Journal of Sport Management, 2005, **19**, 117-142

The Status and Future of Sport Management: A Delphi Study

Carla A. Costa
University of Texas at Austin

Ongoing debates about appropriate foci and growth of sport management research, application, theory, and training are evidence of the field's growing pains. These growing pains also occur in other fields in which they function as a means to expand and elaborate the paradigms through which fields of inquiry grow and mature. In this study, a panel of 17 leading sport management scholars from around the globe responded to three iterations of a Delphi questionnaire probing their views about the status and future of the field. Panelists agreed that stronger research, additional cross-disciplinary research, a stronger link between theory and practice, enhanced infrastructure, and improved doctoral training are desirable objectives. They disagreed, however, about the appropriate academic home for sport management, what constitutes quality research, the roles of qualitative vs. quantitative research, and the relative value of basic vs. applied research. The results show that by actively engaging in debates over the issues identified in this study, sport management scholars can explore new ways of perceiving, thinking, and valuing that could enable proficient and constructive development of the field.

Although the practice of sport management can be traced to at least 11 BCE when Herod the Great, king of Judea, held the Olympics, the field defined itself as a discipline in the middle 1980s as signaled by the founding of the North American Society for Sport Management (NASSM) in 1985 and the Journal of Sport Management in 1987 (Parks & Olafson, 1987). Since then the field has grown exponentially. Other professional associations for scholars have been established in Europe, Asia, and Australia, and an international alliance has been formed. A number of academic peer-reviewed journals have also been established.

As in the case of other emerging fields, evidence of growing pains in sport management is abundant. One of the ongoing concerns relates to the definition of the field itself. Authors offer different perspectives regarding the field's definition and the field's boundaries (cf. Chelladurai, 1992; Hardy, 1987; Mullin, 1980; Parkhouse, 2005; Parks & Quarterman, 2003; Pitts, 2001). The discussion refers to what is unique about the field of sport management, what sets it apart from other academic disciplines, and, therefore, what justifies the development of

The author is with the Sport Management Program, University of Texas at Austin, Bellmont Hall 222 D3700, Austin, TX, 78712

sport management as a distinct discipline. Some authors have questioned whether, in fact, there is anything unique about sport management at all (e.g., Slack, 1998).

There are also research concerns that present challenges to the field. First, there is a debate over whether research conducted in sport management should be mainly practitioner or academically oriented (cf. Boucher, 1998; Chalip, 1997; Cuneen & Parks, 1997; Slack, 1996; Weese, 1995). Second, concerns have been expressed regarding both the quality and quantity of research done in the field (Boucher, 1998; Frisby, 2005; Mahony & Pitts, 1998; Olafson, 1990, 1995; Parks, Shewokis, & Costa, 1999). As a result, these researchers differ in their views regarding the quality, utility, and future directions of sport management.

The differences in perception are both a symptom and an outcome of the fact that sport management is still a young discipline. They represent an exploration of who we are, where we want to go, how we should get there, and where the significant points of disputation reside. These are pivotal realms of self-exploration for a young field that seeks to establish itself and its relevance. Other fields go through similar phases. For instance, researchers in applied sport psychology not long ago were asking the question, "Does the need for applied sport psychology really exist?" (Hale & Danish, 1999, p. 322). Similarly, other research fields such as management (Pfeffer, 1993), marketing (Zyman, 1999), and economics (McCloskey, 1998) periodically engage in debates of inquiry or clarification consequent on divergent perspectives regarding the status, development, and direction of research in their specific fields (e.g., Astley & Van de Ven, 1983; Astley & Zammuto, 1992; DiMaggio, 1995; Elsbach, Sutton, & Whetten, 1999; McKinley, Mone, & Moon, 1999; Ulrich, 2001; Van de Ven, 1989; Whetten, 1989). Their debates are comparable in direction and content to those going on in sport management: conflicting perspectives on the rigor and usefulness of processes by which knowledge is generated; a quest for deeper understanding of theory development and its significance; questioning of the quality and utility of published research; and concerns over the quality of training for future researchers.

In fact, discussions and debates of this kind are useful for the advance of scholarly inquiry because they help to clarify needs, assumptions, possibilities, goals, and directions (Kuhn, 1970; Ulrich, 2001). Indeed, a great deal is now known about the relevant discourse surrounding discussions and debates regarding the status of academic fields. One of the important implications is that academic fields can be furthered through empirical analysis that establishes the parameters of the discussion and its implications. Because discussions and debates about the status, directions, and the future of a field are healthy and help scholarly work to advance, systematic inquiry into the parameters and implications of those discussions and debates can help a field to move itself forward (Capra, 1996).

Analyzing Paradigmatic Discussion and Debate

Capra (1996) defines a paradigm as "a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself" (p. 5). This

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definition is a generalization of Kuhn's (1970) conceptualization of a scientific paradigm. A paradigm, because it can be said to be a lens through which we see the world, has the power to shape, define, and dominate academic discourse through its deeply rooted assumptions and values. We typically inherit these ways of thinking and the values associated with them without fully realizing that we can choose to live by alternative ones. In order for that to occur, there must be a shift in the dominant paradigm, which, in turn, requires the creation of one or more alternative paradigms from which researchers can choose. This enables scientific advance.

As Capra (1996) notes, if a paradigm is to emerge, an expansion of perception, ways of thinking, and values is required. The emergence and persistence of the types of discussions and debates that are ongoing in sport management are useful precisely because they foster and nurture the kinds of expanded perception, thinking, and valuing that are necessary for paradigm development. The advantage of systematically examining the parameters and implications of the discussion and the debate is that doing so clarifies and crystallizes the relevant perceptions, necessary ways of thinking, and utility of particular values.

This is essentially a form of appreciative inquiry, a philosophy of change elaborated by David Cooperrider and his colleagues (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). Elliot (1999) observes, "appreciative inquiry creates a development pathway based on what is right rather than what is wrong" (p. vi). In the case of sport management, appreciative inquiry can enable a more rapid advance of the field by identifying useful pathways for future work. As McGrath and Altman (1966) point out, researchers "must recognize that as 'agents of history,' [they] can alter the present status and future course of [a] field, and set it upon any course [they] collectively . . . deem worthwhile" (p. 93). By examining empirically the discussions and debates about the future of sport management, we can choose the direction (or directions) we deem most worthwhile.

