

Toward the Bright Side: A Multidisciplinary Approach

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Abstract

Introduction

Numerous professional, amateur, and university-based sport organizations in the United States recently have come under severe criticism due to revelations of pervasive unethical and illegal behavior. In many of these cases responsibility was attributed to individual managers, coaches, trainers, and players. However, unethical and illegal behavior may have been encouraged, if not engendered, by the culture and management of the sport organization.

By using a systems approach to explore, analyze, and address unethical behavior, a more comprehensive understanding of individual and patterned social deviance within sport organizations may be facilitated (Santomier, et al., 1980). According to Quinn, Anderson, and Finkelstein (1996), a systems understanding is an extraordinary value component of professional intellect and represents an understanding of the network of cause-and-effect relationships underlying complex problems.

As an educational or professional development tool, the problem-based learning (PBL) model provokes a systems approach, which further facilitates issue identification and problem solving. The process of analyzing ethical issues, such as the use of banned substances, within a problem-based learning (PBL) model also may promote the development of ethical dialogue. In addition, it may encourage the acquisition of multidisciplinary knowledge (Frank, 2005) and an enhanced appreciation of ethics (Koh, Khoo, Wong, & Koh, 2008). According to a recently completed meta-analysis by Koh et al. (2008), PBL is empirically associated with promoting appreciation of legal and ethical aspects of health care in medical students. Results of recent applications of the PBL model support its ability to generalize to other professional groups, such as sport management professionals.

It is the purpose of this presentation to:

- 1) explain, provide evidence for, and demonstrate how PBL can be used effectively to manage ethical issues in sport,
- 2) provide guidance for sport management educators interested in integrating the PBL method within sport management professional programs, and
- 3) demonstrate how a PBL focus on ethical issues can elicit rich interdisciplinary dialogue among sport management educators and students.

Methods

A meta-analysis of literature related to deviant and unethical behavior in sport was conducted. Recurring themes and concepts (e.g., socialization via sport, economic incentives, modeling, unethical behavior in other realms-such as business) were identified as target issues to be explored in the PBL format. An amalgam of five articles (Anonymous, 2005, Leonhardt, 2005, Schmidt & Swartz, 2008, Vecsey, 2008, Wilson, 2008) concerning the use of banned substances, specifically the use of steroids in U.S. professional baseball, was used in PBL progressive disclosure format to provoke students to generate questions related to framework issues and to explore these issues from psychological, sociological, economic, health, legal, organizational, management, moral development, international, political, and media dimensions.

Results and Discussion/Implications

The concepts of systems thinking, multidisciplinary inquiry, and PBL relative to their importance for promoting ethical inquiry and dialogue were presented. Key conceptual issues related specifically to the use of steroids and other banned performance enhancing drugs and their implications for sport managers taking a systems approach to addressing those issues were discussed. An actual sport specific problem focused on the issue of the use of steroids and other banned performance enhancing drugs was used to demonstrate how educators can use complex sport-based problems in a PBL format to promote appreciation of ethical aspects of sport, and to develop more disciplined and informed ethical dialogue among sport management professionals.

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