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Corruption in sport: understanding the complexity of corruption

Lisa A. Kihl^a, James Skinner^b and Terry Engelberg^c

^aUniversity of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, USA; ^bLoughborough University, London, UK; ^cJames Cook University, Cairns, Australia

Sport corruption (in all of its forms and degrees) is a global phenomenon that has, and continues to, threaten the integrity of the sport industry, posing a major challenge for sport managers. Over the past decade, the sport industry has experienced multiple forms of corruption (e.g. fraud, bribery, and institutional) that have ranged in extent (e.g. individual to systematic), occurred in varying contexts (non-profit, for profit, sports, sport events, governance, and international and online betting), and resulted in a multitude of consequences (sanctions, financial costs, diminished reputations, employee turnover, and increased oversight). International agencies (e.g. Transparency International & International Centre for Sport Security (ICSS)), inter-governmental agencies (Council of Europe and Interpol Integrity in Sport Unit), and sport governing bodies (IOC, FIFA, and ICC) have assembled to discuss, carry out research, and implement initiatives to better understand the nature of sport corruption, its causes, consequences, and develop reform initiatives. Examples include ICSS 2014 *Sport Integrity Conference*, IOC's 2014 *Integrity Betting Intelligence System*, and 2012 Institute of International and Strategy's study *Sports betting and corruption: How to preserve the integrity of sport*. These efforts and many more speak to the multidimensional nature of corruption and its respective issues possessing significant challenges for sport management scholars and practitioners in upholding the integrity of sport worldwide.

The complexity and multidimensional nature of corruption has been well established in the business, management, politics, economics, and sociology literature (e.g. Andvig & Fjeldstad, 2001; Bac, 1998; Luo, 2004). Discussions include conceptualizing and defining corruption which has influenced the study and measurement of the phenomenon. Within a variety of contexts, corruption's multiple forms, different causes and consequences, and approaches to reform have also been examined through macro-, microeconomic-, and micro-level of analysis. Several theoretical approaches have been used to inform these analyses including principal-agency theory (e.g. Rose-Ackerman, 1978), organizational perspective model (e.g. Luo, 2004), social exchange theory (e.g. Khatri, Tsang, & Begley, 2006), systems theory (e.g. Brass, Butterfield, & Skaggs, 1998) organizational culture (e.g. Ashforth & Anand, 2003), and governance and transparency (e.g. Grant & Keohane, 2005). As such, there exists at present a solid theoretical base from which to move forward the study of corruption in sport specifically.

Recently, sport management scholars have joined academic conversations about corruption. An emerging body of literature has focused mainly on examining specific types of corruption (e.g. doping, match fixing, academic fraud, and illegal gambling), in particular cases or sports (their causes and consequences) (e.g. Aquilina & Chetcuti, 2014; Forrest, 2012; Hill, 2009, 2010; Kihl & Richardson, 2009; Mazanov, Lo Tenero, Connor, & Sharpe, 2012; Numerato, 2015; Spapens & Olfers, 2015) and reform strategies (e.g. Chappelet, 2015; Geeraert & Drieskens, 2015; Mason, Thibault, & Misener, 2006; Pielke, 2013; Serby, 2015). The growing work on corruption in sport has become more theoretically robust by drawing from different approaches such as agency theory (e.g. Mason et al., 2006), economics (e.g. Forrest, 2012; Mazanov et al., 2012), accountability (e.g. Pielke, 2013), legal theory (e.g. Serby, 2015), principal-agent theory (e.g. Geeraert & Drieskens, 2015), and methodologies to enhance theory development (e.g. Kihl & Richardson, 2009; Numerato, 2015).

Whilst this body of work has provided a sound starting point in the scholarly understanding of specific types of corruption, its causes, the impact on sport organizations, and approaches to reform, the complex nature of corruption in the sport industry has been largely under-explored and under-theorized. For example, certain forms and types of corruption are unique to the sport industry (e.g. tanking, match fixing, doping, and spot fixing). The causes range from the simple bribe to multinational crime syndicates seeking to manipulate sporting events across the globe. Consequences range from harmful (sanctions, damaged reputations, and loss of sponsorship) to beneficial (stronger fan loyalty and minimal effects on winning, and game attendance). Different reform strategies have been developed such as education programs, governance, policing, regulations, compliance programs, and watch dog groups. Therefore, the global sport industry provides a rich context to substantially contribute to the scholarly discussion about the complexity of corruption in terms of its conceptualization, causes, consequences, and reform.

