

SPORT MANAGEMENT: VARYING DIRECTIONS TOWARDS THE NARRATIVE

Allan Edwards¹, James Skinner¹ and Keith Gilbert²

¹Faculty of Education, Griffith University, Queensland, Australia

²Bowater School of Management and Marketing, Faculty of Business and Law,
Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia

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Abstract:

Until now sport managers have had difficulties in identifying core issues that form the framework for successful sport management practice. The purpose of this study was to explore what sport managers believe are the core issues that can contribute to successful sport management practice. This was achieved through an examination of the narrative experiences of 7 sport managers (4 male and 3 female) that highlighted how narrative can be used to enhance a sport manager's understanding of their work environment through critical reflection. Through this examination the overriding issues that the participating sport managers believed provided a unique insight into their everyday lives centered on: (1) experience and power, (2) accountability; (3) demands of the job; (4) professional development; (5) ways of knowing; (6) collegiality; and (7) critical reflection.

This narrative approach to understanding the lived experiences of sport managers allowed the researchers to connect theory with experience and to establish a relationship between daily practice and knowledge. Understanding the lived experiences of sport managers in this way can allow sport managers to establish new insights into how they interact with their sport organizations and the individuals and communities they serve in their daily operations.

The following paper concludes by suggesting that through an increased interest in narrative as a way of knowing the stories disclosed may move other sport managers to share their own stories and experiences to assist in framing their own identity. Moreover, by prompting other sport managers to tell their stories, a deeper understanding of how professionals continue to grow and advance their sport management knowledge may be promoted. These narratives also taught us about deepening and extending our understanding of how sport managers construct meaning. In this way, new insights may be derived about the practice of sport management and how important it is to adding new knowledge for the discipline.

Keys words: core issues, critical reflection, demands of the job, professional development, job identity

SPORTMANAGEMENT: UNTERSCHIEDLICHE ANLEITUNGEN ZUM ERZÄHLEN

Zusammenfassung:

Bis jetzt hatten die Sportmanager Schwierigkeiten mit der Erkennung der Kernfragen, die den Rahmen für eine erfolgreiche Managementpraxis darstellen. Die Absicht dieser Studie war zu untersuchen, was, nach der Meinung von Sportmanagern, die Hauptvoraussetzungen sind, die zu einer erfolgreichen Sportmanagement-Praxis beitragen können. In der Untersuchung wurden 7 Sportmanager (4 Männer und 3 Frauen) gebeten, über ihre Erfahrungen zu sprechen, was die Rolle der mündlicher Aussage bei der Vertiefung ihres Verständnisses der Arbeitsumgebung durch kritische Reflexion hervorhebt. Die vorrangigen Probleme, die gemäß der tätigen Sportmanager einen einzigartigen Einblick in ihr Alltagsleben gewähren sind folgende: (1) die Erfahrung und Macht (2) die Verantwortlichkeit; (3) die Jobanforderungen; (4) die berufsbezogene Entwicklung; (5) die Art und Weise des Kenntniserwerbs; (6) die Kollegialität; und (7) die kritische Reflexion.

Dieses erzählungsbezogene Verfahren, das darauf gerichtet wird, zum Verständnis der Alltagserfahrungen der Sportmanager zu gelangen, machte es den Forschern möglich, die Theorie mit der Erfahrung zu verknüpfen, sowie neue Einblicke in ihre Zusammenarbeit mit den sportlichen Vereinen, mit den Individuellen und den Gemeinschaften, denen sie in ihrer alltäglichen Tätigkeit dienen, zu gewinnen.

Die nachfolgende Studie schließt mit dem Vorschlag, das, durch ein erhöhtes Interesse für das Erzählen als eine Art vom Verständnis, die erzählten Geschichten die anderen Sportmanager dazu veranlassen könnten, ihre eigene Geschichten und Erfahrungen mitzuteilen, was zur Gestaltung ihrer Identität verhelfen könnte. Außerdem, wenn man andere Sportmanager dazu auffordert, ihre Geschichten zu erzählen, kann man es besser verstehen, wie sich die Profis weiterentwickeln und wie sie ihre Fachkenntnisse erweitern. Diese Geschichten waren auch eine Lehre für uns, indem wir unser Verständnis vertieft und erweitert haben, wie die Sportmanager die Bedeutung erfassen. Daraus kann man neue Einblicke in die Sportmanagement-Praxis bekommen und neues Wissen dieser Disziplin beitragen.

Schlüsselwörter: Kernfragen, kritische Reflexion, Jobanforderungen, berufsbezogene Entwicklung, Jobidentität

Introduction

Our group came together for the first time in 2001. Ranging in experiences from a thirty-year sport administration veteran to a recent graduate, the group of three females and four males (not including the researchers) became a close-knit group, willing to meet once a month to converse and share ideas on sport management. The experiences and stories of this particular group uncovered many rich perspectives and this series of narrative events evolved over approximately ten (10) months in different locations. Described here are the overriding issues and unique perspectives that were problematic for everyone. In the words of Maxine Greene (1995, p. 198), we tried, as a group, to “attend to the plurality of consciousnesses – and their recalcitrances, their resistances, along with their affirmations, their songs of love,” in order to make meaning of the issues before us. Our motivation for assembling this group was to explore the potential for further professional development of sport managers by having them meet with fellow sport practicing professionals to discuss and reflect on their practices.