The advance of knowledge is a collective endeavor (Beesley, 2003; Canella & Paetzold, 1994; Chalip, 1985). No individual has a monopoly on or an advantage in knowing what the right considerations for an academic field should be. Consequently, any empirical examination of the present status and future directions for a field must be collective in nature. Several methods are possible, such as content analysis (Weber, 1990), group discussion (Chalip & Switzer, 2005), interview (Weiss, 1994), or survey (Tourangeau, 2004). Each of these techniques, however, suffers from well-known deficiencies when the endeavor is intended to identify both current status and future directions: Content analysis focuses primarily on the present status of the debate rather than future possibilities, at least when current literature is the focus of the analysis; group discussion suffers from status influence and insufficient time to consider alternative points of view, especially when conducted face-to-face; individual interviews do not allow for different ideas to confront one another in the manner enabled by group discussion; and one-time surveys impose the researcher's categories on respondents.

The Delphi technique (Martino, 1983) is designed to overcome these deficiencies. It has proven useful when endeavoring to ascertain experts' views on the

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current status and future directions of a field (e.g., Bijl, 1996). The technique is designed to "elicit and develop individual responses to the problems posed and to enable the experts to refine their views as the group's work progresses in accordance with the assigned tasks" (Ziglio, 1996, p. 9). As applied in the study that follows, the Delphi technique allows leading sport management scholars from around the globe to ascertain their points of agreement about the present status and future needs for sport management as an academic discipline, as well as to clarify their points of disagreement about the field and its future.

Research Questions

On the basis of the foregoing review, the following research questions were derived:

- $\mathbf{Q_1}$ What is the current status of sport management research? More specifically, what are some of the successes that have been achieved by sport management research?
- $\mathbf{Q_2}$ What characterizes an ideal future for sport management research?
- $\mathbf{Q_3}$ What can be done to build and enhance sport management research?
- $\mathbf{Q_4}$ What are the areas of disputation in sport management research?
- $\mathbf{Q_5}$ What paradigms/perspectives are likely to prove useful in moving the field's research forward?

Method

Participants

Because the Delphi technique requires that panelists be experts in the field about which they are being queried (Martino, 1983), it was necessary to identify scholars who could arguably be considered experts. In order to identify experts, a three-step process was used. In Step 1, a panel of three sport management faculty with an aggregate of 36 years of experience in the field consensually identified the five "most established and active research experts in the field." (The author did not participate.) In Step 2, the five researchers identified in Step 1 were contacted. The purposes of this study were explained, and the researchers were asked to name the sport management scholars they felt should be included in the Delphi panel. Four of the five responded, yielding a list of 38 potential panelists. (In order to retain the anonymity and independence required in a Delphi study, the three faculty from Step 1 were excluded from the list, even if mentioned in Step 2.) Ten of the 38 potential panelists were chosen by at least two respondents. They were included in the Delphi panel. This number, however, was deemed inadequate.

Although the optimal size of the Delphi panel depends on the purposes of the study and the expected heterogeneity of the target population (Martino, 1983), empirical examination of the Delphi technique suggests that a linear increase in accuracy occurs as the panel size increases to 11 members (Dalkey, 1969), and that 15–20 members might be optimal (Dalkey, Brown, & Cochran, 1970) unless a

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particularly heterogeneous sample is required. Therefore, in Step 3 the list of 28 scholars who were named only once in Step 2 was submitted to the three sport management faculty who had participated in Step 1. They independently indicated whether each of the 28 should be included on the panel. The seven on whom they agreed were included in the Delphi panel, bringing the panel to a total of 17 expert researchers.

Each of the 17 prospective panel members was then contacted. The purpose of the study was explained, the timetable for the study was presented, and each was asked whether he or she would participate. All agreed to participate. The panel consisted of 11 men and 6 women, and four countries were represented: Eight participants were from the U.S., five were from Canada, two were from Australia, and two were from the U.K. Three panelists were located in business schools; the remaining 14 were located in departments specializing in sport studies (i.e., kinesiology, human kinetics, physical education, etc.). They ranged in age from 32–61 years (M = 46.06, SD = 8.69).

Instruments and Procedure

The Delphi technique consists of iterated rounds of survey questions (Martino, 1983), and each round builds on the preceding round. Findings from each round are fed back to the panelists who then respond. Responses can be both qualitative and quantitative. In successive rounds, panelists are encouraged to explain their responses and to indicate the bases for agreement or disagreement with other panelists. Research indicates that three iterations are typically sufficient to identify points of consensus and systematic points of difference, and that more iterations can bore panelists, thus reducing the validity of findings (Dietz, 1987; Erffmeyer, Erffmeyer, & Lane, 1986). Thus, three rounds were used in this study.

Round 1. The purpose of the first round was to elicit respondents' views about the current status of sport management research, the future of sport management research, and the necessary means to obtain the best future for sport management research. In order to formulate the Delphi questions, the author and two experts in strategic management met to discuss the necessary content and probes. The experts were faculty in a large American university business school who had extensive experience as strategic planning consultants and facilitators. The discussion was guided by principles of strategic management (Bryson, 1995; Coulter, 2002) and appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Quinn, 2000, 2004). The 4-hour discussion was undertaken in three phases. In the first phase, the focus and intent of questions was determined. In the second phase, the appropriate sequence for questions was identified. In the third phase, the language for each question was agreed upon. This yielded an instrument consisting of seven open-ended questions. In order to check the appropriateness of the questions for sport management, the questions were then submitted to the faculty who had participated in Steps 1 and 3 of the selection of Delphi panelists. The faculty endorsed the questions. The resulting seven questions from Round 1 are shown in Appendix A.

