Addressing competing logics between the mission of a religious university and the demands of intercollegiate athletics

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

Article history:
Received 27 July 2012
Received in revised form 5 March 2013
Accepted 16 March 2013

Keywords:
Institutional logics
Intercollegiate athletics
Religion
Culture

A B S T R A C T

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies within a faith-based university for managing competing institutional logics of its NCAA Division II affiliated athletic department. Utilizing a case study methodology, the authors collected data from athletic department members and university administrators and faculty. Within the context of this study, our data indicated that the religious academic culture of the university often conflicted with the athletic expectations of winning and marketing the university. Our findings indicated certain strategies that were effective for resolving the conflicting logics within the athletic department. Particularly, members of the athletic department drew from the strong religious culture of the university to guide their operations. The implications of this research within the field of sport management and broader organizations are discussed.

Published by Elsevier Ltd on behalf of Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand.

Within institutionalized fields, organizations are often presented with the challenges of complying with the values and expectations from various, diverse stakeholders (Kraatz & Block, 2008; Rowley, 1997). Especially when the values and expectations from these stakeholder groups are fundamentally incongruent, determining the success and effectiveness of the organization can become quite convoluted for managers (Zammuto, 1984). In these instances, managers are tasked with prioritizing goals and values within their organizations in order to provide clear directives for appropriate actions within the organizations while offering prescriptions for determining success (Floyd & Lane, 2000; Parent & Deephouse, 2007). The field of sport is particularly suitable for studying these situations since sport organizations often operate with multiple values, goals, and expectations, many of which conflict with one another and compete for primacy (Chelladurai, 1987; Trail & Chelladurai, 2002; Washington & Ventresca, 2008).

Examples of multiple and sometimes conflicting values abound in sport. Consider the case of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) where the values of elite competition and mass participation coalesce. The Olympic Charter states the importance of adhering to the idea of “sport for all” (see International Olympic Committee, 2011), yet the Olympics are traditionally reserved only for the most elite athletes from countries around the world. Further illustrating multiple, conflicting values, Parrish (2003) observed that sport was valued by the European Union as a tool for implementing various social, cultural, and educational policies yet was also seen as a valuable commercial entity. Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011)
examined the case of a Norwegian soccer club that simultaneously valued amateur and professional participation in sport. Finally, stakeholders within intercollegiate athletics in the United States have been found to value commercial success while also attempting to adhere to educational values of amateur sport (Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008).

Although research has suggested that conflicting values within an organization are manageable (Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011), the presence of multiple values that compete for primacy is still problematic for firms. Competing values within an organization can create inconsistencies and contradictions within a field (Seo & Creed, 2002; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). It then is incumbent on organizations to find suitable measures to manage competing ideals. In this paper, we further the understanding of multiple values within sport organizations by examining the case of a private, religiously affiliated NCAA Division II university's methods for managing instances when certain values conflict with others. In doing so, we drew primarily from the theoretical framework of institutionalism and particularly from the concepts of institutional logics. The university in this study offers a relevant case because it has demonstrated through various administrative acts its commitment to ensuring effective operations that are satisfactory to its stakeholders while remaining competitive in a field wrought with logics that may be conflicting to those of the university. Thus, we conducted a qualitative case study to examine the strategies of the athletic department and the university's administration for managing competing logics.

1. Theoretical background

We drew upon the institutional tradition as a means for understanding the construction of values within an organization. The institutional perspective argues “social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on a rule-like status in social thought and action” (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341). That is, the effectiveness of a firm’s operations is judged in accordance to its adherence to the generally accepted norms of behavior within the organization’s field (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Firms, then, are considered to be legitimate by peers and outsiders through conformity to the expectations of proper action in their fields or in the broader scheme of society (Herremans, Herschovis, & Bertels, 2009). By incorporating institutionalized elements and practices, organizations are able to avoid their actions being scrutinized by their stakeholders and society in general (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). For example, certain sport organizations have conformed to various political and environmental forces as testaments to their legitimacy (O'Brien & Slack, 2004; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Slack & Thibault, 1988).

As fields become institutionalized, collective rationales and values, referred to as logics, guide the actions of organizations and decision-makers within the field (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Southall et al., 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2004). These institutional logics reflect the values within a field and are essential in determining appropriate behavior and success within the field (Herremans et al., 2009; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Scott, 2001; Southall et al., 2008; Southall & Nagel, 2010; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Further, many organizations are embedded in fields with multiple stakeholders with diverse logics and ideals of successful behavior (Alvesson, 2002; Kraatz & Block, 2008). Logics at the field-level, organizational-level, and even individual-level provide multiple perspectives regarding success, legitimacy, and appropriate behavior (Battilana, 2006; Clegg, 1999). Furthermore, leaders within organizations are often situated in positions where they are influenced by logics from both upper management and subordinates (Alvesson, 2002). To illustrate, the broader institution of college athletics may indeed influence athletic departments, yet it is likely that the specific logics within individual athletic departments are varied because they are subject to the logics of their universities.