Epistemologically, we sustained one another through group support, communication between meetings, celebration of one another’s successes and personal invitations to each others’ workplaces. There were various reasons why people had chosen to join the group. The most evident was expressed by Anne and echoed by others:

“Actually one of the reasons I don’t mind doing this is because it forces me to be more reflective and during my working life I don’t do it as much as I should”.

The need for comparing ideas, sharing experiences, and getting up to speed on new developments seems critical. Within the context of sport development David describes the conversations in a group meeting this way:

“I’m very glad to get an opportunity to learn different perspectives but I also like to

go beyond my own sport organization. I think that’s very important so that you don’t just see the attitudes and the mind sets of the people in your sport”.

The stories these sport managers told were rich, colorful descriptions of their complex roles and argued that the learning never stops. As Steve indicated:

“I think the one critical piece that I came to learn, as a sport manager, is that you don’t have to be the one with all the answers. All you need to do is ask the right questions and to facilitate the processes. It took me a long time to learn that. I used to think I had to have all the answers and I had to show everyone how to do it, but then I learned that all you have to do is ask the right questions”.

However, before exploring the experiences and stories of these individuals further it is necessary to classify and distinguish how narrative is defined. The reason for this is that because sport management research narratives should not be seen as merely anecdotal or casual accounts of the research participants, but involve a blending of theoretical with empirical or experiential materials. Thus, a narrative approach to sport management research allows the researcher to connect theory with experience and to establish a relationship between daily practice and knowledge. Understanding narrative in this way can allow sport management researchers to establish new insights into sport organizations and the individuals who are responsible for their effective operation.

Defining story, narrative and voice

It is important if narrative is to become a genuine focus for sport management research inquiry that it is adequately defined and delimited. However, in order to do this the meaning of the associated concepts of story and voice must also be addressed.

The term *story* refers basically the “to discussion of particular situations” (Clandenin & Connelly, 1994, p.125). According to van Dijk (1997, p. 123), the relevant properties of stories are that:

- they are primarily about (past) human actions and perceptions although also descriptions of other events, objects, places or circumstances may be part of the stories, for example, as conditioned or consequences to human action.
- they are usually about events and action that are (made) interesting for the audience. This ‘pragmatic interestingness’ is usually obtained by the account of events or actions that are unexpected, deviant, extraordinary or unpredictable, given the knowledge and beliefs of the audience.
- they are usually told to entertain the audience. For example, by influencing their aesthetic or emotional reaction. However, stories may also have broader social, political or cultural functions or play a role in the argumentative schema.
- they may be told from different perspectives or points of view, may feature the storyteller as a participant or not, and may be realistic or fictitious.

There is something impermanent, perishable and exploratory about a story. Stories are not always of course spoken, though the ‘short story’, the ‘tale of detection’, the yarn, terms that refer to literary forms, represent a sophisticated and specialized usage. Within the sport management research context stories are almost always less finished, less formal and less deliberated than the narrative. From this distinction some others follow. Stories and tales are casual, informal and contingent. Narratives are premeditated, organized, formal and have a structure that is their own.

The term *narrative* - though it refers to spoken and informal discourse - reflects the professional and conceptual processes through which the original material (the story or stories) has been put. The real point of this is that narratives should contain a reflective or theoretical component. It may not be overt, but the shaping and organization of a narrative will usually reflect and transmit the consequences of a meditative or generalizing process of thought. Narratives do not exist as Bruner (1991, p. 8) wrote:

“... in some real world, waiting there patiently and eternally to be veridically mirrored

in a text. The act of constructing a narrative moreover, is considerably more than selecting events either from real life, from memory, or from fantasy and then placing them in an appropriate order. The events themselves need to be constituted in the light of the overall narrative.”

To construct a narrative is to make an intervention into a field conceptualized (whether fully consciously or not is insignificant) as problematic. It is to address issues, though these are not addressed directly, but through the selection and arrangement of material.

Narrative is thus a reflective practice whereas story is not. And because it is a reflective practice narrative is connected with authority. The ‘narrator’ is automatically endowed with power, with control over the material he or she presents, a power that flows to him or her through the position as organizer of the material. In moving from *story* to *narrative* it has become part of a reflective, self-conscious and intervention process. In other words, to construct a narrative requires abstract thought. To write a narrative requires intellectual commitment and energy. Moreover, the construction of a narrative involves mediation upon social and ethical issues.

Voice

There is a related term that must be discussed – the term of *voice*. Along with story and narrative it is presently in vogue, though this time its antecedents are not with ‘postmodern theorists’ but with the Russian literary critic and philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin. Sometimes *voice* is used synonymously for *story*, at other times it means ‘professional knowledge or orientation’. When one calls writing a *voice* one is enlisting the residual power of this tradition to give power to the group or individual concerned. The term *voice* tends to carry with it unconsciously the assumption that the group has a natural authenticity, is identical to itself, uncontaminated by the language and values of other usually more dominant groups.