The questions were then e-mailed to each of the 17 panelists, who were asked to provide detailed responses to each question. Their responses were collated

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and the content was analyzed independently by four analysts using the procedures described by Weber (1990). The team of analysts consisted of the author, the two experts who had helped to formulate the questions, and one sport management scholar with experience in content analysis (who had not participated in the study so far). Once the independent analyses had been completed, the analysts met to compare the themes each had identified. Initial agreement ranged from 84–92%, depending on the question being analyzed. Disagreements were resolved through consensual discussion. Eleven to 16 themes were identified for each question.

Round 2. In the second round, the thematic areas identified for each question were used to formulate items (cf. Bell, 1997). Likert-type scales were used in Rounds 2 and 3 in order for Delphi Panel members to refine their responses. For Question 1, panelists were asked to rate the importance of each theme on a seven-point scale ranging from *no importance* to *critical importance*. They were then asked to rate the level of success sport management research had attained in addressing each theme. Ratings were on seven-point scales ranging from *not a success* to *critical success*. For Question 2, panelists were asked to rate the impact of each event and trend on a seven-point impact scale ranging from *no impact* to *critical impact*. For Question 3, panelists first rated the importance of each theme using a seven-point scale ranging from *no importance* to *critical importance*. They then specified their estimate of the probability that the ideal quality represented by the theme would occur. Questions 4, 5, 6, and 7 required respondents to rate both the importance and the probability of the quality represented by the question using scales identical to those used for Question 3. For each theme under each question, panelists were also asked to provide explanations of the reasoning behind their ratings.

Round 3. The questionnaire in the final round consisted of the same items that had been asked in Round 2. In addition, panelists were shown the distribution of ratings from Round 2, including modes and frequencies. All qualitative comments and explanations that panelists had given to each theme under each question in Round 2 were provided as well. Panelists were also reminded of their own rating for each item. They were asked to rate each item again, and to respond to panelists' comments from Round 2. Panelists were also instructed that they should explain their rating if they chose a rating that was more than two rating scale points from the mode, and they were instructed to explain any probability rating that deviated by more than 30% from the group mean.

Analysis

The quantitative responses to items under three of the original seven questions in Round 3 were examined to determine panelists' views of the current status of sport management research (Question 1), the ideal future of sport management research (Question 3), and the best tactics to attain the ideal future (Question 5). Items under the remaining four questions were treated as probes intended to elicit additional qualitative comment from panelists. In order to obtain a more detailed understanding of panelists' views about the current status and future of sport

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management research, comments and explanations for all items (from all seven questions) in Rounds 2 and 3 were collated and then content analyzed by the same team that had performed the content analysis on Round 1 data (again using Weber's [1990] protocol).

Results

Current Status of Sport Management Research

The first question asked panelists to indicate current successes in sport management research that should be sustained. Responses to the open-ended question in the first round yielded 14 themes that fully described the successes panelists identified. As a consequence of panelists' comments in the second round, two were added. The resulting 16 successes are listed in Appendix B, and comments from panelists that describe each success are provided.

Panelists' mean ratings of importance (from the final Delphi round) for each of the 16 successes were calculated, and their mean ratings of the level of success attained for each were also calculated. The magnitude of the gap between importance and current levels of success was calculated by taking the difference between the two scores. The significance of the mean difference was tested using a *t* test for dependent measures. Mean ratings for each item and the gap between importance and current success are shown in Table 1. The significance of the mean difference is also shown.

Examination of Table 1 shows that all 16 aspects of sport management research were rated as less successfully attained than they were important. The difference, however, was significant for only 13 of the 16 successes (at the Bonferroni level of significance). For 8 of the 16, the mean success rating was at least two standard deviations below the mean rating of importance. Overall, the panelists felt that there were identifiable realms of success in sport management research, but that research has not yet attained levels of success that are commensurate with their importance.

The Future of Sport Management Research

Question 3 addressed the future of sport management research. Responses to the open-ended question in the first round yielded 11 themes that fully described the ideal qualities that panelists felt are necessary for sport management research. As a consequence of panelists' comments in the second round, it became clear that one theme had to be split into two. The resulting 12 ideal qualities for sport management research are listed in Appendix C, and comments from panelists that describe each quality are provided.

Panelists' mean ratings of importance (from the final Delphi round) for each of the 12 research qualities were calculated. In addition, panelists' average ratings of the probability that those qualities would be attained during the next 5–7 years were also calculated. Mean ratings for importance and the 95% confidence interval for their subjective probabilities are shown in Table 2.

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Table 1 Importance and Current Success of Sport Management Research

Item	Importance *M* (*SD*)	Success *M* (*SD*)	Gap
Use of theory from parent disciplines	6.41 (0.62)	4.20 (0.94)	2.21*
Developing sport management theory	6.40 (0.83)	3.07 (1.10)	3.33*
Increasing the quality of research outlets in the field	6.33 (0.72)	3.73 (1.10)	2.60*
Developing overall sport management knowledge	6.33 (0.98)	4.27 (0.96)	2.06*
Recognition of sport management as a legitimate academic field of study	6.27 (0.80)	4.47 (0.99)	1.80*
Developing knowledge of sport ethics	6.13 (1.07)	3.47 (1.13)	2.66*
Establishing an infrastructure for sport management	6.07 (1.03)	5.53 (0.92)	0.54**
Increasing quality of analyses in sport management research	5.93 (1.03)	3.73 (0.96)	2.20*
Linking theory to practice	5.80 (1.70)	3.30 (1.29)	2.50*
Developing specific sport marketing knowledge	5.73 (1.62)	4.20 (1.01)	1.53*
Broadening sport management research to include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies	5.60 (1.68)	3.87 (1.55)	1.73*
Increasing quality of sport management research designs	5.47 (1.41)	3.53 (0.99)	1.94*
Developing knowledge about leadership in sport	5.33 (1.35)	3.33 (1.35)	2.00*
Developing knowledge about sport liability	5.29 (1.27)	4.07 (1.54)	1.22**
Diversifying sport management research settings	5.27 (1.53)	3.40 (1.45)	1.87*
Increasing the number of research outlets in the field	4.87 (1.55)	4.13 (1.25)	0.74**

* $p < .003$ (Bonferroni criterion); ** $p \leq .05$.