The presence of multiple logics in a field presents administrative challenges within organizations due to inconsistent expectations (Seo & Creed, 2002), thereby resulting in situations of competing logics within firms (Herremans et al., 2009; Mattingly & Hall, 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). Contradictory ideals within an organization’s culture produce differing perspectives concerning what is proper behavior (Alvesson, 2002). In these situations the dominant logics may reveal themselves over time through the process of trial and error (Hannan & Freeman, 1977); however, human praxis and agency have been suggested as the driving forces behind prioritizing of logics within organizational settings (Seo & Creed, 2002). From this perspective, legitimacy is subjective (Friedland & Alford, 1991) and influenced primarily by the dominant or powerful stakeholders within the firm (Parent & Deephouse, 2007). Questions concerning whose perspective of legitimacy is most valid within an organization may then be formidable for members of the organization. From a top-down perspective, Floyd and Lane (2000) observed that leadership within an organization “can shape [their] members’ collective tendencies by clarifying the broad priorities and expectations considered fundamental to organizational effectiveness” (p. 167). This would suggest that leadership may be key to solving problems of multiple logics within organizations. Recent research has suggested that conflicting logics can indeed coexist within the same organization given adjustments in the governance of that organization (Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011).

Indeed, leadership has been found to influence the dominant institutional logics and culture within an organization. However, scholars from within the critical management tradition have critiqued institutionalized ideals and the manner in which such ideals become embedded within organizations and society (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007). Alvesson (2002) suggested that leadership does not only shape the culture of an organization but is shaped by the culture as well. Leadership is constrained by the collective rationales in which it is operating, adding credence to the notion that leadership may, in fact, be influenced by subordinates inasmuch as it influences subordinates (Alvesson, 2002). Thus, management is likely only as effective at managing the culture of an organization, along with competing logics within it, as the people carrying out managerial directives. Drawing from and building upon these concepts, this study examined the manner in which administrators managed competing institutional logics in the intercollegiate athletics context of the United States.
1.1. Current study

Intercollegiate athletics within the United States provides a fitting context for studying the management of competing logics. Proponents of intercollegiate (and interscholastic sport) within the U.S. have championed the educational merit of participation in athletics (see Bailey et al., 2009; Beyer & Hannah, 2000), while others have lamented the undermining of the academic missions along with the academic integrity of universities by their athletic departments (Eitzen, 2006; Gerdy, 2006; Sperber, 2000). Further, athletic departments navigate unique, institutionalized environments with stakeholders inside and outside the university valuing seemingly divergent outcomes (Trall & Chelladurai, 2002). Frey (1994) suggested, “The athletic department exists under the umbrella of the university, yet its operation and goals are inconsistent with those of the larger organization” (p. 120). Studying this dynamic, scholars have suggested that college athletics operate within both an academic logic and a commercial logic (Shulman & Bowen, 2001; Southall & Nagel, 2010). Pursuing legitimacy within both logics simultaneously can present difficulties to athletic administrators because the commercial interests of athletics are often divergent of the academic interests of universities (Buer, 2009; Southall & Nagel, 2010). In college athletics, it is in the best interest of both the university and athletic administrators to address situations where there are competing logics in order to provide clear direction as to the primary expectations for the athletic department.

Despite the significant findings of the aforementioned studies, much of the research concerning institutional logics within intercollegiate athletics has been conducted examining the highest levels of intercollegiate athletic competition (e.g. NCAA Division I). The logics of operating a lower level program, such as one at the NCAA Division II level, have been largely ignored. The NCAA Division II level of athletics presents an interesting context for studying institutional logics as most Division II athletic departments still offer athletic scholarships yet they receive limited national media exposure, generate less revenue, and receive fewer revenue distributions of smaller amounts from the NCAA. For instance, the median generated revenue for Division II universities with football was $618,000 in 2011 (Fulks, 2012b), compared to the $38.7 million generated by Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) universities (Fulks, 2012a). Further, the median scholarship expense for Division II universities with football was $1.5 million whereas the median for FBS universities was approximately $7.6 million (see Fulks, 2012a, 2012b). In lieu of these budgetary differences, research has suggested that Division II coaches may be evaluated less stringently in regards to wins and losses (Gorney & Ness, 2000). Consequently, the average salaries for coaches at the Division II level are also significantly less than the averages for Division I coaches (see Fulks, 2012a, 2012b).