But as Jacques Derrida (1981) insisted, the meanings given by the living voice depend upon a process of differentiation between signs, in this case sound signs, as much as writing does. Speech can, no more than writing, be said to be a transparent medium of subjective experience. The term *voice* lays claim to this by its own independent natural authority. But in fact no language is like this, and no voice is unproblematically free from or uncontaminated

by the terms, values or concepts of others. When the term *voice* is used in reference to what is in practice writing, we have a rhetorical trope whose complicated elision of these points is quite different from the supposed innocent directness that it is simultaneously claiming. *Voice* thus collaborates with *story* in valorizing that which is unpremeditated and apparently unmediated, but the term is in fact involved in quite complicated contestations and valorizations of meaning. It carries much the same meaning as 'representation' in the political sense, but without the separation between origin and signifier that 'representation' always insists upon.

As the story goes the narrative use of the individual's voice is perhaps one of the most important issues relating to research utilizing the narrative perspective. Indeed, few traits of current biographies are more firmly entrenched than the conventional use of the individual's voice. Past research, (Alvesson, 1993; Goodson, 1991; Schratz, 1993) has attempted to throw light upon the issue of the voices of marginalized groups within the society. In point of fact in recent years 'many researchers have become disenchanted with the academic process of noise reduction' (Schratz, 1993, p. 1) by suppressing the more disturbing aspects of representing the individuality of human interaction. Academics such as Ball (1989), however, began to lead researchers to break down some of the established conventions of objectivity and highlight issues such as gender, race, homophobia, and socio-economic class by representing the marginalized voices within culture. Some have argued that at times Ball (1989) enters into a dialogue with the respondent. Consequently, a distinction must be drawn here between *dialogue* and *voice*. As Ruddick (1993) remarked:

"Dialogue is a part of social convention where rules underwrite the possibility of speaking and being heard: turn taking offers more promise of equality". (p. 8)

She continued by referring to voices being:

"... emotive more disembodied, more disturbing. At one level they can 'represent' individuals or groups who have been denied the right to contribute or who have simply not been heard". (p. 8)

The issue of voice can be well represented by narrative writing and the use of narratives as "frequently embedded exemplars - concrete

situated examples of action" (Witten, 1993, p. 107) as told by the marginalized individual. In this manner the stories of narrative are thus "the stories of everyday life" (Clegg, 1993, p. 32) and more importantly the stories of everyday people's voices, like those of sport managers.

Narratives "are embedded so deeply in culture and everyday life" (Nakagawa, 1993: 145) that it could be argued that the configuration of language indicates a profound pursuit for storytelling, which appears as a basic instinct common to all human life. Indeed, Nakagawa, (1995) remarked that language utilized in narrative has become so sedimented and 'natural' in our daily experience that only rarely, if ever, do we consider how they construct, legitimate, and perpetuate a particular order of coherence and sense-making. In summary narratives indicate a "major discourse genre for reproduction" (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 125) of individual or group voices.

Narrative and reminiscing

When engaged in narrative research the researcher can be accused of using prior knowledge by reminiscing about their own life experiences. Sparkes (1995) referred to this process as 'narrative of self' (p. 175). Porter and Washington (1993) remarked "the individual is not admitting to the self that he/she is denying the existence of things prior" (p.149). However, the self should be prepared to accept a situation of neutrality before the research begins. Consequently, the sport manager's life could be interpreted in the context of a narrative report and the act of reminiscing also becomes an important tool for representing the narrative of the manager's life. In other words, the act of reminiscing can have a major effect on the final production of the narrative. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, reminiscing is the precursor to reflection which requires a deeper form of thought. Another form of interference in the narrative comes from the acceptance of nostalgia. This can also function as an important perspective in the act of reminiscing. Thus, the nostalgic or positive thoughts of the past may lead some respondents to reminisce and over-emphasize the nature of certain points in the narrative. When this happens, if the researcher has experienced similar occurrences, the passage of narrative might take on a stronger significance than warranted within the text. Porter and Washington (1993) went further and argued that:

“... the very implicitness of nostalgia leads one to assume that, previous knowledge and experience must affect the context and overall development of the narrative account of an individual’s life or voice”. (p. 151)

In short, nostalgia must therefore have some influence over the ‘truth’ of the narrative.