The aim of this joint special issue is to build on the existing corruption research and increase our understanding of the complexity of corruption within the context of sport. This joint special issue on the complexity of sport corruption empirically and theoretically contributes to the sport management literature by discussing how integrity should be conceptualized in relation to understanding how to tackle sport corruption. As well as developing evidenced-based theoretical models that reflect the complexity of the different causes of sport corruption, in particular, match fixing, and the implications for reform strategies. The empirical and practical implications of these works heightens our understanding of this global phenomenon for both scholars and practitioners as well as sharing insights and determining what management strategies work in combating the global concern for sport corruption.

Conceptualization of integrity and its relation to corruption

In this first paper of the joint special issue, Gardiner, Parry, and Robinson (2017) argues that integrity is an under-theorized concept within what he terms the ‘sports integrity industry’ – the various organizations fighting corruption in sport. He contends that the sports integrity industry hold diverse and incoherent narratives about the conceptualization of integrity that potentially imposes a corporate (i.e. behavioral-based) model of integrity. Focusing on behavioral integrity that aims to eradicate corrupt behaviors,

such as match fixing and doping, results in neglecting other forms of integrity issues within sport organizations (i.e. institutional governance and oversight). The second part of the paper provides an in-depth conceptual analysis of integrity where the philosophical and psychological underpinnings that have informed how businesses, including within the sport industry, understand integrity. Sport managers should therefore be aware of the broader discussions concerning integrity to further develop the sport industry's understanding of the meaning of integrity so as to aptly think about the practice of integrity, its relationship to corruption, and effective sport governance.

Causes of match fixing in European grassroots football

Most research on the causes of match fixing has centered on the European professional football context (e.g. Streppelhoff, 2015) in providing a micro- (i.e. individual) level analysis, which has been under-theorized (Numerato, 2015), and conceptual in nature (e.g. Forrest, 2013). Answering the call for theoretically sound empirical studies that enhance our understanding of how corruption occurs in different contexts, Nowy and Breuer (2017) examined the extent and drivers of match fixing in European grassroots football from an organizational capacities framework. European grassroots clubs from five countries were surveyed where match fixing was found to be a serious problem in grassroots football and instances reflected countries' level of general corruption. Organizational capacity factors contributing to match fixing included larger sized clubs, independent (football only) clubs, clubs with less formalized staff, and recorded lower levels of revenue diversification. Managers of grassroots football clubs should examine their organizational capacities independently and in concert with each other to understand what features of these organizations contribute to match fixing. In particular, managers could enhance their strategic capacity by offering match fixing educational programs that raise awareness about expected codes of conduct, clear definitions of corrupt behaviors, and effective accountability practices.

Causes of match fixing in Taiwanese professional baseball

In this joint special issue, Lee (2017) furthers our understanding of the complexity of corruption by exploring how Confucian cultural factors contribute to cases of match fixing in Taiwanese professional baseball. Specifically using a key concept of Confucianism, Wulun that focuses on social relationships, Lee conducted a qualitative study where they collected documents (court transcripts and media articles) and interviewed syndicates that arranged the match fixing. This included former Taiwanese professional baseball players, coaches, and players' wives, who were asked about their perceptions of how the match fixing occurred. The findings showed match fixing across the cases occurred because of various forms of Wulun cultural social relationships, including obedience to individuals in authority, collective harmony, friendships, and loyalty. This study enhances our understanding of the complex nature of corruption, in particular, how eastern cultural traditions can influence match fixing in Taiwan professional baseball. Thus, reform efforts within an eastern sport context should consider moral and legal education to assist individuals in counteracting the social-cultural influences that lead to match fixing.

The papers within this joint special issue contribute to our academic understanding of the complexity and multidimensional nature of corruption. They clearly demonstrate that corruption has become a significant issue for sport and its many stakeholders. The commercial growth of sport has raised community concern about the seriousness of corruption and the unsatisfactory way it is often handled by sport administrators. In many ways, this growth supports Budd's (2001) contention that 'commercialization can exacerbate scandal and criminality' (p. 2) and that corruption has a long association with sport. Moving forward, we encourage sport management scholars to undertake further research to better understand corruption and its implications. Doping, organized crime, ticket scalping, hazing, fraud, homeland security issues, post-corruption organizational impact, intellectual property issues, money laundering, bribery of officials, corrupt organizational cultures, and the growth and influence of the gambling industry on sport all require robust academic investigation. As the sport sector continues to globalize, and the economic and social consequences of corruption become more pronounced, a failure to address corruption in sport may lead to the public desensitization (Chien, Kelly, & Weeks, 2016) of corrupt practices and a growing cynicism about the place of sport in society.

Disclosure statement

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