

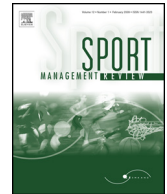


ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Sport Management Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/smr



Political activity in escalation of commitment: Sport facility funding and government decision making in the United States

Michael Hutchinson^{a,*}, Brennan K. Berg^b, Timothy B. Kellison^c

^aThe University of Memphis, 495 Zach Curlin St., 204A Elma Roane Fieldhouse, Memphis, TN, 38152, USA

^bThe University of Memphis, 495 Zach Curlin St., 206 Elma Roane Fieldhouse, Memphis, TN, 38152, USA

^cGeorgia State University, P.O. Box 3975, Sports Arena 171, Atlanta, GA, 30302, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 25 October 2016

Received in revised form 10 July 2017

Accepted 10 July 2017

Available online xxx

Keywords:

Escalation of commitment theory

Organizational commitment

Politics

Sport policy

Facility funding

ABSTRACT

In the United States, the decision to commit extensive public resources to sport facilities is a contentious topic of debate. Elected officials often commit substantial public resources to sport facility projects amidst contrary empirical evidence and mixed residential approval. This behavior not only implicates the presence of political activity to advance a course of action, but also suggests an escalation of commitment (EoC), the subject of this study. The authors implemented a collective case study approach to examine three municipalities with long-standing histories of subsidizing professional sport facilities. Data collected from influential elected officials and public leaders ($N = 13$) as well as documents and records revealed (a) political action to be essential in EoC with decisions involving multiple stakeholder groups; (b) the influence and interaction of political action within each EoC determinant; (c) the substantial role of support, resources, power, and influence in efforts to increase and prevent commitment to a failing course of action; and (d) noticeable spillover effects from use of political activity in EoC.

© 2017 Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand. Published by Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Organizations often encounter situations involving commitment to a course of action that fails to produce a desired outcome (Drummond, 2014). Rather than considering alternatives, decision makers regularly maintain and sometimes increase commitment to the course of action amidst the presence of questionable or negative outcomes in hopes of achieving the desired outcome (Staw & Ross, 1987). Within the sport environment, this behavior—known as escalation of commitment (EoC)—has been a threat to the efficient operation of sport organizations and sustainability of sport programs (Berg, Hutchinson, & Irwin, 2016; Hutchinson, Nite, & Bouchet, 2015). While a variety of issues contribute to EoC, political activity¹

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: mdhtchns@memphis.edu (M. Hutchinson), bberg@memphis.edu (B.K. Berg), tkellison@gsu.edu (T.B. Kellison).

¹ Political activism or participation (henceforth political activity/action) has been defined as “legal acts by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of governmental personnel and/or the actions that they take” (Verba, Nie, & Kim, 1987, p. 1). Norris (2005) expanded this definition by noting that political activity may include both traditional and emergent forms of political communication that are “used to pursue specific issues and policy concerns among diverse targets, both within and also well beyond the electoral arena” (p. 11). Policies are the rules that guide the activities of an organization or an administration, and they provide authority for allocating resources to reach specified objectives (Green & Kreuter, 2005). Policies can be set through laws, executive orders, projects or programs by those with the authority to make such decisions.

is a less understood factor in decisions to maintain or increase commitment to a course of action that has not historically produced a desired outcome. This may be most evident in the context of publicly funding professional sport facilities. For instance, commitment to numerous facility ventures have provided evidence of political activity in pro-subsidy advocates safeguarding the use of public funds for facility construction and maintenance. Examples range from the former Hubert H. Humphrey Metrodome (Klobuchar, 1986) and U.S. Bank Stadium (Grow, 2013) in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA, to SunTrust Park (Klepal, 2014) and Mercedes-Benz Stadium (Lutz & Trubey, 2016) in Atlanta, Georgia, USA.

