

Encouraging the Use of Innovative Practices in Sport Management

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The role of innovation in the ongoing success of sport organizations is undeniable. Innovation, defined as new and distinct programs, services, or business practices, can help organizations compete, remain relevant to stakeholders, and/or help them achieve objectives effectively and efficiently (Hoerber, Doherty, Hoerber, & Wolfe, 2015; Naraine, 2019; Winand, Rihoux, Robinson, & Zintz, 2012). Innovation is particularly important for sport organizations that face significant competition or demands for change (Legg, Snelgrove, & Wood, 2016; Ratten, 2016), or seek to address wickedly persistent social problems (Misener & Misener, 2017; Svensson, & Hambrick, 2019).

The aim of this special issue was to create a collection of case studies that challenge students to consider how to design and implement innovative practices to achieve organizational objectives and solve pressing social problems. The case studies contained in this special issue demonstrate the potential for innovation to exist in all substantive and functional areas of sport management such as marketing, sales, event management, strategic management, research methods, sport development, organizational behavior, human resources, social justice, sport-for-development, and program evaluation. Furthermore, the contexts of the cases are wide ranging and include professional sport, sport-for-development, youth sport, collegiate sport, and sport events, making them of interest to students with varying interests.

The case study by Armentrout and colleagues focuses on FanStand, the maker of an app used by professional sport organizations to connect with live spectators. During the COVID-19 outbreak, the app is not being used while live games are canceled or played in front of minimal to no crowds. Although arenas and stadiums will soon reach full capacity, this case challenges students to consider different ways that sports app makers, like FanStand, can diversify revenue streams by leveraging stakeholder relationships and integrating the latest digital technology and consumer trends. Instructors teaching undergraduate courses on sport marketing or strategic management of sport organizations may be particularly interested in using this case study.

McSweeney et al. introduce students to the potential use of technological innovation to transform the ways that a sport-for-development organization delivers its programming around the world. Although the need to innovate program delivery is spurred by COVID-19, the lessons that can be learned through the use of this case study extend beyond the pandemic because solutions have the potential to extend the scope of the organization's impact given limited resources. Instructors teaching a course on undergraduate

or graduate sport-for-development will especially appreciate this case study because it challenges students to consider the design of suitable solutions based on varying objectives, geographical contexts, and organizational capacities.

The problem of declining ticket sales to the University of Minnesota's men's hockey games is presented in Warren's case study. Students are placed into the role of a sales and marketing consultant who is challenged with the task of analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to develop consumer focused solutions using a design thinking approach. Instructors of undergraduate courses on sport marketing or sport sales will appreciate the ability to have their students make data-driven decisions using an established framework for generating innovative solutions. The challenge of selling tickets to collegiate sports games is enduring and not unique to men's hockey at Minnesota, thereby offering instructors and students an opportunity to discuss how approaches to this issue may be similar or different across contexts.

As the pool of referees continues to age and young officials do not replace them at a similar rate, many youth sport organizations are seeking to address the issue before a crisis is reached. The case authored by Pierce and colleagues present multiple problem spaces that can be implicated in the challenge of recruiting and retaining referees in youth sport using a well-described approach to design thinking. Instructors of capstone courses at the undergraduate or graduate level will appreciate the breadth of the case, whereas undergraduate course instructors of strategic management or research methods may choose to focus on one of the problem spaces. Students are challenged to go beyond the case to acquire data to be used in the design thinking process, making this case suitable for use over an extended period of time.

Bodin and colleagues address another pressing issue in youth sport through their case on youth baseball set in the context of a national sport organization in Canada. The case challenges students to address the issue of declining participation in organized youth baseball through the implementation of an initiative that leverages the trend toward less organized and rule-bound forms of sport. The supplementary materials included with the case provide students with either raw data collected via surveys, interviews, and focus groups from stakeholders of a pilot project on a proposed initiative or a summary analysis of the data. This case will be particularly appealing to instructors of undergraduate courses on program evaluation, research methods, or sport development, who can task students with analyzing the data to make recommendations about the future use or modification of the initiative country wide.

When a professional sport league expands, a number of management processes are needed to form and develop a new organization. One of these tasks is building a team of executives and staff who can thrive in a competitive environment through forward thinking. In their case, Zvosec and colleagues present this

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challenge to students who take on the role of the new President of Business Operations for the Nashville Comets of Major League Baseball. Students are tasked with building a front-office culture that is focused on innovation and long-term growth. This case is particularly suitable for undergraduate courses on organizational behavior or human resources.

Finally, in the case authored by Rich and colleagues, students are presented with an opportunity to consider how the upcoming hosting of a major sport event can be leveraged to foster inclusion for LGBTQ+ individuals in the host community. As diversity and inclusion continue to become important social issues, this case provides students with a unique approach to achieving social impact through events. Instructors of courses on event management or social justice oriented courses at the undergraduate or graduate level will be particularly interested in this case.

Case studies continue to serve as an important pedagogical tool that can bring organizational and social problems to life in sport management courses and put students in the roles of key decision makers (Snelgrove, Wood, & Wigfield, 2020). Integrating innovation-focused cases into sport management courses, such as the ones found in this special issue, will encourage students to bring new ideas to pressing problems and develop the foundations of competitive sport organizations.

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