reproduce the actions and customs deemed legitimate as long as the institutional environment believes such actions legitimate. A sport example of institutional maintenance would be the practice of tailgating before football games. Tailgating is a popular ritual for many football consumers; removing the opportunity to do so would harm the sport organization's legitimacy, and consequently, such practices are supported and encouraged by sport organizations.

Institutional disruption occurs when institutions or practices are deemphasized or removed altogether. This is done when a given institution or practice is no longer viewed as legitimate. An example of institutional disruption is the recent efforts that both professional and collegiate football have made to make the game safer by altering their tackling rules.

1.4 Summary

Sport organizations are inherently controlled by their environments. The two perspectives discussed provide different viewpoints, one where sport organizations are controlled by the amount or lack of resources and the other by whether or not a sport organization is viewed as legitimate based on the perceptions of those within the institutional environment. Moving forward, it is important to take into account the ability of the sport organization to support its employees is often dictated by the environment. There simply may not be enough resources available to support employees fully. Perhaps implementing programs that are not well known or unproven would be seen as weird and illegitimate by peer institutions or other employees, which would make the organization appear less attractive to some employees. Regardless, sport organizations need to be aware of how their environment impacts their capabilities and limitations.

Discussion Questions

1. How has the study of organizational behavior in the sports industry evolved?
2. What are the differences between the HERO, HEROES, and A-HERO models?
3. Why is legitimacy important to sport organizations?

4. Distinguish between coercive, normative, and memetic isomorphism. Provide examples of each.

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