Change the Logics, Change the Discourse: A Systems Approach to Improving Equity in Sport Organizations

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Equity and diversity present as interminable organizational objectives in sport, yet, the data are stable: white men still have a firm hold on the vast majority of leadership positions, controlling professional access (hiring) and treatment of women and minorities in sport organizations (Cunningham, 2010; Lapchick, 2018). Shaw and Frisby (2006) argued that progress on equity is bounded by organizational strategies that operate within existing socio-organizational structures, suggesting that alternative strategies that disrupt the discourse constituting existing structures need to be explored.

The objective of the proposed conceptual model is to illustrate a blueprint for ‘disrupting the discourse’ on equity in sport organizations by embedding equity in organizational design (OD). The dimensions of OD operate as the contexts through which new logics can be introduced into organizational systems, both formal and informal (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008).

Institutional logics (e.g., isomorphism) are "the socially constructed, historical patterns of material practices, assumptions, values, beliefs, and rules” (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008, p. 101), or the principles, that constrain cognition and behavior of organizations and individuals. Organizational policy (written) or office norms (communicated) are examples of manifested sets of logics. Thornton, Ocasio, and Loundsbury (2012) proposed that organizational behavior is the manifestation (i.e., operationalization) of logics, and thus OD frameworks are ideal for platforming logics as the theoretical parameters for organizational decision-making. OD has six dimensions that have been validated as explaining the variance between organizations: a) complexity, b) hierarchy of authority, c) formalization, d) centralization, e) specialization, and f) standardization (Pugh et al., 1968). The devil is in the details of the six design dimensions: they are the contexts through which agential and structural logics recursively constitute and reorganize the organization (Giddens, 1984), and thus are optimal sites for embedding equity logics in organizational infrastructure.

Where coupling institutional logics with an OD framework provides, respectively, a method (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) and context for disrupting the discourse, a systems approach provides for ‘carrying’ restructured formal and informal equity logics (i.e., reorganization); logics and social systems are fundamentally coupled, as institutional systems are the carriers of logics (Scott, 2001). The elemental information paths that carry logics in systems are a) resource configuration (throughputs; i.e., organizational production); b) feedback loops (internal and external); and c) reorganization (i.e., institutional work; Meadows, 2008). In this model, information paths represent how logics “travel”, or manifest as both a) the institutionally imposed parameters for decision-making (structure) and b) formal and informal feedback loops from subsystems or organizational members (agency).

The conceptual model, which situates equity in organizational infrastructure, is proposed as a strategy to disrupt the discourse that constructed the need for organizational equity strategies in the first place. The model illustrates how equity logics (parameters; loadings), embedded in the dimensions of OD (variables) and carried by the informational paths in systems (theory), can reconstruct the discourse on equity in sport organizations. Where agentic and structural logics recursively pattern OD, the dimensions perform as an infrastructural context for weaving equity logics into the fabric of organizations (Kikulis et al., 1989).