

1-1-2016

Welcome to the Arena: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Power and Politics in Sport

Marshall J. Magnusen

Samuel Y. Todd

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>

Recommended Citation

Magnusen, Marshall J. and Todd, Samuel Y. (2016) "Welcome to the Arena: An Introduction to the Special Issue on Power and Politics in Sport," *Journal of Applied Sport Management*: Vol. 8 : Iss. 3.

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm/vol8/iss3/13>

This article is brought to you freely and openly by Volunteer, Open-access, Library-hosted Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Sport Management* by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>.

Welcome to the Arena

An Introduction to the Special Issue on Power and Politics in Sport

Marshall J. Magnusen and Samuel Y. Todd

Organizational politics is about influence and those who influence. From Fortune 500 companies to startups and from high school athletic departments to professional sport organizations, power and organizational politics are an entrenched component of nearly all work settings. Because they are social systems, organizations tend to be political as members compete for limited resources in order to accomplish work objectives and get ahead. As such, organizational members who have an ability to influence others in order to achieve a desired objective are said to have “political skill.” This ability, scholars note, takes several dimensions: (1) social astuteness: interpreting social situations and having the savvy to generate an effective response, (2) interpersonal influence: developing good rapport with people to build trust, (3) networking ability: developing connections with influential people for future gain, and (4) apparent sincerity: showing, or appearing to show genuine interest in others.

Very little interest has been given thus far to exploring how these dimensions operate in the sport industry, though it would seem fertile ground, especially in the sub-segments of the industry that contain heightened elements of fan or organizational identification, social calls for justice, and high stakes/outcomes. The goal of this special issue is to act as a catalyst by providing a platform for the examination of various aspects of power, politics, and social influence processes in sport organizations from a management research perspective, and therefore to foster advancement in these areas awareness, investigation, and sport industry-specific managerial applications.

Two of the most prolific scholars on organizational politics and political behavior are Drs. Gerald R. Ferris and Pamela L. Perrewé. Dr. Ferris is the Francis

Marshall J. Magnusen is an assistant professor in the School of Education at Baylor University. **Samuel Y. Todd** is a professor in the School of Health and Kinesiology at Georgia Southern University.

Please send correspondence to Marshall Magnusen, marshall_magnusen@baylor.edu

Eppes Professor of Management, professor of psychology, and professor of sport management at the Florida State University. He is the author of numerous articles published in such scholarly journals as the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Personnel Psychology*, *Academy of Management Journal*, and *Academy of Management Review*. Ferris has authored or edited a number of books, including *Political Skill at Work*, which he coauthored with Perrewé, the *Handbook of Human Resource Management*, and *Strategy and Human Resources Management*. Dr. Perrewé is the Haywood and Betty Taylor Eminent Scholar of Business Administration, professor of sport management, and distinguished research professor at the Florida State University. She has published over 40 books and book chapters and over 110 research articles in journals such as *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, and *Personnel Psychology*.

In this special issue, Perrewé and Ferris introduce and offer an overview of political skill and how it can be used in sport management research. Though organizational politics and social effectiveness skills have long been discussed in the organizational sciences, it was not until more recently that explicit efforts were undertaken by scholars to take political skill from conceptualization to instrument development. Ferris and colleagues (1999) presented a paper at the 59th annual meeting of the Academy of Management which offered an initial attempt to measure political skill. This effort, which offered a concise, unidimensional measure of political skill, helped lay the foundation for the 18-item, multidimensional measure of political skill (now referred to as the Political Skill Inventory (PSI)) developed by Ferris et al. (2005). The PSI consists of social astuteness, interpersonal influence, networking ability, and apparent sincerity dimensions, and has been utilized in a multitude of studies since it was published in mid-2000.

