Critical Thinking in Sport Managing and Leading

As introduced in chapter 1, critical thinking skills are important for the management of human resources in the sport industry. Leaders and managers should base their decisions and actions on rational, factual, and objective information. Caring about others and considering their opinions, concerns, and interests are important elements for the critical thinker. Steps discussed in decision making and the management of human resources in the workplace offer good strategies to ensure a systematic evaluation of alternatives based on objective criteria to enhance the well-being of employees in the workplace and as such attain the objectives of the organization. Critical thinking ensures sound reasoning about appropriate decisions and behaviors surrounding the most important resource in organizations—people.

Ethics in the Leadership of Sport Organizations

Employees, managers, and leaders are expected to act ethically as they undertake their duties and responsibilities within the sport organization. Unfortunately, as many incidents in the recent past have demonstrated, people in organizations do not always act ethically. In a study on ethical decision making and practical morality for compliance officers of U.S. university athletics departments, Kihl (2007) demonstrated that these sport leaders drew from various sources to make ethical decisions. The sources included their personal moral codes, professional codes of conduct, and their organization’s standards, rules, and procedures. Decisions made often involved a manager’s ability to balance these three sources. To illustrate the challenges of decision making, a modified version of the scenario presented by Kihl is detailed in the next paragraph.

The scenario involves the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and its decisions related to an under-18 world basketball game. Because of agreements with organizational sponsors and the television company broadcasting the game, the leaders of FIBA wanted to abide by their policy to plan a game time optimal for reaching the largest audience. Therefore, the leaders decided to go with an 11:00 p.m. local start for the final contest of the tournament. Besides adhering to the prior television and sponsorship agreements, a late start produced the most potential global viewers for the television broadcast. An increase in potential viewership would provide the opportunity for the organization and its stakeholders to reap the economic benefit (e.g., increased revenue through ad sales). But the coaches and leaders of the teams involved believed that the late start could negatively affect the players’ performance. Thus, they disagreed with the organizational policy.

This scenario, which is frequently played out in the sport industry (e.g., agreements between television companies and universities regarding the start of college football games), highlights the often conflicting and competing values and interests of the various stakeholders involved in sport. These varying values and interests lead to important challenges that managers and leaders must carefully consider in making the best (i.e., most ethical) decisions.

Ethical leadership may be an appropriate strategy to help thwart unethical behaviors within sport organizations. Brown and Treviño (2006) suggested that ethical leaders are characterized “as honest, caring, and principled individuals who make fair and balanced decisions” (p. 597). In this light, sport leaders must frequently communicate with their followers about ethics, set clear ethical standards, and use rewards and punishments to see that those standards are followed. Sport leaders must also proactively communicate, reinforce, and make decisions with consideration of the effect of those decisions on the organization and its stakeholders.
Summary

People play an important role in sport organizations. This chapter provides an overview of some of the concepts involved in the management of these people and the relevance of leadership in guiding their activities toward the achievement of organizational goals. As outlined in the chapter, management and leadership are two distinct yet complementary functions. Management refers to the process of working with, and through, individuals and groups to accomplish organizational goals. Leadership is the process of influencing individual and group behavior for some desired result.

Contemporary management theorists have cited five underlying functions that guide the concept of management: planning, staffing, organizing, directing, and controlling and evaluating. Managers in sport organizations commonly use three basic skills: conceptual, human relations, and technical. In this chapter, the roles of top-level, middle-level, and supervisory-level managers are explained and connected to specific managerial skills. Conceptual skills are often exercised by top-level managers where communication and planning are needed to assess the big-picture within a sport organization. Human relation skills are an integral component of top-level, middle-level, and supervisory-level managers, since managers at each level are required to interact with people on a daily basis. Finally, supervisory-level managers require technical skills in that specific skills related to their role must be present in order for effective operation. For instance, the front line manager of the concession area at the local hockey arena must have technical knowledge and skill with the cash register computing system in order to effectively manage subordinates.

Several theories have been developed to explain leadership. This chapter briefly covers the contingency theory of leadership, leader traits and behaviors, and situational theories of leadership, and then focuses on a more contemporary leadership model—the full range of leadership model.

As part of their responsibilities, managers and leaders are constantly involved in making decisions. Steps in decision making include defining or framing the problem, identifying criteria for the decision, developing and evaluating the alternatives, selecting an alternative, implementing the alternative, and evaluating the effectiveness of the decision. The concepts of power and authority are integral to decision making. Power is defined as the ability to influence others or as control over resources. Power can originate from different sources—organizational and personal. Organizational sources of power include legitimate, reward, and coercive power. Personal sources of power include referent, expert, and informational power. Authority is defined as the power to enforce rules and to expect subordination from those who have no authority. Collectively, decision making, power, and authority are important concepts for managers and leaders to understand and carefully wade through to achieve the goals of the sport organization.

Human resource management is about addressing the needs of the sport organization in terms of its labor force. More specifically, recruitment and selection of employees, their orientation within the organization, their training, and the appraisal of their performances within the workplace are all important. The management of human resources also includes addressing diversity and ethical behavior in the organization. Diversity can represent variation in age, gender, race and ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ability. Managing diversity in organizations can be challenging, but leaders should not be deterred from ensuring that the workplace is diverse. In addition, diversity management may connect directly to ethics in the leadership of sport organizations in that leaders are influenced by sources of ethics, including their personal moral codes, professional codes of conduct, and their organization's standards, rules, and procedures. Each source contributes to the ethical outcome of a leader’s decision-making process.
Review Questions

1. What are three theoretical approaches to management and managing people in sport organizations?
2. What are the three managerial skills of sport managers? What are the levels of management typically associated with each managerial skill?
3. What is the difference between management and leadership? Explain the distinction using examples from sport organizations.
4. What are the essential components of the interactive process associated with the contingency theory of leadership?
5. What are the major features of the full range of leadership model?
6. What steps are involved in the decision-making process?
7. What is the difference between power, authority, and leadership? Provide an example of each.
8. What are the sources of organizational power? What are the sources of personal power? How do these sources of power affect decision making?
9. What elements are involved in the management of human resources? How can diversity enrich the operations and effectiveness of sport organizations?
10. What is ethical leadership? What sport organizations may benefit from ethical leadership?

References