Narrative and truth

Through the use of narrative language and dialogue researchers can make courageous and convincing pronouncements that can be camouflaged from finite inquiry and interrogation. Witten (1993) also believes this is true because of the “cognitive and psychological effects of stories on listeners” (p. 105). It could be argued that narratives render the listener susceptible to having their attention caught by often provocative speech or through tone of voice, tense, and vivid and concrete details whereby plots and episodes are unfurled (McLaughlin, 1984). The importance of these salient narratives is likely to be retained and persist over time, for as Martin (1982) suggested immediate language is memorable. Consequently, narratives can have a powerful impact and plausible persuasive effects on the listeners. In addition, the unparalleled strength of narrative talk stems from its ability to state claims of truth which are shielded from testing or debate in the memorable and persuasive text. As Jefferson (2000) suggested the rules of narrative - the conventions of the game - make it difficult for a listener to question the narrative’s content. Witten (1993) supported this comment by stating that:

“The presumption, encased in narrative, is shielded from testing or debate; it is a claim to validity that denies the need for justification or proof. In short, the narrative is a powerfully persuasive, presumed claim to truth and correctness that is not ordinarily subject to challenge”. (p. 107)

So how can we be sure that the *narrative* has been written correctly and does not falsify the *truth*? It appears as though all the normal conventions of interpretative research are followed when writing the narrative, cross-checking by the use of triangulation and rereading by the subject can counteract any contradictions of the truth. However, if working in isolation or of a clandestine nature the narrative discourse utilized often relies on its ‘truth’ by the reputation of the writer.

Methods

Applying narrative research

Typically, in qualitative research methodology, the researchers try to listen first to the practitioners’ stories. However, in our research effort, we tried telling and responding to one another’s stories concurrently so that we could reflect a sincere effort to listen to all the participants. Thus, our shared story began to evolve with all our voices enacting it. Because we were able to expand on and extend another’s stories by adding our own experiences and reflections, the story became richer and more meaningful for us.

By sharing stories, and remaining open to the variety and eloquence of others’ stories, we pursued a narrative reflection on practice that Schon (1983) discussed as critical to professional development. Our conversations were marked by a feeling of equality that allowed each of us to establish freely the form we were comfortable with and to share the content of our experiences (Oakley, 1981). We gathered together for this project in a climate of respect and mutual trust. In our conversations, we learned trust, confidence, and the critical importance of the relationship in human interactions (Noddings, 1984).

In choosing to share experiences as sport managers, our group focused on the taken-for-grantedness of our roles. We were in agreement that the text of sport management professional development was in need of revision. Its one-dimensional, single perspective stories told in a distant, authoritative language of expertise no longer represented our understanding of the multiple realities of today’s sport management practice. In our own collaborative way, by slowly uncovering our stories, we began to reflect on our day-to-day actions. We learned from each other’s successes and failures. Our efforts of coming together, listening attentively, and responding to each other’s stories created in us a stronger, more meaningful connection to one another and fostered our growth as a professional community.

As we participated in sharing stories, the more reflective we became about the construction of personal knowledge. Personal experiences – inward feelings, hopes, and reactions, external conditions of reality and context all tempered by a timeframe - helped us to reconcile the importance and relevance of our stories. This is evidenced by the remarks of Steve, he stated:

“Each of us have our own biography of experiences that impact on our sport management practices”.

Anne agreed and added:

“I think your experiences as a administrator gives you a lens through which you view particular events and incidents and that informs your reaction”.

The group therefore came to realize that there is not one individual knowledge, but a variety of competing *knowledges*, each of which is developed within a specific cultural, professional or institutional framework.

Researchers as participants

One of our difficulties in carrying out this collaborative research project had to do with gaining an understanding that we were collaborating together. Our role as researchers in this group was relatively undefined. We wanted to be viewed as participants and not necessarily as researchers. As researchers we went into every group not sure what would transpire. We took the role of participants purposely in order to level the landscape and encourage everyone to feel a part of the whole.

Although it took time the group eventually viewed us as participants as well as researchers. This was supported by the comments of Paul, he stated:

“At the beginning I saw you guys as the researchers, but as we journeyed through it, I began to see you more and more as a part of the group, especially because you were very amenable to keep meeting even after the main part of your research was done. You felt, we can still keep going with this, and this was a support to us”.

Anne added her thoughts:

“I saw you as members of the group, because you often talked about your experiences, reliving and revisiting incidents. ...I've been in that position: I've had to suffer through this myself. This is what I did.' No, I didn't see you as someone sitting outside watching the group and writing up their scientific notes, sitting above or beyond the group, but rather, very much a member of the group”.

In their article, “Working in the Interpretive Zone”, Wasser and Bresler (1996) commented on the importance of the researcher's presence and how the interactions of the researcher with the participants serve to shape study outcomes. This shift, they say, is occurring in tandem with the increasing recognition of the collective nature of knowing and our greater

attention to social theories of development. By working in “the interpretive zone” (Wasser & Bresler, 1996), multiple voices and viewpoints were encouraged, and participants had an opportunity to bring together their different kinds of knowledge, experiences, and beliefs, hopefully forging new meanings through the process of joint inquiry.

Christine shared her insights on the relaxed boundaries of the group:

“I see all of us in the group. I considered you to be part of the group. You were the researchers but at the same time you were part of the group. It wasn't like we were the group and you were taping the group”.

Less important, but not entirely without problems, the question of the researcher or participant is an important issue to examine after the fact. There were some difficult moments as researchers/participants. We were reticent to speak out or in any way try to lead the group. This was problematic because there were moments when we floundered and needed some direction. At these times, we felt we had to step in and give more shape to the events. Other times we felt the concern as researchers that one person or another was taking too much time in the group. Part of us, as researchers, wanted to end the conversation and move on to other issues, while part of us, as participants said we had no right to think that.