Inspection of Table 2 shows that all 12 of the ideal qualities were deemed to be important, but that panelists were less than confident about the likelihood these could be attained. Panelists were most confident that high-quality doctoral students (Item 4) and high-quality research (Items 3, 5, and 6) could be attained. The upper boundary of their confidence that these could be attained, however, reached no higher than 77.4%, whereas the lower boundary for the same items was as low as 46.9%. Thus, even for those aspects of sport management's future about which they were most confident, the panelists felt that there was a reasonable likelihood

Table 2 Importance and Probability of Qualities for an Ideal Future for Sport Management Research

Item	Importance *M* (*SD*)	Probability (95% confidence interval)
Adequate research resources	6.47 (0.74)	27.7–50.9
Sport management researchers professionally accepted, credible, and respected as scholars	6.30 (0.85)	44.4–62.2
Rigorous research designs, methodologies, analysis, and interpretation of data	6.29 (0.96)	46.9–66.5
High quality doctoral candidates	6.28 (0.39)	62.1–75.3
Research grounded in parent disciplines' theories	6.24 (0.83)	58.3–73.7
Research consistently of sufficient quality that it is readily publishable in first-tier sport management journals	6.20 (0.94)	54.0–77.4
Cross–disciplinary research	6.13 (1.13)	40.7–61.9
Sport management research consistently of sufficient quality that it is readily publishable in first-tier management journals	5.80 (1.15)	31.2–52.8
Theory developed/tested in sport management that impacts parent disciplines	5.73 (1.39)	24.0–48.0
Unique body of knowledge	5.67 (0.98)	36.0–57.4
Sport management research that is useful to management and that identifies best practice	5.47 (1.19)	35.4–59.2
Sport management research disseminated to the general public	4.87 (1.88)	27.7–53.7

that these could not reach ideal levels in the near term. The panelists were least confident about the impact of sport management beyond the community of sport management scholars (Items 8, 9, and 12) and about the adequacy of research resources that would become available (Item 1). For these items, the upper boundary of their confidence that these could be attained reached no higher than 53.7%, whereas the lower boundary for the same items was as low as 24%. Panelists felt that it is unlikely that these can be attained in the near term.

Tactics Needed to Build and Enhance Sport Management Research

The tactics needed to build and enhance sport management research were solicited in Question 5 in the Delphi survey. Responses to the open-ended question

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in the first round yielded 12 themes. The 12 tactics that the panel identified are listed in Appendix D, and comments from panelists that describe each tactic are provided.

Panelists' mean ratings of importance (from the final Delphi round) for each of the 12 tactics were calculated. In addition, panelists' average ratings of the probability that those qualities would be attained during the next 5–7 years were also calculated. Mean ratings for importance and the 95% confidence interval for their subjective probabilities are shown in Table 3.

Inspection of Table 3 shows that all 12 tactics were deemed to be important, but that panelists were less than confident about the likelihood these would be implemented. Panelists were most confident that publication outlets would expand (Item 12), that researchers would become more specialized (Item 9) but would also become more interdisciplinary (Item 3), and that researchers would (as a group)

Table 3 Importance and Probability of Tactics to Optimize Sport Management Research

Item	Importance *M* (*SD*)	Probability (95% confidence interval)
Improve professional development opportunities for faculty	6.53 (0.83)	41.6–59.8
Increase research preparation required of doctoral students	6.38 (1.03)	45.6–62.4
Increase interdisciplinary and collaborative research	6.33 (1.05)	49.3–64.1
Encourage global sharing of knowledge and intercountry collaboration	6.33 (1.29)	46.5–62.9
Increase quality of research designs	6.27 (0.59)	39.0–61.0
Sport widely recognized as a context for theory building (and not merely for theory testing)	6.24 (0.83)	40.2–61.2
Increase standards required to publish sport management research	6.07 (1.03)	46.5–65.5
Increase industry links and funding opportunities for research	6.00 (1.23)	39.8–60.2
Researchers develop focused research specialties	5.80 (1.15)	49.4–69.2
Greater diversity in research topics	5.64 (1.15)	47.0–65.8
Application of sport management research to other disciplines and industries	4.73 (1.53)	25.5–45.1
Expand publication outlets	4.4 (2.03)	50.0–70.0

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address a greater diversity of topics (Item 10). The upper boundary of their confidence that these could be attained reached no higher than 70%, whereas the lower boundary for the same items was as low as 47%. Thus, even for those tactics about which panelists felt most confident, they believed it only marginally likely that any would find adequate implementation in the near term. The panelists were least confident about the application of sport management research outside of the field (Item 11), the improvement of resources and professional development for research (Items 1 and 8), and advances in the quality of sport management theory and research (Items 5 and 6). For these items, the upper boundary of panelists' confidence that these goals could be attained reached no higher than 61.2%, whereas the lower boundary for the same items was as low as 25.5%. Panelists felt that it is unlikely these areas would be adequately developed in the near term.

Realms of Disputation

Although Delphi studies typically seek to locate expert consensus, they can also be an effective means to explore matters on which experts disagree. As Bijl (1992) observed in a study of mental health disciplines:

> Clarifying dissensus on the issues under study proved to be as interesting and relevant . . . as was the elucidation of consensus. In a highly policy-sensitive field, . . . the classical consensus striving aim of Delphi is surpassed by the quest for alternative options to management the future." (p. 247)

In their comments when responding to items from all seven questions in the second and third rounds, panelists' evidenced a substantial amount of disagreement with one another. Even though they were encouraged to reach consensus, they often disagreed about what has been attained, where the field should go, and how to get there. Their comments and responses to one another throughout the seven questions in both the second and third rounds indicated that there is a significant need for discussion about how far the field has come and where it is going. Content analysis of panelists' comments throughout the survey (without reference to the question that had elicited each comment) yielded 12 themes, which were organized into six groupings (numbered one to six for ease of reference). These themes represent areas where there was substantial disagreement and about which panelists felt strongly. These areas were interrelated rather than independent of one another. The 12 themes, their grouping, and their relationships are diagrammed in Figure 1.