Finally, much of the research concerning institutional logics, especially within the field of sport management, has been conducted within secular sport organizations and has ignored the impact of religion within organizations. Considering that many sport organizations and universities have religious foundations and many people espouse religious beliefs, it is important to understand the impact that religion and faith may have within institutional logics. Management scholars have recently lamented the lack of focus on religion within organizational analyses and have suggested that institutional analyses may benefit from the inclusion of religion (Tracey, 2012). Insight into the role of religion in prioritizing institutional logics within athletics’ programs could prove useful for athletic administrators and sport managers.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the strategies within a faith-based university for managing competing institutional logics of its NCAA Division II affiliated athletic department. We focused specifically on a private university in the southern portion of the United States, in which the religious traditions are highly salient throughout the entire university, including the athletic department. This university provided a suitable context for this study with initial indications suggesting that the espoused religious culture of the university might not entirely coincide with the culture of intercollegiate athletics in the U.S. This university’s budgeted scholarship allotment was nearly double the median amount for private schools as reported by Fulks (2012b). These teams have experienced varying levels of success in athletic competition, with many programs achieving national recognition while other programs have had trouble competing with other schools in their conference. The conference in which this university competes has been recognized as being one of the more competitive Division II conferences in the country and has historically been a favorable destination for many Junior College and Division I transfer athletes. However, as one of the few private universities in its conference, the stringent academic tradition of this university has made the recruitment and admission of transferring athletes difficult for many of the coaches at this university. Consequently, some of the programs, particularly men’s basketball, have had difficulty competing for conference titles with other universities that have less stringent academic requirements.

With this background information, we drew from institutional theoretical perspectives, and specifically the writings on competing logics (see Herremans et al., 2009; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Seo & Creed, 2002; Southall et al., 2008), to examine the dominant institutional logics within this athletics context and the ways administrators and coaches managed potential contradictions. In doing so, the following research questions guided this inquiry:

**RQ1.** What institutional logics were at work within the athletic department?

**RQ2.** How were situations involving competing logics managed by the university and the athletic department?

2. Method

To understand this university’s management of competing institutional logics, we utilized a qualitative case study design (see Berg, 2001; Stake, 1995). We believed that this approach was most appropriate to address the purpose of this study...
because we were able to implement multiple data collection strategies to gain understanding of the inner-workings and managerial processes within this university’s athletic department. While findings from this type of research are contextually bound (Stake, 2005), the results of this study provide insight into the management strategies of one university, which may prove useful in similar settings.

2.1. Participants

Multiple data collection strategies were implemented in this investigation. We obtained primary data for this case study through in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with key members of the athletic department and university administration/faculty (see Table 1). Given the role of human praxis in prioritizing institutional logics (Seo & Creed, 2002), we implemented purposive criterion sampling for selecting interviewees. It was our goal to secure interviews with individuals who were directly responsible for establishing the culture and priorities of the athletic department and university as a whole. Thus, we sought to interview high-level administrators within both the athletic department and the university. Additionally, we interviewed head coaches of four different sports. Finally, we also sought to interview members of the university’s faculty athletics committee. This committee was responsible for overseeing scheduling and other operations within the athletic department to ensure that the athletic department was operating in accord with the university’s mission and goals. In total, we secured interviews with 13 different individuals (N = 13).

2.2. Supplemental data

In conjunction with the interviews, we also performed document analysis in order to gain a deeper understanding of different policies and rules that govern not only this particular institution but also NCAA Division II athletics as a whole (Yin, 1994). As noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) documents and other artifacts can be especially useful in further understanding the research context as these provide printed records and expectations within the setting. For this study, the documents included press releases from the university’s athletic department, the university’s student handbook, the athletic department’s student-athlete handbook, and the NCAA Division II Handbook. We drew from these documents as both a means for informing our interview guides as well as for corroborating information gleaned from the interviews. Specifically, the university’s and athletic department’s handbooks provided insight into the specific institutional logics within our research setting.

2.3. Data collection

Once IRB approval of this study was secured, participants were contacted via email to secure interview times. The athletic director was instrumental in assisting with scheduling the interviews. Interviews were conducted over a two-day period within a conference room provided by the athletic department. The lead researcher utilized an interview guide that was tailored to fit the occupational role of each interviewee. Considering our adopted definition of institutional logics, that is, guidelines of operation used to determine appropriate behavior and success (Herremans et al., 2009; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Scott, 2001; Southall et al., 2008; Southall & Nagel, 2010; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008), interview questions were constructed in a manner that would allow each interviewee to divulge information concerning operations and expected operations within the athletic department. Such questions included: what does the university’s administration expect from the athletic department? How are athletics viewed on this campus? What is the purpose of athletics on this campus? These questions were used as guides; however, the interviewer was allowed a certain level of flexibility during each interview to ensure rich data collection that addressed the purpose of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 1
Interview participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years w/the university</th>
<th>Years of involvement w/athletics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provost</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Vice President</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Athletic Representative</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>&gt;20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>“lots”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Athletic Director</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Director of Operations</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Academic Services</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Football Coach</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Men’s Basketball Coach</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Women’s Basketball Coach</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head Volleyball Coach</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Information was self-reported by the participants via a demographic questionnaire.
To ensure that our findings were credible and reliable, we employed various techniques during the research process. Specifically, the techniques of audio recording and transcribing interviews, member-checking, data triangulation, and peer debriefing ensured trustworthiness within this study. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy of the interview data. Member-checking is the process in which the interviewees are allowed to clarify their responses and verify the interpretations of the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this instance, member-checking took place during each interview where the interviewer would ask the participants to clarify their responses or confirm our interpretations of their comments.