Discussion

This section discusses the core issues that contribute to successful sport management practice. It draws on the narrative experiences of 7 sport managers (4 male and 3 female) to provide a unique insight into their everyday lives and experiences.

Experience and power

According to Castells (1998), experience is the:

“... action of human subjects on themselves, determined by the interaction between their biological and cultural identities, and in relationship to their social and natural environment and it is constructed around the endless search for fulfillment of human needs and desires”. (p. 15)

Moreover Castells (1998) argued that experience is part of the social structure of society together with power and production. Foucault (1979) explained that power permeates society as a whole, and it constrains individual space

into a well-knit grid of official tasks and informal aggressions.

“This political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use, it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination; but, on the other hand, its constitution as labor power is possible only if it is caught up in a system of subjection (in which need is also a political instrument meticulously prepared, calculated and used): the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body”. (p. 26)

Foucault (1979) explained that there might be knowledge of the body that is not exactly about how it functions but rather about how to dominate it. This he calls the “political technology of the body” and it consists of “micro-chips” that form a set of tools to subtly dominate (p. 26). Institutions then implement “a micro-physics of power”, which are “dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, functionings, that one should decipher into a network of relations (p. 26). “Micro-powers” deal with strategic positioning of the player (privileged and/or dominated): and they are not unidirectional/univocal: “they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, for struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations” (p.26). Knowledge of these dispositions, maneuvers, tactics, techniques, and functionings becomes power-knowledge; knowing how to play the game to one’s advantage. As Foucault (1979: 28) suggested:

“It is not the activity of the subject of knowledge that produces a corpus of knowledge, useful or restraint to power, but power-knowledge, the processes and struggles that traverse it and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge.”

In learning to tell, to listen, and to respond, we ultimately began to uncover significant consequences particularly associated with issues of power. Anne provided the initial comments that began this discussion. She stated:

“I think the picture of the sport manager is changing too. As short a time as I’ve been in this, it’s changing our relationships too. I find what used to be decisions of the Chief Executive are no longer decisions exclusively of the boss”.

David took the discussion further and suggested the power dynamics had also changed. He commented:

“Sometimes that hits you in the face. When somebody comes and says, ‘Is it all right if I do this?’ I’ve had that experience where I think, ‘Why are they asking me that?’ Do they feel that they need my approval? Because you’re hoping that you’ve created a situation where they feel more independent. But sometimes that question comes and hits you every now and again. It makes you stop in your tracks and think”.

Paul commented on his experience as a ‘boss’:

“Some people see you as the boss. The “boss”, a ubiquitous term that is heard far too often and in ways that are often uncomplimentary. One of the hardest things that I’ve coped with is just being willing to admit that I don’t know or don’t have a skill in that area. Yet, I think that has been a very freeing thing for staff, because it has given them freedom to not know everything in all areas”.

Anne spoke for the whole group when she stated:

“Whether we realize it or not our experience and role give us certain power in our organization that we are not always aware of and that power can work for and against us”.

David agreed and added:

“I think because of our role we have certain knowledge which is not available to others in our organizations which reinforces our power”.

The group accepted however, that despite their positions and experiences justifying the power they held within their organizations, the issue of accountability was a consequence of having power.

Accountability

A constant theme in our series of conversations was the theme of accountability. Accountability was central to the way each participant structured their understanding of their jobs. In its simplest form accountability was seen as a relationship in which people were required to explain and take responsibility for their actions.

As Anne indicated:

“Accountability is about accepting responsibility for acting responsibly”.

Steve added:

“Accountability provides for an account of efficiency and effectiveness of management”.

David recalled a definition of managerial accountability from his Master of Business Administration (MBA) studies program. He commented that:

“Accountability defined within a managerial model requires those with delegated authority to be answerable for producing outputs or the use of resources to achieve certain outcomes”.

David added that managerial accountability is about the:

“... nuts and bolts of sports administration like delivering the budget and developing a strategic plan”.

Each of us agreed that often the sports administrators become the “meat in the sandwich” or the “sacrificial lamb” for decisions that can be judged with expediency of hindsight, as “not the best option”.

Discussions indicated an understanding that accountability also involved professional and personal accountability. With respect to professional accountability David suggested:

“Professional accountability invokes the sense of duty we have as sports administrators”.

Christine added:

“It’s not our responsibility to ASSA [Australian Society of Sports Administrators] which I see as meaningless but to the professionalism we have amongst ourselves”.

This comment evoked a consensus about personal accountability. As Steve suggested:

“Personal accountability is based upon my belief that I respect the rights of others and act in a way that doesn’t unduly affect others’ lives”

Christine added:

“It may be a little passé in today’s business world but I believe that there is a strong need for effective sports administrators to adhere to their own set of moral and ethical values”.

Each of us agreed that accountability is an intersection of managerial, personal and professional demands. Another constant theme of discussions within the group was the “demands of the job”.