Essence of the Field

Throughout all seven questions and during all rounds, it became apparent that panelists had markedly different perspectives about the field's assumptions and beliefs. One of their concerns paralleled the ongoing discussion regarding the uniqueness of the field. The majority of comments hinged on derivatives of the field's definition and identity: who are we, what is unique, what differentiates us from other fields of study, and what, specifically, is sport management theory?

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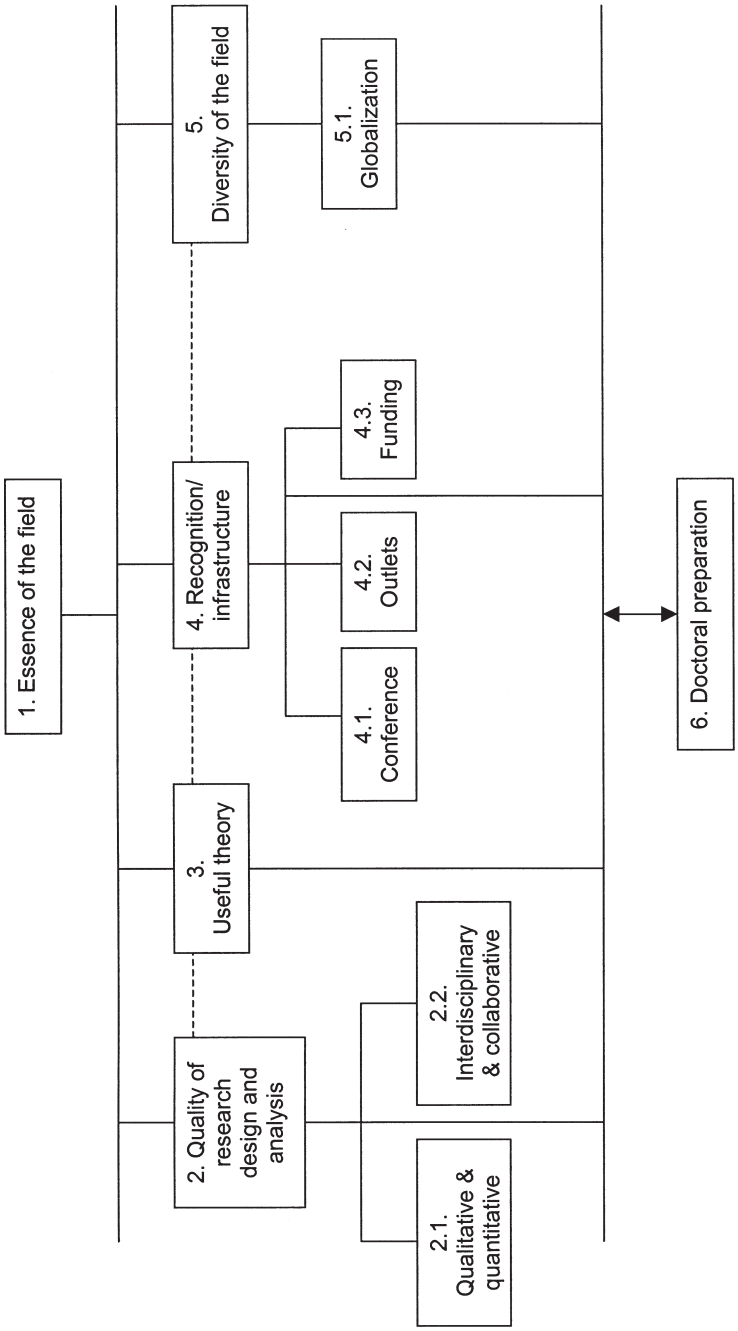

Figure 1 — Areas of disputation.

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Some panelists felt that sport management exists only as the application of existing theory to sport; others felt that sport management does build unique theory (e.g., sport leadership).

There were also strong concerns and opposing views regarding the most appropriate housing for sport management programs within the university structure: college of education, school of business, or kinesiology department. Some panelists felt that sport management should be housed with other management disciplines. Others felt that sport management must remain close to other realms of sport studies, such as sport sociology and sport psychology, in order to maintain its distinctive focus on sport. Most respondents felt that these matters had significant implications for the directions in which the field would develop.

Quality of Research Design and Analysis

Whereas panelists agreed on the need to increase the quality of research design and analysis, they disagreed about the designs and methods used by sport management researchers. Although panelists felt that quality research is important, they could not articulate clearly their criteria for quality. Consequently, they made use of many different qualifiers, such as *sophisticated*, *rigorous*, *complex*, *new*, and *quality* to characterize research designs and methodologies, but they were unable to operationalize these qualifiers. This created confusion among the panelists, several of whom articulated their frustration during later rounds, pointing out that they were not clear that what they and others were advocating was comparable, even if the qualifier each chose was the same. One panelist opined, "Quality/rigor differs from complexity."

There were strong and conflicting opinions about the use of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Analysis of the comments revealed two related opinions about the divide. One was a sense among some panelists that there is a negative perception of qualitative research among some sport management researchers. One panelist said, "Qualitative method is underutilized and underappreciated in sport management." Another commented, "Many still look at qualitative as 'fluffy' research." A panelist with editorial-board experience noted, "Some reviewers reject qualitative studies based on their own positivist biases rather than on knowledgeable assessment of research." On the other hand, some panelists felt that both qualitative and quantitative research are respected in the field, but are often poorly carried out. As one put it, "The problem here is not with pluralism but with rigor." Another said, "It is much more critical that people are involved in sound, rigorous research regardless of the methodological approach."

The matters of method and rigor were also related to the disciplinary basis for research. Although some felt that sport management research should be based in distinctive disciplines, others felt that sport management research should be collaborative and interdisciplinary. Some felt that this was already occurring, but that it is not well accepted, noting that interdisciplinary research can "be marginalized." Others felt that it is either not occurring or not occurring enough. As one panelist put it, "Cutting edge developments [happen] in multidisciplinary and interstitial environments."