Further, upon the completion of each interview, the participants were given the opportunity to review the researcher’s notes as well as the interview transcript, as another form of member-checking. However, it should be noted that most of the participants declined to review the transcripts and simply confirmed the interviewer’s interpretations during an oral review of the interviewer’s notes. Data triangulation is the process in which multiple data sources and researchers are consulted to corroborate the findings within a study (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Through interviewing, document analysis, reflexive journaling, and utilizing multiple researchers, we were able to corroborate the findings of this study and obtain what we perceive as an accurate representation of the data in this study.

2.4. Analysis

As outlined by Thomas (2006), we analyzed the data using a general inductive approach. This method for data analysis allows the researcher to “use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). This approach is similar to a full-content analysis (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985), however, it differed as we were able to pinpoint specific portions of the data that addressed the purpose and research questions of this study. Simply, portions of the interview data that were unrelated to our study were not included in the coding process.

The inductive analysis of the data in this study began with a thorough reading of the interview transcripts during which the lead researcher openly coded portions of each interview with the purpose of identifying the institutional logics in the setting. During this initial coding, data that denoted an operating procedure, a guideline for appropriate behavior, or an expectation of attitudes or behavior were color-coded. After this initial coding stage, each transcript was reread by two researchers and these initial codes were further scrutinized with specific data pieces being grouped together, indicating themes and patterns within the data. Throughout the coding process, we drew from previous research concerning institutional logics (see Herremans et al., 2009; Lounsbury & Pollack, 2001; Scott, 2001; Southall et al., 2008; Southall & Nagel, 2010; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008) as guidelines for determining which coded data pieces were recognizable institutional logics within the research setting. This procedure allowed us to identify the overlapping ideas in the data and categorize them in a manner that was appropriate for this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Marshall & Rossman, 1995; Thomas, 2006).

Once we had identified the logics, the data were recoded in order to identify possible areas of conflict within individual logics and between the dominant logics. Data that were seemingly incongruent with other codes were categorized as conflicting logics. Finally, the interview data were coded to explicate the strategies employed by this university to address the conflicting logics. Through this process of data analysis we were able to explicate the data within this study and provide a depiction of the institutional logics along with the strategies for managing competing logics within this setting.

3. Findings

The purpose of this study was to examine the strategies within a faith-based university for managing competing institutional logics of its athletic department. The athletic department in this study faced similar challenges of balancing expectations between athletics and academics. However, this athletic department was presented with distinct challenges created by the added pressures of conforming to the religious expectations of the broader university. In this regard, the data suggest two broad logics, religious education and athletic requirements, that this particular athletic department had to negotiate in order to remain viable and legitimate. The university and athletic department in this study demonstrated novel strategies for managing the situations when these logics competed for primacy. In the subsequent sections we briefly describe these logics and how they are embedded within the athletic department. We then provide discussion of strategies implemented by this university and athletic department to address the contradictions and confusion that could be created by these competing logics.

3.1. Institutional logics – religious education and athletic requirements

The data from this study pointed to two primary logics of the athletic department; the first of which was religious education. These data suggested that the athletic department was expected to operate in accord with Christian values and mores, consistent with the foundations of the university. In doing so, members of the athletic department were required to emphasize the spiritual and academic development of their athletes in as much as they emphasized their athletic development. It is important to note that the participants did not view spiritual and academic development as two separate
ideals as these two concepts were intertwined throughout the university. Consider the mission statement of the athletic department:

[The University's] athletics will have strong spiritual emphasis. The coaches and professional staff will be active Christians who serve as mentors. The student-athletes will have spiritual goals compatible with those of the university. Christian principles will be deliberately and systematically incorporated into all activities. [The University's] athletics will encourage, endorse and emphasize the academic mission of the university. Prospective students will be screened for inclination and aptitude for collegiate work. The academic progress of student-athletes will be monitored. Time allocations will be determined with academic priorities in mind. Academic excellence by student-athletes will be rewarded. (From the athletic department’s website)

In accordance with the mission statement of the athletic department and that of the university, participants in this study also reflected the importance of operating and conducting athletics within the university's religious traditions and academic expectations. Consider the following:

From a Christian perspective, I think I’m probably idealistic and I don’t think I’m naïve in the way reality is but I am idealistic and maybe somewhat naïve in my hopes for an athletic program and athletic representation that would stand apart… if coaching is just coaching athletics because we just happen to have a program and we look like everybody else and sound like everybody else, our student body, you know, cheers like many student bodies would, then that behavior, that language, I don’t think is reflecting of a Christian spirit then I think that we’re doing something wrong here, particularly at this university. –Associate Professor

I’d say the highest expectation is that the athletic program would reflect accurately the identity of the university. –University Vice President

Athletics should be a vehicle that serves the greater mission of [the university]. It can’t be isolated on its own separate part of campus. It can’t be something that happens, that’s all about wins and losses… we really have to think about what are we doing to ensure that we are furthering the mission and vision and goals of the university… to educate students for Christian service and leadership throughout the world. –Athletic Director

Thus, success within athletics was not only considered as winning but as also operating in accord with the university's religious principles.