Demands of the job

The demands on sport managers have traditionally been very high (Shilbury, 2001; Smith & Stewart, 1999). In an era that has now embraced a more professional approach to the management of sport organizations volunteers are still a vital component of the human resource pool (Cuskelly, 1995). However, the introduction of paid professionals into the field has created

a situation where many club members believe paid staff should be responsible for nearly all the operational facets of the organizations. These demands are reflected in the comments of Anne, who stated:

“It’s hard, because we have so much to do. It’s a very demanding job”.

Christine supported this statement and noted that:

“There are so many evening commitments that are related to the job. You’re going back in the evening for this, that, and the other thing”.

Paul added:

“We are ‘meetinged’ (*sic*) to death! We’re sitting on committees that basically do nothing but because it’s related to the sport, and you are paid, you must go”.

Anne was concerned about the demands of the job on her health. She stated:

“How do you take care of yourself in that situation? Do you say, ‘I’m not going in till noon tomorrow?’”

Michael concurred but was more concerned about the perceptions of others if he was not the first to arrive at work. He elaborated:

“I came in at 2.05 p.m., after several meetings consecutively and one assistant said to me, ‘Good morning! Where have you been? You sure have started your day late’. I said, ‘Maybe I was not here, but I can assure you I started my day earlier than you did’.

Joan joined in with her views:

“But the workaholic’s attitude is that the best person is the one that comes in at six in the morning and stays until ten at night. Now, that’s your best administrator, because they’re so dedicated. But they’re not alive!”

Steve continued the discussion, and stated:

“Often you don’t even know who you are, know what you feel, what you care about, or even if you had a shower in the morning. I think you get to the point where you don’t even know where you are. Those sixty – or – seventy hour weeks there, I think, ‘Who am I? What am I doing in this job?’”

These concerns in some ways were accepted by the group as being similar to those of individuals in other professions. However, the process of discussing these concerns, according to the group, was a positive one. In many ways it was seen as a form of professional development

Professional development

A key factor in this project was to foster ongoing professional development. In many

ways our group had committed to a public discourse in order to evolve professionally. Christine talked about her experience in the group:

“To be able to speak to a group who have common experiences, to hear how other people handle things, and to hear that you’re not the only one handling issues, has been a real bonus”.

Instead of ignoring the difficult or uncomfortable issues, we tried to understand, speak the unspeakable and reveal ourselves fully. Guided by Schon’s (1983; 1991) work on the reflective practitioner and acknowledging work by Stacey (1992) with regard to managing ambiguity and the unknowable, we were prepared to help ourselves to create maps from which to act. Within the group, the continuous interaction among the people created a certain amount of coherence and self-organizing (Stacey, 1992). Often what our conversations did help create were the boundaries that provide a field for the reciprocal processes of understanding and meaning making. As we continuously reflected, inquired, and summarized, we were more able to facilitate the construction of meaning among ourselves.

The lexicon of leaders in a professional development relationship bears examination. Our approach required enabling, connecting structures that ensured a level of trust. There had to be an environment of safety so that we could feel safe enough to “break set with old ideas” and develop a meaningful dialogue that would uncover and provide a mechanism for addressing difficult topics. Paul’s comments are an example of how this process allowed members of the group to think about how they dealt with particular issues. He stated:

“The learning that’s happening through the dialogue, conversations, has really changed things, changed the way I think about situations and made me really rethink some of my practices”.

Consequently, this process allowed the group to come to grips with the variety of ways people address similar problems. In essence they established new “ways of knowing”.

Ways of knowing

Many of the participants have one or two confidants with whom they meet on a regular basis. It is with these people and often behind closed doors that the secret stories are told. They also gather together at a workplace meeting and management retreats. Stories in

front of their colleagues are often full of descriptions of the things they are doing. Tales of how they managed are often the substance of these stories. While their stories are not always the same stories they resonate in similar ways. Too much to do, not enough time to do it, one more thing to do, the same old stories are commonly heard.

Our need to tell stories to help create meaning was as strong as our need to reflect on actions taken and things thought. Often at the beginning of a group development members of a group aren’t always clear as to why they are assembling. However, when we inquired of the different participants what their thoughts were when they were first asked to join the research group, their responses were similar. Anne’s comments best reflected the general consensus:

“... to have a purposeful conversation about our work, about who we are and what we are and what it means to be in this role of sport manager. I know I’ve learned a lot of things from the other people – there were so many gifts around the table, and we were so different”.

We were a privileged group to be able to learn not only from our own experiences but also from those of the people around us. We had a capacity for building on each other’s stories and not closing down when uncomfortable issues surfaced. We sustained each other and gained glimpses of how we might do our work differently. The diversity of the people added an important dimension. The fact that we were open to continuous learning was one of the many significant reasons we succeeded. As we worked together as a group, our learning processes were quite basic but important. Probably the most significant was the realization that there was no magic truth of sport managers which to seek.

The research group drew on their memories and experiences, looking and seeing, listening and hearing, supporting and caring. We tinkered with ideas and listened to each other, and tried to open ourselves to the possibilities of the moment. It soon became clear that while new ideas and actions would likely emerge in the messiness and discomfort, we would not discover the “truth and only the truth”. This seeming lack of direction, even incoherence, sometimes created frustration not only with the process but also with the participants. Paul spoke about this when he shared his early concerns that he wasn’t always comfortable

with people's remarks. He talked specifically about his feelings of frustration:

"Some [participants] people tend to want to dominate, and I don't know that it's conscious, because they've had some really good ideas, and I think they want to share them".