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Useful Theory

Panelists were concerned about the status of theory in sport management and the relationship between theory and practice in sport management. Some felt that theory development has typically been ignored when research has an applied purpose. One panelist noted that in applied research, "the 'so what' is many times overlooked." Another said, "Often when we say 'linking theory to practice,' we mean forget the theory and focus on the practice." Although some felt that this was a problem, others were not so sure. One panelist asked, "Is this integration [of theory and practice] always necessary and desirable?" Others suggested that sport management theories are not (yet) relevant to practice: "We are still having difficulty getting our work applied within the sport industry."

Whereas some panelists worried about the tension between theory and practice, others argued that the distinction between theory and practice is itself the core problem. As one panelist put it, "Our dialogue maintains the distinction between theory and practice, and thereby militates against real and meaningful integration. . . . Theory and practice can be jointly obtained."

Recognition and Infrastructure

There was a general consensus that the status of the field is related to the field's infrastructure, particularly university programs, recognition and reward systems, and publication outlets. The direction of impact—from status to infrastructure or vice versa—was debated. Some felt that higher quality research is a necessary prerequisite for a stronger infrastructure: "Until we have more research quality, the infrastructure is irrelevant—or, worst yet, an institutionalization of incompetence." Others felt that a stronger infrastructure would render greater status: "Formal recognition will have much influence on moving research in the desired direction." Others argued that systems of recognition, such as awards and formal recognition of status, could damage the field if they were implemented before the appropriate status had been obtained: "[I am] concerned that we may recognize mediocre scholarship."

The issue of infrastructure's relation to status led panelists to debate the proliferation of conferences and outlets for publishing research in the field. Some felt that more conferences and outlets would foster growth and development of the field. One panelist said, "We need different kinds of journals." Another said, "We are missing a few journals that we could use, but we are making great strides in this area." On the other hand, those who felt that infrastructure should follow rather than lead the pursuit of status argued that it is "too easy to publish drivel or even simply wrong assertions." These panelists argued, "We have diluted the field through establishment of journals that will publish substandard research."

This debate also extended to research funding. Some felt that funding is a prerequisite for enhancing the status of sport management research: "The status and sustainability of the field may depend on our ability to attract and renew funding." Others argued that "we can do research without extensive funding,"

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whereas others were concerned that "[funding] could begin to dictate our research interests."

Diversity of the Field

Panelists had very divergent opinions about the diversity of topics represented in sport management research. Some felt that "a wide variety of topics is represented in our research," whereas others argued that there is "an overemphasis of certain contexts, and a need to expand the views and perspectives of the field to include other pertinent topics of study." This was particularly reflected in comments about the place of globalization in sport management's research agenda. Whereas some argued, "We are already embracing it [globalization]," others argued that there is a "need to broaden . . . [in order] to reflect a more global sport perspective." The effect of North America's dominance of the field was suggested by some to be a particular stumbling block to diversification of the field: "North America still defines . . . objects of study too narrowly; consequently, it is hard to get [some] research past the field's gatekeepers."

Doctoral Preparation

Panelists agreed that "high quality doctoral candidates" are essential for the field (see Appendix C), and they agreed that quality research should be an objective for the field (see Table 2), but they disagreed about the quality and direction of doctoral preparation. Although some argued that doctoral "programs seem to be producing a few great prospects," others argued that "doctoral programs are not [generally] developing individuals with the necessary tools to become good researchers." Those who felt that some current programs are doing well also felt that the future for doctoral training in sport management is bright: "The quality of doctoral training will continue to increase." On the other hand, other panelists were less than sanguine about the future of doctoral preparation in the field: "The pressures are in the other direction—get students through to completion with minimal stumbling blocks (which added research preparation often constitutes)."

Discussion

The panelists agreed that the field of sport management has made significant strides despite its youth as a field. They also agreed that stronger research, additional cross-disciplinary research, a stronger link between theory and practice, enhanced infrastructure, and improved doctoral training are objectives toward which the field should strive. Panelists, however, were at best only moderately confident about the field's ability to move in those directions, and they disagreed about the necessary means to do so. Their differences in opinion provide useful bases for considering the field's future development.

One of the most fundamental differences had to do with the appropriate home for sport management: business or sport studies. This difference of opinion is, in fact, an outcome of the hybrid nature of sport management. It is simultaneously

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about management and about sport. The appropriate concern, then, is not which academic unit should house the discipline, but the degree to which any home (whether business or sport studies) will facilitate the requisite interdisciplinary dialog between sport studies and the study of management (including its related disciplines, such as marketing, finance, and operations).

There are, of course, differences in the academic prestige accorded to colleges of business on the one hand, and departments of sport studies (e.g., kinesiology) on the other. Although panelists seemed to agree that higher status is preferable to lower status, they disagreed about the means through which status is best achieved. If infrastructure is assumed to lead status, then the matter of the best home for sport management is readily determined; the best home would be the higher prestige location (i.e., business). On the other hand, if quality research is assumed to enable establishment of appropriate infrastructures, then the best home is whichever best facilitates quality research by sport management scholars. In fact, many of the debates about the best home for the discipline, the need (or lack thereof) for more journals or conferences, and the need for funding are actually grounded in opposing assumptions about which must come first—status or infrastructure. Recognizing this issue clarifies the debate because it allows it to shift away from arguments about which or how many to a more fruitful discussion about the degree to which any particular policy or action will foster the co-development of status and infrastructure. Although there is likely to be some disagreement regarding particular policies or actions, the terms for appropriate debate are nonetheless clarified. In fact, the relevant question becomes a strategic and empirical one: How can we determine what the effects of particular policies and actions are/will be on both the field's status and its prestige?

