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ACADEMICIAN/PRACTITIONER RESEARCH RELATIONSHIP
IN SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The following manuscript will address areas in which practitioners and academicians can develop stronger research relationships in sport and leisure management. These include ascertaining the true nature of our research, recognizing common goals of both groups and the ability of managers to interpret findings. Finally, it will be argued that in sport and leisure management, academicians and managers can utilize their skills of observation and analysis to synthesize experience and perception for improved management performance by the practitioners.

ACADEMICIAN/PRACTITIONER RESEARCH RELATIONSHIPS
IN SPORT AND LEISURE MANAGEMENT

A variety of research designs are available from management science for the sport/leisure manager or sport/leisure scientist interested in examining practical application of research. Drawing from the fields of management and physical education, sport/leisure management researchers can advance the methodological pluralism called for by Michael Scriven.(5)

When defining the usefulness of applied research in sport/leisure management one must use the practitioner or practicing sport/leisure manager as a focal point. The following paper will address what the author believes to be important needs of sport/leisure practitioners. These principal needs include the following: descriptive relevance, goal relevance, operational validity, and timeliness. It is the author's contention that these needs must be met to make any theoretical application relevant to the practitioners. Finally, common goals of academicians and practitioners will be examined.

DESCRIPTIVE RELEVANCE

Descriptive relevance addresses the ability of research findings to

extrapolate phenomena confronted by the practitioner in their environment or workplace. Kilmann (6), for example, has utilized Campbell and Stanley's (1) comparison of internal and external validity when elaborating on descriptive relevance. Kilmann believes management academicians have used the internal validity of studies or the predictability of conclusions drawn from a particular data base. With this type of validity the experiment is more of a controlled laboratory environment but manipulates data and phenomena to produce less variation in analyzing the data. According to Kilmann this type of experimental research yields data on findings that have weak external validity to organization settings. Others argue that experimental methods tend to simplify hypotheses without providing direction to the causal mechanisms.

Leisure and recreation management is developing within the larger context of the two fields of recreation and leisure management. Consequently, sport/leisure managers are in the enviable position of synthesizing the strengths of each field to develop a separate area of study and practice. Parkhouse and Ulrich (9) suggest that sport/leisure management science is the application of scientific methodology or principles to management decisions. These designations naturally assume a distinct perception of the nature of scientific methods and their applicability to sport/leisure management. From the positivistic paradigm that characterized traditional science and gives rise to experimental and quasi-experimental research, sport/leisure managers can develop statistically rigorous and empirically verifiable theory for projection and prediction.

Sport/leisure management also needs "alterative research practices that honor the fluidity, context-specificity, and essential indeterminacy of the vast majority of human experience." The contingency movement within management addresses this indeterminacy squarely. This contingency movement examines the diversity of organization, not looking for universally applicable principles that work in all situations, but isolating situational determinants. By looking for common characteristics that might exist in a number of situations, the contingency movement attempts to qualify theory to the specifics of the situation in each organization.

GOAL RELEVANCE

Yet another practitioner need area is that of goal relevance. Goal relevance is the relationship of outcome (or dependent) variable in a theory to what a practitioner actually wants to change or manipulate in an environment. There have been several organizational academicians who found that needs of the practitioner have not been thoroughly examined.

An example of goal reference is perhaps best summarized in Sheffield and Davis (10) when they conclude that in Sport/Leisure Management, the common goal for all persons interested in sport/leisure management is the efficient and effective delivery of sporting experience for clients. The Involved Profit Model (IPM) developed by Davis and Sheffield delineated the three types of client involvement in light of the profit motive fundamental to any business. The Involved Profit Model, (Figure 1) has

been advanced to better identify the direction in which sport/leisure management researchers should proceed in their attempts to develop theoretical postulates. In the model, the clients' involvement is that of spectator, consumer, and participant. Further, the model represents for sport/leisure management researchers a branching of the general embodiment of sport and leisure management into specialized areas of study. Concentrated research should be conducted in each of these areas and implications from empirical data should directly refer to the intricacy of each branch. What does this imply for managers in the sport and leisure industry? The theoretical framework also helps to provide the rationale for applied research and for collaboration with practicing managers. Studies by Parkhouse and Ulrich (8) and Davis (3) have utilized this collaborative approach in their research surveying the professional preparation of sport/leisure management graduates and sport/leisure managers.