In time, however, these frustrations dissipated and we formed a collective bond and spirit that fostered professional growth and an understanding about the issues that we confronted as sport managers.

Collegiality

An important act of learning the group gained was that the more we linked together, the greater our knowledge expanded and we thrived. Each time that we met, we engaged at a different level. Growing together and merging our ideas into a new collectiveness taught us the importance of co-laboring and being partners in this process. We became more intense knowers of ourselves, of one another and of our work in sport management. Telling and retelling stories where both the researchers' and the participants' voices were heard, formed the collaborative effect of our narrative inquiry. From our conversations together, we not only learned facts, but also trust, confidence, and the importance of relationships in human interactions. Christine was reflective in her remarks:

"Life is lonely at the top". "To be able to speak to a group of people who have common experiences has been a real bonus, to hear how other people handle things, and to hear that you're not the only one handling them is helpful. When I heard somebody say that, I thought, 'Oh my God! "Somebody understands that, somebody else is having that experience'. I think in almost every experience we have, we question ourselves. 'Did I handle this right? Are my values in place?' So for me, that has been one of the most important things – the collegiality and then the opportunity to see and observe practice."

In many ways the group also learned how to address issues from a different perspective. Factors that previously were considered not important were now seen as relevant to solving particular problems, as David commented:

"I have been able to recognize that other influences that I previously considered unimportant could very well be the major cause of the problem. I have been able to extend the knowledge base on what I need to look at before I attempt to address a particular concern".

In a sense the group has taken their learning to a new level. They were beginning to "reflect on things unseen".

Critical reflection

As a group we learned about things we weren't looking for, influences and behaviors we hadn't anticipated. Looking back, our work together was an act of faith, and as such, we hoped for something unseen but helpful to use. This is evidenced by David's words:

"The learning that's happened through the dialogue, the conversations, has really changed things, changed the way I think about situations and made me really rethink some of my practices. After the first meeting with the people, I realized: Here are some people I can learn from! New level of thinking - right?"

We became more conscious participants willing to accept and notice things we didn't know would be important. As Steve put it:

"Another learning for me was the importance of my own professional development and that it's a constant: I have always to be looking at that and refining and refocusing what I do to make me a better sport administrator. I really enjoyed the honesty, when people said, 'I'm having a problem with this. Can we brainstorm some strategies? I really appreciated that, because then that made me think, okay, now, this is my situation or could be my situation. What can I do or could I do? Who can I speak to or could I speak to? What advice can I get from people or could I get from people?"

From a researcher's perspective it was very pleasing to hear that the group evolved professionally from the interaction that took place. It was our hope that this would occur but we also wanted to be able to add to this learning experience. At the same time, however, we did not want to control the agenda. We wanted the group to establish its own direction, to formulate a learning curve that they controlled. As a result, we had to come to grips with the fact that as researchers we were also participants who could influence the direction and outcomes of our discussions.

Conclusion

This paper, in part, has been a plea for clarity in the use of narrative in our profession. Until recently, quantitative research has been the dominant research paradigm in sport studies and sports management areas. Throughout this paper the writers have argued that qualitative

research methods such as 'story', 'narrative' and 'voice' can provide rich descriptions of the sport environment and at the same time provide an alternative to the positivistic approach. In particular, Bruner (1986; 1991) argues that "narrative is a useful a way of approaching the world of sport research". We understand that the most important aspects of this paper are to develop interest in the qualitative research paradigm but we are also cognizant of the strength of the combination of research methods.

As previously mentioned, the researchers conducted group meetings with 7 sport managers (4 male and 3 female) over a period of 10 months. These series of narrative events addressed the overriding issues that the participating sport managers believed provided a unique insight into their everyday lives and the results highlighted some of the major difficulties in their reasoning and provided areas of concern which could be utilized in further research studies. These issues centred on:

- (1) experience and power,
- (2) accountability;
- (3) demands of the job;
- (4) professional development;
- (5) ways of knowing;
- (6) collegiality; and
- (7) critical reflection.

By examining how sport managers deal with their experiences and how their involvement in their sport organization has created a dominant set of meanings about what constitutes sport management practice, this paper has indicated how critical reflection through the sharing of lived experiences can be beneficial to the development of sport management knowledge. Therefore we argue that the use of critical reflection and narrative are strong paradigms which could be utilized together to produce research previously not encountered in our fields of expertise. As the data has illustrated, not all sport managers have the ability to analyze their own practice, however, it has argued that critical reflection is a vital component of sport management practice. Again we reiterate the importance of the combination of research paradigms. Moreover, it is suggested the sharing of narratives help shape and frame the unique experiences of sport managers and assist them ultimately in understanding the complex nature of the practitioner's world. Finally, we argue that this process of writing, sharing, reflection and analysis should lead to improved sport management practice and improved leadership qualities.