Quality research is one indicator about which the panel agreed. There was no consensus, though, regarding what constitutes quality research. In fact, the debate among panelists about the degree to which research should be grounded in "home disciplines" or should be interdisciplinary in character reflects a difference in opinion about the degree to which the object of study (i.e., sport) is likely to make a difference in the nature of management. If sport makes a difference, then sport management research cannot remain grounded in studies that occur in nonsport settings, and the intermingling of disciplines might help to elaborate the unique effects of the sport context. On the other hand, if sport were merely another context for doing generalizable management inquiry, then it would make sense for it to remain grounded in disciplinary research. The important point to bear in mind is that the effect of sport on management is yet to be empirically determined. In other words, we cannot know *a priori* whether there is something unique or distinctive about managing sport. This is itself something we need to determine via research in the field. Thus, in the absence of empirical evidence regarding the unique or distinctive aspects of managing sport, any contention about the primacy of disciplinary versus interdisciplinary research is moot.

The related debate among panelists about the relative value of qualitative vs. quantitative research reflects a more subtle paradigmatic difference between those who feel that sport management research can be conducted in a strictly objective

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(i.e., positivist) manner and those who feel that the management of sport is socially constructed. Similar debates continue to rage throughout the social sciences (e.g., Creswell, 2003; Frisby, 2005; Schultz & Hatch, 1996). The salutary feature of the debate, particularly among management scholars, is that it generates a substantial volume of useful research and theory (Canella & Paetzold, 1994). In other words, it matters less that one side is right and one is wrong; what matters is that we conduct qualitative and quantitative research. In fact, the two can be profitably joined in a single research endeavor (Chalip, 1989; Yauch & Steudel, 2003).

Similarly, debates about the relative value of basic vs. applied research might, in fact, fail to appreciate the relative value that both kinds of research can have for one another. It has long been known that applied research can usefully inform theory if the applied researcher reflects on the conceptual implications of findings (Chalip, 1985, 1990; Ulrich, 2001). Conversely, it has been argued that sport management practice will be most effective when the practitioner reflects on the theoretical foundations and conceptual implications of experience (Edwards, 1999; Weiss, 1980). In other words, application can inform theory, and application improves when it is theoretically informed.

Debates about theory vs. practice reflect a concern about whom the field should serve, and what it should seek to achieve. The same is true for debates about the appropriate diversity of topics the field should address. What we address determines whom we do and do not serve, as well as what we seek to achieve. Whether we seek to address global concerns or local ones and whether we concern ourselves with a wide array of topics or only a few depends less on what appropriately constitutes sport management than on whom we choose to include in our community of discourse. The question, then, is whether we conceive ourselves as broadly relevant or narrowly so. Again, there is no right or wrong choice here. Any healthy discipline will consist of multiple communities of discourse: some are widely dispersed, some are locally focused, some have narrow concerns, and some have broad agendas. Ultimately, what matters is how interesting the questions we ask about sport and its management are, not the content or focus of those questions (Brown, Isaacs, Vogt, & Margulies, 2002; Ulrich, 2001). Interestingness is determined by communities of discourse, not *a priori* boundaries.

These insights, and the debates from which they derive, have significant implications for the training of researchers for the field. Clearly, becoming a sport management scholar is not merely a matter of mastering particular research methods and analytic techniques. If the field is to advance, doctoral students will also have to come to grips with the matters identified by the panelists in this study. As Ulrich (2001) demonstrates, competency in both research and practice develops as a consequence of "sustained effort at learning and growth" (p. 3). Ultimately, the issues the panelists identified provide a basis for new sport management scholars to determine what kind of researcher they will seek to become, and consequently, the outcomes to be achieved.

This applies equally to established scholars. This study began by noting that the emergence of research paradigms requires an expansion of perception, ways of thinking, and values. By actively engaging in debates over the issues identified in

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this study, students and established scholars can expand their perceptions of the field, explore new ways of thinking, and thereby enhance the values that guide their work. Discussion, debates, and research into these matters are not symptoms of sport management's academic malaise; they are an indication of the field's vibrancy and potential.

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Appendix A

Questions From Round 1 of the Delphi Survey

1. What are the successes in sport management research that should be sustained?
2. What are the current events and trends impacting research in sport management?
3. What qualities and characteristics would you use to describe a best-case scenario for sport management research in 5 to 7 years?
4. What qualities and characteristics would you use to realistically describe sport management research in 5 to 7 years?
5. In your opinion, what direction should sport management research take to move it towards the best-case scenario?
6. In your opinion, what actions or strategies will contribute to the movement of sport management research in these directions?
7. In your opinion, what challenges can be managed now to move sport management research in these directions.

Appendix B

Successes Identified by Panelists (With Sample Panelist Comments)

1. Use of theory from parent disciplines

- "We have . . . taken some classical theories of management, leadership, advertising, economics, etc. and applied them specifically to a sport context."
- "[We need to] continue to ground our work in theories from parent disciplines like psychology, management, marketing, public policy, and communication."

2. Developing sport management theory

- "I believe that there has been improvement in the use and development of theory in sport management research."
- "The development of the archetype and change research [has been a success, as has] some of the more theoretical work on sponsorship."

3. Increasing the quality of research outlets in the field

- "*JSM* is an excellent outlet for research, it is recognized as a quality journal, . . . articles in *SMR* appear to be solid."
- "*JSM* has increased rigor and is a good representative . . . of better work in sport management."

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4. Developing overall sport management knowledge
   - "We know more about all aspects of sport management (e.g., management, marketing, leadership, economics) because it is now a recognized field of inquiry and scholars are willing to address it."
   - We know so much more about sport and sport management education."
5. Recognition of sport management as a legitimate academic field of study
   - "Being recognized as an area worthy of investigation . . . is a success that should be sustained."
   - "I believe that sport management research has made great strides . . . in being recognized as a *bona fide* field of study."
6. Developing knowledge of sport ethics
   - "Some of our colleagues are doing really interesting work in the area of sport ethics."
   - "Sport ethics has been an area of focus."
7. Establishing an infrastructure for sport management
   - "The establishment of an infrastructure [is] necessary for a young research field, that is, associations, research journals."
   - "NASSM has grown tremendously and is meeting a need of sport management academics."
8. Increasing quality of analysis in sport management research
   - "I have seen an increase in the sophistication of the analysis being used by sport management researchers."
   - "improved and appropriate methods of analysis"
9. Linking theory to practice
   - "We are beginning to get more in-depth studies that link theory and practice."
   - "integration of what we know from theory to practice"
10. Developing specific sport marketing knowledge
    - "There is a group of researchers in the field focusing and advancing the sport marketing body of knowledge."
    - "We have moved along in the area of sport marketing."
11. Broadening sport management research to include both quantitative and qualitative methodologies
    - "use of diverse qualitative and quantitative methods"
    - "expansion in research methodologies . . . including more qualitative designs"