OPERATIONAL VALIDITY

Operational validity examines the capability of the practitioner to utilize theoretical constraints by manipulating independent variables. Some critics have noted that even theories that address dependent variable of relevance to practitioners often are incapable of implementation. Gouldner's (4) observation that, although scientists are interested in understanding and predicting events, applied scientists must be interested also in controlling events. In applied research, according to Gouldner, a variable must therefore be selected for their accessibility to control. Van de Vall et. al. (11) expresses this feeling with the term "operational validity" in their investigation of 40 research projects. Their findings indicate that academic researchers are concerned almost exclusively with epistemological validity and the operational validity of their findings. Strengthening academician/practitioner research ties through survey inclusion and other types of phenomenological investigations will assist in the operational validity of studies.

TIMELINESS

Finally, timeliness concerns the requirement that theory not be "moot" to practitioners by the time they receive adequate information on how to apply it. One of the most serious criticisms of the organizational sciences is that the phenomena under study change faster than science can come to grips with them. When dealing with a slow-converging science such as sport and leisure management science, and then applying it's theories to rapidly changing phenomena, most conclude that phenomena never completely described or understood before they vanish and are subsequently replaced by new phenomena.(11)

However, there are signs of that the field of sport/leisure management is developed with regard to timeliness. The unique challenges of the field are being examined in a scholarly fashion. As reported, Sheffield and Davis (10) feel that promising alliances between programs

in business and programs in physical education are becoming the rule rather than isolated exceptions. The issues are being determined in the open forum of academic communication. Since the 1980 ARENA report there have been several important additions to the sport/leisure management knowledge base. A recent issue of the Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Dance devoted a 16-page special section to sport/leisure management.(7) VanderZwaag (12) has published a text in sport/leisure management. The recently completed Managed Recreation Research Report provides an excellent overview of the burgeoning private sector which includes clubs, resorts, theme parks, YMCA programs, and camps. Indeed a growing number of published materials are available to both the academician and the sport/leisure manager. SPORTS (Science Periodical On Research and Technology in Sport), Sports Retailers, Tennis Industry, Sports Marketing, Interscholastic Athletic Administration, Athletic Administration, The Journal of Sport Management, Club Business, and Athletic Business are representative academic, administrative, or trade journals for sport/leisure managers. While it is important for the sport and leisure management academician to understand the limited usefulness of trade journals for academic advancement, the trade publications do provide a necessary link between academicians and the managerial force. These journals are the most promising avenue for assuring two-way communication.

In recreation management, printed materials are also becoming more available. Recent issues of Leisure Today have been devoted to commercial and employee recreation as well as the management of leisure services. The newly formed Journal of Recreation and Park Administration is providing a scholarly forum for leisure managers. Leisure Management and Employee Service Management are other fairly recent publications.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD OF SPORT MANAGEMENT

It was Corbin's (2) contention that a unified profession need not be completely comprised of professionals. "A profession needs scientists to research the discipline, general practitioners to provide our social services to the masses . . . even . . . technicians . . . to aid the professionals . . . The key is having all groups work together for a common goal" (p. 31). Corbin's programmatic observation is applicable to any field of interest regardless of its general designation as profession or discipline.

In sport/leisure management, academicians and managers can utilize their skills of observation and analysis to synthesize experience and perception for improved practice. As in most social sciences, these researchers are generally constrained by the need for immediate application of their findings. As a greater descriptive understanding of sport/leisure management emerges, it may be appropriate to move into inferential analysis of sport/leisure management issues and behavior.

With a thorough understanding of the needs of the practitioner, academicians in the field can synthesize research they produce with greater applicability to those practicing in the field. By addressing the issues of descriptive relevance, goal relevance, operational validity

and timeliness, sport management academicians can make an concerted effort to improve management performance by practitioners. Furthermore, by attempting to design specialized areas of study in line with the industry's needs, we will be able to meet the unique demands the sport/leisure management area requires.

To recap, sport/leisure management is at a developmental crossroad. Rhetoric about the role and scope of this area may be simply that. By attempting the design specialized areas of study in line with the industry's needs, we will be able to meet the unique demands the sport/leisure management area requires.

The following recommendations for future research/program development in sport/leisure management are suggested:

1. Inservice training of present sport/leisure managers would insure more effective use of sport/leisure management techniques implemented by these individuals.

2. A continued attempt should be made by academicians to establish industry/research relationships and to further recognize the need for applicability of our findings.

3. Recognize common goals exist for both practitioners and academicians and utilize these goals to further understand the true nature of the field of sport/leisure management.

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FIGURE 1
LEISURE MANAGEMENT
PROFIT MODEL