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Correspondence to:

Prof. Keith Gilbert, PhD

Bowater School of Management and Marketing

Faculty of Business and Law Deakin University

Melbourne Campus, Burwood

221 Burwood Highway

Melbourne, 3125 Australia

Phone: +61 (03) 92 41 72 84

Fax: +61 (03) 92 51 70 83

E-mail: keith.gilbert@deakin.edu.au

MENADŽMENT SPORTA: PRIPOVIJEDANJEM OSMIŠLJENA DJELATNOST MENADŽERA

Sažetak

Članak je pokušaj da se istraži pripovijedanje sportskih upravitelja (menadžera) u Australiji. Sastajali smo se jednom mjesečno tijekom dužeg razdoblja kako bismo razmjenjivali svoje ideje o sportu. Tijekom tih sastanaka otkrili smo neke skrivene probleme i teškoće s kojima se svakodnevno moraju nositi sportski upravitelji, a onda smo postupno došli i do nekih zaključaka o težini zadataka koje valja obaviti. U članku smo definirali epistemologiju pripovijedanja kako bismo pokazali da pripovijedanje valja promatrati kao izvorno istraživačko oruđe znanstvenika iz područja sportskog menadžmenta, a ne kao još jednu "kvalitativnu paradigmu" koju je bolje ignorirati. Kao što raspravljamo u članku, narativni pristup sportskom menadžmentu dopušta istraživačima da povežu teoriju s iskustvom i uspostave odnos između svakodnevne prakse menadžera i njihovog znanja. Prihvatimo li takav pristup pripovijedanju, otvorit će nam se sasvim nov pogled na organizaciju sporta i pojedince koji su zaduženi za njeno učinkovito funkcioniranje. Stoga termin pripovijedanje, naracija, premda pripada govoru i premda je neformalan diskurs, odražava profesionalan i konceptualan proces kojim pojedinci iznose svoje osobne pripovijesti. Vrlo brzo smo otkrili da je prava svrha pripovijedanja obuhvatiti promišljanje ili teorijsku sastavnicu. Pripovijesti ne postoje, kako piše Bruner (1991): "u nekom stvarnom svijetu, gdje strpljivo i vječno čekaju da bi se vjerodostojno odrazile u tekstu. Čin stvaranja, oblikovanja naracije puno je više od pukog biranja, izvlačenja događaja iz stvarnosti, sjećanja ili mašte i od njihova slaganja nekim prikladnim redoslijedom. Događaji zapravo sami po sebi moraju tvoriti samo pripovijedanje."(str. 8)

Tako je pripovijedanje, naracija reflektivna, misaona praksa, a priča nije. Pripovjedač automatski dobiva moć da nadzire materijal koji predstavlja, moć koja izvire iz položaja organizatora da bi se pretočila u konačnu pripovijest. U našem druženju s upraviteljima, menadžerima impresioniralo nas koliko su se trudi-

li i koliko su vremena uložili da bi dali značnije svome glasu. Drugim riječima, složili smo se da termin "glas" sa sobom nesvjesno nosi pretpostavku da je grupa prirodno autentična te da taj moćan medij dopušta sudionicima da tijekom istraživanja daju glas svojim problemima i brigama. Jer, kako kaže Ruddick (1993) o poimanju glasova: "koji su emocionalno više bestjelesni, više uznemirujući. Na jednoj razini mogu predstavljati pojedince ili skupine kojima je zaničevano pravo da sudjeluju ili ih se jednostavno nije slušalo."(str. 8)

Također smo dali pregled ideja koje se bave prisjećanjem (reminiscencijama) i istinitošću naracijskog istraživanja te smo nakon zapisivanja pripovijedanja, promišljanja i ponovnog zapisivanja zaključili da treba pažljivo istraživati i ispitivati kako bi se osiguralo učinkovito pokrivanje oba područja.

Nekoliko se tema tijekom istraživanja stalno pojavljivalo: iskustvo, odgovornost, zahtjevi položaja, profesionalni razvoj, radne skupine, kolektivni duh i istraživač kao radnik na svome radnom mjestu. To su vrlo važna pitanja koja su menadžere kao skupinu zabrinjavala, a i nas istraživače su zanimala jer o njima prije istraživanja, tj. naših pripovjedačkih seansi nismo znali ništa. Kako se menadžeri nose s nepredvidljivošću života te kako rješavaju probleme s kojima se susreću? Svi odgovori su u naraciji. Njihove pripovijesti su pokazale kako je naracija vrlo snažna metoda koja omogućuje da se čuje kolektivni glas budući da većina menadžera zapravo radi u izolaciji i da, u biti, nemaju s kime podijeliti svoje ideje jer moraju paziti (čak se i boje) da bi drugi sportski kolektivi mogli iskoristiti njihove ideje.

Naracijsko istraživanje omogućilo nam je da razumijemo i druge načine upoznavanja svijeta menadžera koji se svakodnevno bave problemima sporta. Nadamo se da će ovo istraživanje potaknuti i istraživače, ali i sve sudionike u sportu da razgovaraju, razmjenjuju ideje, umjesto da rade u samoći. Tako bi se mogle dobiti nove spoznaje o praksi sportskih menadžera.