Political skill has been shown to have direct effects on numerous work outcomes, including job satisfaction, work performance, and career success (Munyon, Summers, Thompson, & Ferris, 2015; Todd, Harris, Harris, & Wheeler, 2009). Additionally, political skill acts as a moderator of important work relationships, such as the relationship between a subordinate and a supervisor (Harris, Kacmar, Zivnuska, & Shaw, 2007). Further, as Perrewé and Ferris note in their article, the realm of sport is ripe for investigating political skill. Several studies (e.g., Magnusen, Kim, & Perrewé, 2014; Magnusen, Kim, Perrewé, & Ferris, 2014; Treadway, Adams, Hanes, Perrewé, Magnusen, & Ferris, 2014) already have explored how political skill may help NCAA Division I coaches be more effective recruiters. However, considering the vastness of the global sport marketplace and the intense competition for resources and goal attainment across all sectors of the sport industry, the study of organizational politics, power, and political skill is relevant outside the realm of intercollegiate athletics as well.

A collection of original conceptual and empirical articles examine political skill in the context of sport. Magnusen and Kim as well as Brandon-Lai, Armstrong, and Bunds explore sport management student internships and the role of

political skill. Both studies acknowledge the importance of internships to sport management students. However, the former pair of scholars empirically examine political skill in an internship context whereas the latter group of researchers conceptualize the relationships between internship development experiences, internship quality, and political skill. Though political skill has been linked to career success (Todd et al., 2009), how exactly political skill leads to career success has received inadequate attention. Political skill is a social effectiveness capability that is rendered meaningless unless politically skilled individuals have outlets for it. Accordingly, Magnusen and Kim, using a sample of sport management interns, show how the connection between an intern and his/her supervisor may mediate the relationship between intern political skill and the career-related outcomes of career satisfaction, perceived external marketability, life satisfaction, and perceived work effectiveness.

The study by Brandon-Lai et al. explores sport management internships and how, when students determine the value of their internship experiences, they might consider including the extent to which they become more politically skilled. The researchers developed a conceptual model of the moderating effect of internship quality on the relationship between internship developmental experiences and political skill. Internships are often spoken about in terms of networking, future job placement, and the development of job-specific skills. Regrettably, the development of social effectiveness competencies such as political skill tend to get left out of internship experience conversations even though such competences encapsulate the type of professional growth that interns need to develop and that many internships claim to deliver. In view of that, a key contribution of the research piece by Brandon-Lai et al. is that it offers a different take on how we, as sport educators and professionals, should be structuring as well as evaluating the effectiveness of sport management students' internship experiences.

Next, in a research article by Kim, Wells, and Kim, the authors looked at reputation, political skill, and leader effectiveness. Several sport studies (Magnusen, Mondello, Kim, & Ferris, 2011; Treadway et al., 2014) have sought to better understand how political skill and reputation can improve the ability of NCAA Division I coaches to attract and sign highly-rated athletes. The current study by Kim et al. expands on this line of scholarship by investigating how coach (leader) reputation may mediate the relationship between political skill and leader effectiveness, which was operationalized in terms of team- and leader-unit performance. Political skill not only may help coaches be more successful recruiters but, as was found by Kim et al., the social effectiveness competency may help coaches better leverage reputation characteristics to achieve enhanced support amongst their assistant coaches and achieve greater success as the leader of a sport team.

Finally, Ellen examines the concept of political support with a case study of Doug Williams's termination from the Grambling State University football program. Ellen's case study introduces an intriguing concept that has gained increased

attention in the organizational behavior sciences over the past decade but only rarely, with the exceptions of news stories and popular press books, has it been formally discussed in the sport management literature. Political support represents “leaders’ tactical or strategic use of power or influence to provide for, advocate for, or otherwise aid followers by attempting to alter the distribution of advantages within the organization in followers’ favor” (Ellen, 2014, p. 893). Leaders often have expectations to provide for their followers. Coaches, for example, may be expected to both provide for their players as well as their coaching staff. If the formal, organizationally specified means for providing are unavailable, then leaders may use their personal networks, power, and influence to sidestep organizational bureaucracy and attain the desired resources. Ellen introduces and explains the concept of political support to sport audiences via a relatable sport-based case study and a framework that illustrates how, within highly political sport environments, some leaders may be better able to leverage their social capital to offer support for their follower via political behaviors.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to *Journal of Applied Sport Management* former editor, Dr. Damon P.S. Andrew, for believing in the importance of research on organizational politics and making the special issue possible. Additionally, we offer our thanks to Dr. Matt Walker, editor of the *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, for his patience and guidance in navigating us through the guest editor process. Winston Churchill, the prime minister of the United Kingdom during the mid-1900s, once remarked that you get politics when you mix people and power. Power, politics, and political behavior are all elements that are present in sport from the hallways of college athletic departments to the world stage of the Olympics. It was a privilege and honor for us to serve as guest editors for this special issue, which represents one of the first issues in sport to be wholly devoted to the study of organizational politics and political behavior in sport.