The second broad logic we identified was athletic requirements. Most notably, the importance of winning and enhancing the university's presence within the community and region were expressly discussed. Regardless of how much interview time was spent discussing the importance of adherence to the university's religious principles, all of the participants conceded that having winning athletic programs was important for promoting the university and building a sense of community on campus. As such, winning was viewed as an important benchmark for success within the athletic department. This is reflected in statements from coaches:

I mean, at the end of the day, if we lose a bunch of games, I'm not going to get to stay. –Head Football Coach

Our job is to win games. They're not going to keep me here if I'm winning five or six games every year. –Head Women’s Basketball Coach

The Provost also addressed the importance of winning:

I don't think anyone expects every sport to have a winning record every year. But I think in general, the university would be looking to have the kinds of teams that help create community and help promote [the university] effectively to its various stakeholders. And I think winning is an important part of that. –Provost

Although it was also noted by many of the participants that they did not think that winning was the only measure of success at this university. However, it should also be considered that participants readily admitted that winning was a vital part of enhancing the university’s sense of community on campus and also marketing and promoting the university to current and future stakeholders.

Competing ideals were observed within these two broad logics. In the space below, we will outline how certain aspects of these logics may be competing. Congruently, we will then discuss the methods employed by this university to manage the conflicts between these logics.

3.2. Managing competing logics

Competing institutional logics can be noticed when operating under one logic seemingly devalues the other (Buer, 2009). Our data suggested that there were examples of competing logics within the athletic department. Many of the competing ideals within this athletic department were not particularly dissimilar from the challenges encountered at every other university in the United States. For one, the primary concern was the amount of time that athletes were absent from classes when they were traveling for athletic competition. Consider the following from the associate professor,
Well there’s, without a doubt, conflict just by the scheduling. There’s no getting around that. The university has a policy here that to pass a class you’ve got be in class 80% of the time regardless of the reason. So that gives you 20% absences and so we really do count up and hold at least the schedule to be down to where student-athletes don’t miss more than the limit… but there’s definitely a conflict with attendance and academics.

However, certain conflicts could be somewhat unique to this context, particularly the usage of athletic facilities for religious activities. The Assistant Director of Operations shared the following:

Just walk over to [to the gym] right now. They have kicked us out of our gym for a week for [a religious festival], which is unheard of at major colleges and universities during basketball season. And I personally have a problem with how they abuse the floor over there… them not putting down any sort of matting over there for chapel. You should have seen it on Wednesday in there how marked up the floor was. And the way they make our teams schedule practice times is a bit ridiculous.

One final example of conflict between logics included the Athletic Director’s requirement of coaches to attend to the spiritual development of athletes by having them engage in community service. As he noted:

I require each of our coaches to have something that they participate in, more than just a one weekend type thing but something that they’re involved with, whether it be Big Brothers, Big Sisters, Boy’s and Girl’s Club. You know, [the baseball coach], they go and read at an elementary school with kids to help prepare them for the state tests. We try to really encourage them to find a place to give student-athletes opportunities to be involved in the community and things outside of [the university].

These types of activities created difficulties for the coaches as they were still faced with NCAA requirements concerning time restrictions and they still had the pressure of winning games.

Acknowledging the divergent logics within their athletic department, members of this university and the athletic department have implemented practices and management techniques to lessen the tension between these competing logics. These techniques included university oversight, aligning with the university’s culture, and reframing logics. Each of these will be discussed in detail.

University oversight. The university’s faculty and administration were instrumental in shaping the logics of the athletic department. The university’s administration relieved the tension created by competing logics with clear prioritization as to which logics should be paramount within the athletic department. University faculty and administrators were adamant that the academic and spiritual development of the athletes superseded the athletic endeavors of the athletic department. One participant conveyed the importance of this:

I would say like most of the guys I work with, they just want them to be good students because they’re concerned about them in their classroom and in their program. And so they just want them to be good students and are probably much more concerned about their academic success than their athletic success. –Department Chair

The university and its administration validated their commitment to the academic achievement and development of their athletes through the presence of a standing Faculty Athletic Committee. Many of the participants described this committee in detail. The Faculty Athletic Committee was comprised of nine faculty members and was chaired by the Faculty Athletic Representative. Each academic unit within the university had at least one representative on the committee. The primary function of this committee was oversight of team scheduling, thereby reviewing all of the teams’ schedules to ensure that the athletes were not missing too many days of class. The Faculty Athletic Committee ensured that each team was in compliance with the strict attendance policy of the university. Coaches expressed that it was not uncommon for them to delay road trips or leave athletes behind in order to comply with the university’s attendance policies. Participants specifically referenced a situation experienced by the volleyball team:

This past season, I had a couple of girls that took classes at times that I told them not to because of when we had to leave all the time… so what ended up happening is we had to leave the kid behind for three matches, one of which was in the conference tournament of the season. –Head Volleyball Coach

In some instances, athletes were expected to miss competitions to attend classes. The Faculty Athletic Representative described a situation where one student had a conflict between games and class:

We’ll have a problem because of nursing school. When they get to certain levels it’s really, really hard, but we’ve made arrangements for one of the girls in the nursing school to, one, miss a few Thursday night games, and two, travel to Saturday games after she’s finished whatever she had to do at the nursing school. We’ve worked very, very closely with them.

