Practice Theory and the Study of Sport Organization

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This paper seeks to theorize practice – concerned with an explanation or “why” of everyday activity (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011) – in organizational contexts in the field of sport management. Practice-based approaches to analyzing organizations are important because of their capacity to understand how organizational action is enabled and constrained by dominant organizational and societal practices (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). While there are limited examples of practice theory in the field of sport management (Kitchin & Howe, 2013), practice theory is more relevant to the field today as it refocuses scholarly attention on health in sport in a Covid-19 era. One outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic has been an increasing reliance on various types of technologies to carry out scouting, coaching, or undertaking processes normally performed in person (such as the amateur draft). Another outcome is the growing focus on the health and wellbeing of those working, and participating in, sport. This is complicated by new mandatory health protocols such as online symptom screening and tracking that are becoming standard practices in the management and delivery of sport. This paper explores how the human body interacts with emerging and changing technologies such as video conferencing, smart devices, and their human resources applications in both administrative and participatory contexts. Some considerations include: 1) How does the human body interact with technologies in new and innovative ways? 2) How does the use of technologies include or limit recruitment and participation in ways not yet understood? 3) What are the ethical considerations of using these technologies in sport contexts? The aim of this paper therefore is to examine these questions in terms of practice, and to provide a roadmap for future inquiry into the impacts of changing practice and the management of sport.

To do so, this paper will theorize technologies in practice (Orlikowski, 1992), described as the enacted technology structures (Giddens, 1984) that are reproduced in everyday action and influence organizational outcomes. Thus, this paper will contribute to the literature examining the interrelated social actions and routines (Felman & Pentland, 2003) in which bodies are mobilized and technologies are used (Reckwitz, 2002). In doing so, we reconsider norms about health, wellness, and ability, and acknowledge the limited research on bodies within sport organizations (Van Amsterdam et al., 2017). Further, the paper will make several theoretical contributions. First, it will add to practice theory by exploring organizations that focus on human movement and the physical act of practice. Moreover, it will explore and theorize the existing challenge of moving between the boardroom to the field that is unique to sport organizations, while also recognizing the ways in which routines have evolved by adapting new technologies in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper will also have practical implications, as it will highlight the possible advantages (i.e. better inclusion and more awareness of those with disabilities and health issues), disadvantages (i.e. limitations to athlete development) and ethical considerations (i.e. collection of personal health data, safety of children online) of integrating technologies into organizational life and practices in sport.