Researchers have examined the political nature of sport facility financing negotiations and planning from a wide range of perspectives. When the decision whether to subsidize a major sport facility is put to the voters, they may be influenced by various stakeholder groups (themselves sometimes promoting irreconcilable goals; Mason & Buist, 2013), such as powerful growth coalitions (Paul & Brown, 2006), the media (Buist & Mason, 2010), pro- or anti-subsidy campaigns (Huberty, Kellison, & Mondello, 2016), or the accessibility of clear details about the subsidy issue (Mondello & Kellison, 2016). In the United States, sport facility subsidy decisions are more commonly carried out through legislation by elected officials at the municipal, county, or state level. In those cases, decision makers must navigate the varying interests of sport owners, business leaders, fellow legislators, journalists, and the voting public (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016; Mason, Washington, & Buist, 2015; Scherer, 2016).

Regarding sport facility return on investment, researchers have discredited most ex ante economic impact studies commissioned by sport franchises and pro-facility advocates by demonstrating the limited economic impact and spillover benefits of sport facilities on municipalities and surrounding regions (Harger, Humphreys, & Ross, 2016). Yet, elected officials and civic leaders in the United States often commit substantial public funds and resources to both construct and maintain sport facilities, even amidst the presence of mixed residential support and failed referendums to approve subsidy (Groothuis & Rotthoff, 2016). For many U.S. municipalities and counties, decisions to commit public funds and resources to sport facilities over multiple decades suggest an EoC. While determinants of EoC have been heavily researched in a variety of settings, select determinants have received limited investigation. Most notably – and applicable to publicly funding sport facilities – the role of politics in EoC has yet to receive an extensive empirical examination (Sleesman, Conlon, McNamara, & Miles, 2012).

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate the role and impact of political action in EoC. To accomplish this, we used a collective case study approach to examine three municipalities in the United States with long-standing histories of publicly subsidizing professional sport franchise facilities. From a theoretical perspective, we sought to understand EoC theory by exploring how political action was used to maintain or increase commitment to a questionable or failing course of action. From a pragmatic perspective, we sought to empirically examine the spillover effects of using political action to maintain or increase commitment to a questionable or failing course of action. Given the limited research on the electoral consequences of a sport facility subsidy decision (e.g., Carr, 2009; Danielson, 1997), we used a retrospective approach to consider the role of EoC in these deliberations. To accomplish this, we developed the following research questions to guide the study:

Research Question 1: How was political action used to maintain or increase commitment to a questionable or failing course of action?

Research Question 2: What were the spillover effects of political action in committing to a questionable or failing course of action?

2. Theoretical framework

For more than 40 years, EoC has served as a theoretical framework for investigating commitment to courses of action that consistently fail to produce a desired outcome (Staw, 1976). Within various types of organizations, typical escalation situations begin with the decision to pursue a course of action that is believed to provide a favorable outcome, often in the form of financial profit, economic impact, or otherwise return on investment. However, following a period of commitment, decision makers recognize the selected course of action as producing a questionable or negative outcome rather than the anticipated favorable outcome (e.g., financial loss, unsubstantiated economic impact). This prompts decision makers to reexamine the course of action in determining the solution most likely to yield the highest expected utility (i.e., withdraw, reduce, maintain, or increase commitment). While withdrawing or reducing commitment may be the prudent consideration, decision makers are influenced by the interplay of four determinants—project, psychological, social, and structural—that account for both macro and micro level forces contributing to the decision to escalate, rather than de-escalate, commitment. As a consequence, decision makers maintain and often increase commitment, even amidst the presence of questionable or negative outcomes. A true EoC occurs when organizations engage in a cycle of this behavior over an extended period of time, thus persisting in a course of action despite the ongoing questionable or negative outcomes (see Staw & Ross, 1987). To better understand the escalation determinants – and set the stage for this investigation – we provide a brief overview of each below (for a more exhaustive summary, see the work of Sleesman et al., 2012; Staw & Ross, 1987).

Project determinants are the initial and typically most common factors for maintaining or increasing commitment to a course of action (Staw & Ross, 1987). This category accounts for the objective features that influence commitment decisions, most notably the financial and economic considerations of maintaining or increasing commitment (e.g., opportunity costs, size of payoff, profitability estimates) compared to reducing or withdrawing commitment (e.g., closing costs, salvage value). In making this determination, decision makers weigh both the potential outcome of continuing or reducing commitment

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6576085>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6576085>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)