Though these actions may be seen as extreme, the faculty and administration of the university were resolved in their efforts to ensure the athletic department did not compromise the academic and spiritual standards of the university.

The university’s administrators also had strict requirements for daily chapel attendance. As outlined in the student handbook and on the university’s website, students were only allowed a certain number of absences from chapel before university officials put them on probation. Similar to academic probation, students would be expelled from the university if
they did not comply with the chapel requirements. This was significant for the athletic department as it restricted their practice times and also affected their travel schedules as well. Coaches were not allowed to hold practices during the same time as the daily chapel service and would often delay road-trips to prevent their athletes from receiving chapel absences. Finally, the athletic department and individual athletic programs participated in weekly “departmental chapels.” On certain days of the week, the university would deviate from its one chapel service and allow each academic unit to host its own chapel. The athletic department participated in this by having an athletic department chapel and various team chapels. These chapel services were closely monitored by the university administration to ensure that the coaches and athletic administrators were operating in accord with the spirit of chapel.

Furthermore, the university and athletic department demonstrated their commitment to the university’s mission by hiring a full-time academic advisor (Director of Academic Services). Although it is common practice for most Division I universities to have at least one, if not multiple, academic advisors employed within the athletic department, the presence of an academic advisor within the athletic department of Division II schools is less common due in part to the discrepancy of resources between the two divisions (Nite, 2012). The athletic director and the director of academic services attested to this, respectively:

You know, at our level, to have somebody in our office who’s dedicated to academics… there’s not many like that. – Athlete Director

The only other DII school in our conference is [a regional state school]… But it is kind of unusual in DII to have a full-time person. A lot of time, the compliance person or the coaches deal with it. But the standards are that… the admission standards to stay at the school are a lot higher here than they are at some of the other conference schools. – Director of Academic Services

Creating this position and hiring the Director of Academic Services was necessary to aid athletes in managing the rigors of this university.

The university’s oversight into the athletic department is also evident in their unwavering commitment to their stringent admission requirements for all students, even athletes. The admission standards along with the requirements for remaining enrolled in the university are more stringent than other universities in their athletic conference and also are beyond the requirements set forth by the NCAA. To clarify, the NCAA outlined in their Division II handbook (NCAA, 2010) that to maintain eligibility for athletic participation, athletes must only maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.0 once they have been at their current institution for 72 semester hours. Athletes remain eligible in their first 24 semester hours if they have a 1.8 GPA and are eligible with a 1.9 GPA after 48 semester hours (National Collegiate Athletic Association, 2010). The academic and GPA requirements of the university’s students are less lenient. To remain in “good standing” with the university, all students must maintain a 2.0 GPA. Once any student falls below a 2.0 they are immediately placed on academic probation. If in the subsequent semester the student is unable to restore a 2.0 GPA or achieve a 2.5 GPA for that semester, the student is then on academic suspension from the university. Further, the university does not accept Ds on transfer applications and transferring athletes must maintain a higher GPA for a greater amount of time when compared to other schools in the university’s athletic conference. Thus, the oversight of the university into the athletic department prioritized the logics for the athletic department, which helped manage the divergent expectations of competing logics.

Aligning with the university’s culture. The athletic department also dealt with potential conflicts between logics by aligning with the culture of the university. Specifically, when instances arose where athletic endeavors were not in accord with the academic and religious culture of the university, the athletic department would draw from the culture of the university to prioritize the logics. The Athletic Director spoke directly to this alignment:

Athletics should be a vehicle that serves the greater mission of [the university]… it can’t be isolated on its own separated little part of campus. It can’t be something that happens, that’s all about wins and losses [and] all about our own little world. We really have to think about what are we doing to ensure that we are furthering the mission and vision and goals of the institution.

Moreover, this meant that university faculty and administrators expected the athletic department to operate in accordance with the university’s Christian culture. Specifically, coaches were expected to avoid using profanity with their athletes, and they were also expected to curtail the usage of profanity among their teams.

Members of the athletic department believed that adherence to the religious culture of the university was important to the athletes and was a welcomed aspect by people working within this university’s athletic department. The participants embraced the expectations of the university as a positive aspect that has positively enhanced their athletic program. In the words of coaches,

There’s a lot that we do with the girls that has nothing to do with our sport, has everything to do with just being a better person, being a better Christian, learning more about God, having Him be the focus of our life. And if I didn’t have that vehicle of volleyball, I wouldn’t have that team to work with. – Head Volleyball Coach

I think a lot of the athletes are drawn to [the university] because of the Christian atmosphere. And I think that’s a bonus that we have at [the university]. And that’s why I love coaching at [the university]. I think at [the university], it’s one of the reasons a lot of us are here and it’s the reason I love being here. – Head Women’s Basketball Coach
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The key of the re-framing logic. Finally, members of the athletic department and university managed the confusion and contradictions of competing logics by re-framing the conflicts as beneficial instead of detrimental to the work environment and athletes. Particularly, the conflicts between academics and athletics were portrayed as opportunities for athletes to learn the importance of communication and coordination with other people. In the previous example of the volleyball player who missed matches because she had class, the Head Volleyball Coach dealt with the frustration of this situation by reconciling that the player should have communicated more effectively with her professors. Despite her frustration with the situation, the coach reconciled this as an important act by the professor that ultimately benefited the athlete and the volleyball program.