Although organizational politics may aggravate us, they also can serve us as we seek to gain the information and resources needed to accomplish individual and organizational goals (Mintzberg, 1985). The systematic elimination of politics from organizations is neither possible nor grounded in sound interpretation of basic social dynamics (Buchanan, 2008). Politics are part of sport organizations just as they are part of non-sport organizations, and organizational survival often requires a bit of a political act (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980; Ferris et al., 2005). Unfortunately, misconceptions about the phenomenon (e.g., automatically equating politics with unfairness) combined with a “politics doesn’t happen here” mentality amongst many sport professionals and even academics has constrained the growth and development of this important area of scholarship. Admittedly, politics can be a “messy topic to research” (Frost, 1989, p. 13), but it is not a topic that is impossible to research. We hope that this collection of articles elevates awareness, spurs dialogue, and encourages quality scholarship on power and politics in the diverse and expansive arena that is sport.

References

- Bacharach, S., & Lawler, E. (1980). *Power and politics in organizations*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Buchanan, D. (2008). You stab my back, I'll stab yours: Management experience and perceptions of organizational political behaviour. *British Journal of Management*, 19, 49-64.
- Ellen, B. P., III (2014). Considering the positive possibilities of leader political behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35, 892-896.
- Ferris, G. R., Berkson, H. M., Kaplan, D. M., Gilmore, D. C., Buckley, M. R., Hochwarter, W. A., & Witt, L. A. (1999). *Development and initial validation of the political skill inventory*. Paper presented at the 59th annual national meeting of the Academy of Management, Chicago.
- Ferris, G., Treadway, D., Kolodinsky, R., Hochwarter, W., Kacmar, C., Douglas, C., & Frink, D. (2005). Development and validation of the political skill inventory. *Journal of Management*, 31, 126-152.
- Frost, P. (1989). The role of organizational power and politics in human resources management. In A. Nedd, G. Ferris, & K. Rowland (Eds.), *International human resources management, Supplement Volume 1, Research in personnel and human resources management* (pp. 1-21). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Magnusen, M. J., Kim, Y. K., & Perrewé, P. L. (2014). Gaining a competitive edge when recruiting student-athletes: The role of political skill. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 9, 1291-1310.
- Magnusen, M. J., Kim, Y. K., Perrewé, P. L., & Ferris, G. R. (2014). A critical review and synthesis of student-athlete college choice factors: Recruiting effectiveness in NCAA sports. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*, 9, 1287-1288.
- Magnusen, M. J., Mondello, M., Kim, Y. K., & Ferris, G. R. (2011). Roles of recruiter political skill, influence strategy, and organization reputation in recruitment effectiveness in college sports. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, 53, 687-700.
- Mintzberg, H. (1985). The organization as political arena. *Journal of Management Studies*, 22, 133-154.
- Munyon, T. P., Summers, J. K., Thompson, K. M., & Ferris, G. R. (2015). Political skill and work outcomes: A theoretical extension, meta-analytic investigation, and agenda for the future. *Personnel Psychology*, 68, 143-184.
- Todd, S. Y., Harris, K. J., Hrris, R. B., & Wheeler, A. R. (2009). Career success implications of political skill. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 149, 179-204.
- Treadway, D. C., Adams, G., Hanes, T. J., Perrewé, P. L., Magnusen, M. J., & Ferris, G. R. (2014). The roles of recruiter political skill and performance resource leveraging in NCAA football recruitment effectiveness. *Journal of Management*, 40, 1607-1626.