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12. Increasing quality of sport management research designs
    - "improved and appropriate research designs"
    - "increasing use of more rigorous and innovative research designs [reflecting a] better understanding of complexity of theoretical material underlying studies"
13. Developing knowledge about leadership in sport
    - "Leadership in sport is one area in which we have evidence of good scholarship."
    - "Leadership has been a focal area in sport management research."
14. Developing knowledge about sport liability
    - "We have scholars who are raising important issues in [sport liability]."
    - "[Sport liability] has become an area of interest among some researchers in the field."
15. Diversifying sport management research settings
    - "use of various settings (e.g., professional, college, volunteers)"
    - "There are a number of people who are conducting research in other than the common sport settings."
16. Increasing the number of research outlets in the field
    - "increase in the number of sport management journals and conferences"
    - "*JSM*, *SMR*, *SMQ*, *European Journal of Sport Management*"

Appendix C

Qualities for an Ideal Future Identified by Panelists (With Sample Panelist Comments)

1. Adequate research resources
    - "resource availability for those choosing to engage in research"
    - "ability to attract and renew funding for [sport management] research"
2. Sport management researchers professionally accepted, credible, and respected as scholars
    - "[Sport management scholars] will be better respected by the academy."
    - "high level of acceptance and credibility of [sport management] scholars by peers in other disciplines"
3. Rigorous research designs, methodologies, analysis, and interpretation of data
    - "Most researchers will have an excellent understanding of research design, method, data analysis, and interpretation of data."
    - "an in-depth understanding of the assumptions underlying research design, methodology, and analysis"

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4. High quality doctoral candidates
   - "creating PhDs with truly inquiring minds who are dedicated to seeking answers to pertinent questions"
   - "train doctoral students in matters of intellectual curiosity and intellectual ambition—in the substance of research, rather that just the form of research"
5. Research grounded in parent disciplines' theories
   - "[Research] will be grounded in parent's theories and hopefully moving towards new theories."
   - "use of sociological and psychological and, where appropriate, historical theory to gain a better understanding of the sport industry"
6. Research consistently of sufficient quality that it is readily publishable in first-tier sport management journals
   - "ability to publish in rigorous sport management journals"
   - "Great majority of articles submitted to first-tier sport management journals will be theoretically sound and methodologically robust."
7. Cross-disciplinary research
   - "[Sport management research] will involve scholars from a number of different disciplines."
   - "[Sport management] research will be multidisciplinary in nature."
8. Sport management research consistently of sufficient quality that it is readily publishable in first-tier management journals
   - "publishing in rigorous mainstream management journals"
   - "Articles submitted to quality management journals will be theoretically and methodologically robust."
9. Theory developed and tested in sport management that impacts parent disciplines
   - "providing insights that inform parent disciplines"
   - "researchers in sport management influencing and impacting parent disciplines (i.e., management, sociology, psychology, marketing, etc)"
10. Unique body of knowledge
    - "developing a unique body of knowledge"
    - "distinctive body of knowledge that is truly grounded in the [sport] phenomenon"
11. Sport management research that is useful to management and that identifies best practice
    - "[Sport management research] will be relevant to practitioners. [Researchers] will be in a much better position to make recommendations to practitioners that can help them in their roles."
    - "emphasis upon field-based research that develops best practices"

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12. Sport management research disseminated to the general public
    - "[Sport management] will be shared with the general public."
    - "Sport management practitioners will have access to info derived from research findings."

Appendix D

Tactics to Optimize Research Identified by Panelists (With Sample Panelist Comments)

1. Improve professional development opportunities for faculty
    - "ensure professional development opportunities for professors"
    - "facilitate professional development sessions at NASSM"
2. Increase research preparation required of doctoral students
    - "improve the doctoral level work in research (design, methodology, analysis, and interpretation)"
    - "make sure doctoral students are trained by a strong group of researchers"
3. Increase interdisciplinary and collaborative research
    - "I believe that more interdisciplinary research should be conducted—it will allow us to leverage our theoretical and methodological expertise with that of scholars from other fields."
    - "We need to do more collaborative research with specialists in other fields."
4. Encourage global sharing of knowledge and intercountry collaboration
    - "facilitate the International Alliance as a symbol to encourage global sharing of knowledge and cooperative research opportunities"
    - "develop good relationships with sport management scholars from other countries"
5. Increase quality of research designs
    - "produce research that is appropriately designed, is methodologically strong, and is theory-driven in nature"
    - "Researchers also need to step out of the box and be bolder in its design and braver in their interpretations."
6. Sport widely recognized as a context for theory building (and not merely for theory testing)
    - "do more to see sport as a place to test and build theory"
    - "create sport as a context for theory development"
7. Increase standards required to publish sport management research
    - "stricter yet explicit standards for academic journals"
    - "publish more in specialty areas which have rigorous standards"

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8. Increase industry links and funding opportunities for research
   - "develop/maintain good (close) industry links, show industry how research findings can be transformed into practical outcomes for managers"
   - "establish funding to support fundamental [sport management] research"
9. Researchers develop focused research specialties
   - "Researchers need to become more specialized in a field."
   - "important to create research-focused nucleus"
10. Greater diversity in research topics
    - "increase attention to: volunteers in sport management settings, recreational sport settings, etc"
    - "The field, particularly in North America, still defines itself and its topics too narrowly."
11. Application of sport management research to other disciplines and industries
    - "consider whether what researchers discover in sport is pertinent in other industries"
    - "general need to take sport management research out of the sport ghetto"
12. Expand publication outlets
    - "create journals as the field grows that are more specialized"
    - "find additional publishing opportunities"

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