Other examples of re-framing included coaches suggesting that attention to the academic and spiritual growth of their athletes would result in more wins, thereby enhancing the statues of the university. The head men’s basketball coach spoke to this directly,

Well, I mean, I think winning is kind of a byproduct of what you do. . . But I think, you know, if you’re doing everything right then I think that’s a byproduct of what’s going to happen.

The head women's basketball coach similarly stated:

I think if you’re doing the other things right and if you’re developing your student-athletes like they should be and you’re recruiting the right players that are going to buy into what [the university] is about and what is expected of them at [the university], I think the winning part takes care of itself. If you’re taking care of your players and you’re treating them the way you would want your kids to be treated or the way that you would want to be treated, I think the winning part takes care of itself a lot of times.

The head volleyball coach mentioned this as well,

I truly feel that if my kids are happy with their academic life and their social life and their spiritual life, they’re going to perform well for me on the court because they’re not stressed out in those other places.

It is not surprising that these coaches would suggest that athletes who are able to balance the various aspects of their college experiences are more successful. Considering that all of the participants in this study had essentially “bought into” the university’s culture, coaches often embraced opportunities to engage in activities with their athletes that would cut into practice times and the athletic development of their athletes.

The faculty and administration of the university also engaged in re-framing. One participant suggested that balancing academics and athletics were opportunities for personal growth for athletes:

I don’t perceive any real conflict between academics and athletics in the classroom. I mean you just have to work through that. . . you know, balancing and communicating. –Department Chair

Further, participants routinely suggested that participation in athletics served to develop important job and life management skills. The Faculty Athletic Representative expanded upon this notion:

It’s a way to learn to deal with adversity in your life. It’s a way to deal with other people. It’s a way to learn teamwork. It also, when you put it in the context of the whole college career, it gives you great skills in time management if you do it well. It should give you great skills in dealing with humans. . . You deal with your teachers. You do have to deal with other team members on the team but also in the academic setting.

The tactic of re-framing ultimately lessened tension between the athletic and academic realms of the university, which was beneficial to all parties involved, especially the athletes.

Of further interest, upon the conclusion of the collection of interview data, both the men’s and women’s basketball coaches have subsequently resigned from their positions. Within the current landscape of intercollegiate athletics within the United States, coaches will often resign from their jobs when they recognize that their firings are imminent. In this case, their resignations were particularly intriguing, as these coaches had championed the religious culture of the university. By all accounts from their fellow participants, they had implemented various techniques within their programs to nurture the spiritual and academic growth of their athletes. Yet, each coach’s program had struggled in recent years to achieve and maintain the expected level of win’s and losses. We noticed that these coaches were the more adamant about reframing situations where the culture of the university conflicted with the expectations of winning. This could further verify that reframing of logics may be utilized when employees, or in this case coaches, are facing difficulties meeting expectations in key areas of their jobs. In this case, the participants drew upon their faith in God that they were conducting their programs in the proper manner.
4. Discussion

On multiple levels, this study contributes to previous research and understandings of multiple institutional logics within organizations. Particularly, this study extends the conversation concerning leadership and management within organizations with multiple logics. In this study, if we conceptualize university administrators as upper management, with athletic administrators as mid-level managers, and coaches serving as low-level employees, we notice an important inter-play among these parts of the organization. We found that oversight from the university was key in prioritizing the logics within the athletic department. This would be consistent with the idea that leadership and governance are instrumental in shaping the logics of an organization (see Floyd & Lane, 2000; Herremans et al., 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011). Specifically, we recognized this with the presence of the Faculty Athletic Committee. This committee provided clear directives regarding athletic scheduling. These actions served to prioritize logics within this athletic department.

Many participants did express displeasure with the university’s unwillingness to alter rules for athletes. Yet, we also noticed that athletic administrators and coaches demonstrated strong levels of “cultural buy-in” regarding the religious traditions and expectations of the university. In their study of a Norwegian soccer club, Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011) observed that competing logics could coexist, especially when all members of the organization have realized the benefits of these logics. The oversight from the university was effective because the athletic department had bought into the Christian culture of the university. This ultimately resulted in the reframing of logics. The participants routinely suggested that situations with competing or conflicting logics were integral to the development of their athletes. Instances of reframing likely pointed to the cultural buy-in of the coaches and members of this university. Thereby, any tension that could have been present when the religious and athletic logics conflicted was alleviated, not only because of the strong culture or leadership, but because of the buy-in of the employees. This adds further validation into critical management perspectives that leadership effectiveness is influenced by subordinates (Alvesson, 2002).

However, cultural buy-in within this athletic department did not occur without some level of discontent. The coaches and other members of the athletic department did express frustration with the unwavering and unyielding nature of the university’s commitment to religious education. This could be seen in the situation of the forced absence of the volleyball player from a playoff match. For instance, the Director of Academic Services and the women’s teams’ coaches were not particularly pleased with the fact that the women’s volleyball team had to leave a player at home during their trip to the conference tournament. By all accounts, this player had followed the proper channels of obtaining approved absence letters and had accumulated zero unexcused absences. While the Faculty Athletic Representative viewed this as a reasonable action taken by the faculty, the coaches and athletic administrators disagreed with this stance.

Additionally, discontent was seen in the situation of facility scheduling. Yet the dominant culture of the organization was maintained despite contention among the employees. Perhaps this is a result of the salient religiosity within this research context. Even though coaches were not particularly pleased with university’s strict adherence to religious education, they still yielded to the university’s dictums. The participants were all professed followers of the Christian faith and firmly believed in the mission of the university, ultimately resulting in them prioritizing religion over athletics. This was evident even when religious adherence could have been detrimental to athletic achievement. Thereby, the athletic department honored the university’s requirements despite their discontent.

This study also pointed to the consequences of total buy-in to the dominant logic in a setting and not properly attending to other viable logics. When dealing with conflicting logics in an organizational setting, managers and employees cannot view management of the logics as a zero-sum game. Although logics can certainly be prioritized and receive the majority of emphasis, employees risk alienation and losing their jobs if they do not attend to the needs of all stakeholders within their organizations. Consider the situations of the head coaches who resigned from their positions. By all accounts from the athletic director and other members of the athletic program, these coaches had exemplified the religious mission of the university and athletic department. Yet, their inability to produce winning teams ultimately resulted in them leaving the university. This situation would suggest that effective management of competing institutional logics is more than simply yielding to the dominant logic. As suggested by Alvesson (2002), within complex organizations with multiple interests and often contradictory demands, oversimplifying these multiple logics into categories of “good” and “bad” is likely unbeneﬁcial to members of the organizations. In the case of this athletic department, the coaches who did not attend to the athletic expectation of winning were eventually replaced regardless of their level of buy-in to the religious education logic.

Within the context of intercollegiate athletics, this study offered an interesting glimpse into the seldom-studied interplay of religious culture and the secular culture of intercollegiate athletics. Recently, Tracey (2012) pointed to the fruitful insights that may be gleaned from the study of religion in secular institutionalized environments by suggesting that “a focus on the logic of religion would expand the range of logics examined in institutional theory, and might also undermine the notion of incompatibility between logics” (p. 118). Indeed, findings from this study provide evidence supporting this assertion. A common strategy we identified in our data was the practice of reframing. Within this athletic department, administrators and coaches viewed situations that should be negative (e.g. missing classes for games) as positive situations that resulted in personal growth and positive outcomes for all those affected. Participants suggested that conflicts between the culture of the university and the expectations of athletics were part of the overall growth and development of the athletes. Thus, the logics were not viewed as incompatible but instead were complimentary and part of the religious education of the athletes.
Although evidence from this study may support Tracey’s (2012) previous proposition, there were still instances in which the logics within this athletic department were conflicting. In these instances, the coaches involved were bought into the university’s culture and had prioritized the religious education logic above the expectations of athletics within their programs. However, as previously discussed, certain coaches were no longer with the university because of their inability to meet the athletic expectation of winning. Certainly, it is not unique for organizations to remove employees who were unable to balance multiple expectations. Religion, though, is thought to be an institution where adherence to traditions and mores usurps other logics. Thus, this study further highlights the complexity between religious logics and expectations of secular firms.

5. Conclusions & future research

This study provided insight into organizations with multiple conflicting logics and pointed to the need for further research into certain topics. Notably, future studies are needed for understanding the effects and consequences of cultural buy-in. Of particular interest within this concept is the idea of corporate credibility. The credibility of organizations and managers is questioned when employees have bought into the dominant culture and attended to the ideals within that dominant culture but have been removed from the organization despite their loyalty. Also, this particular study focused primarily on the university employees and how competing logics affected their working environments. Future studies of athletes’ perspectives concerning the effectiveness of universities’ strategies for managing competing logics within athletic departments would further enrich the literature. These types of studies could provide insight into how management strategies impact lower-level employees within organizations and if managerial intent translates into effective policy for low-level employees.

Also, research is needed that explores the inefficiencies created by attempting to satiate multiple institutional logics within sport organizations, especially university athletic programs. From an educational and developmental standpoint, athletic departments in the U.S. are often falling short on providing their athletes with the support and skills for being successful beyond their athletic careers. From a business standpoint, U.S. athletic departments are often drastically inefficient in their operations and are continually putting undo financial strain on their universities. Researchers should examine the role that competing institutional logics may play in these shortcomings. Finally, the role of religion within sport organizations should be further examined. The sport industry could offer a valuable context for addressing Tracey’s (2012) observation that managers have largely ignored the influence of religion in secular organizations. Considering many universities and sport organizations are founded by churches and other religious organizations, studying the logic of religion may prove insightful for sport management scholars.

References


