

Institutional Adaptation to Technological Innovation: Lessons From the NCAA's Regulation of Football Television Broadcasts (1938–1984)

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The effective management of innovation is important for sport organizations seeking to maintain dominance within their respective fields. However, innovation can be problematic as it threatens to alter institutional arrangements. This study examined how technological innovation impacted institutional arrangements within U.S. intercollegiate athletics. Adopting the institutional work framework, we studied the emergence of television and the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) struggle to maintain centralized control of television regulations. We drew from historical data that discussed the NCAA's regulation of television from the 1940s until the mid-1980s. We found that disparate perceptions of the impact of live televising of college football games and the NCAA's protracted regulations resulted in tensions among its members. This led to large universities forming strategic alliances and openly defying NCAA regulations. The tensions culminated when universities sued the NCAA in a case that was ultimately ruled upon by the U.S. Supreme Court. This resulted in substantial institutional change that saw the NCAA losing regulative authority of college football television contracts. The findings of this study have implications beyond the context of U.S. intercollegiate athletics.

Keywords: institutional theory, institutional work, intercollegiate athletics

It goes without saying that in the United States, college football is widely popular. For the 2016 regular season of college football, a Nielsen study found that college football had a television reach of approximately 155 million people in the United States, which was more than 50% of the U.S. population (Nielsen, 2016). Since the invention and proliferation of television broadcasting in the 1940s, college football administrators and television broadcasting companies have mutually benefitted from their relationship. Television executives have continually sought to include college football in their programming schedules due to the sport's popularity, while purveyors of college athletics have enjoyed the substantial revenues from television broadcasting contracts (Dunnavant, 2004). This popularity is reflected in the current television contracts as the five highest profile athletic conferences (i.e., Southeastern Conference, Big XII, Pac 12, Big Ten, and Atlantic Coast

Conference) each have television contracts in excess of \$2.6 billion (Dosh, 2013).

Although the popularity of televised college football in the United States has become widely assumed, the history of college football and television has been checkered with fear, uncertainty, and heated battles over the National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) regulative authority. The case of the NCAA and its regulation of televised college football highlights both the success and failure of policy in addressing innovation in an institutionalized field. While the term itself generally invokes positive connotations, innovation tends to be characterized by risk and uncertainty in its initial stages (van Waarden, 2001) which often results in contentiousness between those who seek to adopt and those who may be leery of change (Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006). These tensions are further exacerbated considering institutions are notoriously resistant to change (Greenwood, Oliver, Sahlin, & Suddaby, 2008). Despite the contentious nature of innovation, some sport organizations have been relatively progressive in pioneering advancements into organizational practices.

Various forms of innovation have shaped the sport industry and the manner in which sport organizations

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operate. For instance, Turner and Shilbury (2010) examined how emerging broadcasting technologies might alter partnership arrangements between broadcasters and sport organizations. Other research found that new media technologies have altered sport organizations' sponsorship activation strategies (Dees, 2011). Innovations have significantly changed the manner in which tickets are priced (Shapiro & Drayer, 2012), organizational identities are developed (Ballouli & Bennett, 2012), and how community sport organizations operate (Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012). Although it is understood that innovation indeed changes sport organizations and their operations, little is known about how institutional responses to innovation might impact institutional arrangements.

In this paper, we outline the events that led from the majority of NCAA member schools endorsing centralized television contract negotiations to powerful member schools challenging the NCAA regulatory power. Although the NCAA has become adept at addressing institutional challenges (Nite & Washington, 2016), its struggle to maintain control of college football telecasts was particularly damaging as the heated contestations culminated with the stripping of the institution's regulatory power. In short, the NCAA's proposed and enacted regulation of innovation significantly altered institutional arrangements. With this study, we sought to understand how television, a technological innovation, resulted in substantial changes to the institutional arrangements of the NCAA (i.e., the relationship between the institution and its membership).

Drawing on institutional work literature, we discuss the institutional work of important actors within the field and how the concerted actions of schools on the one hand and the NCAA on the other eventually led to institutional change. In this regard, the NCAA was slow to evolve its practices and chose (wrongly) to satiate the majority of its membership. It chose to battle its most high-profile members who sought greater leeway in exploiting television revenues. We expand on the consequences of the NCAA's strategies for regulating television and discuss how the insights from this research might be relevant in other sport contexts.

Theoretical Framework

This research draws upon the concepts of institutional leadership and institutional work. The foundational tenets of institutional leadership were outlined in Selznick's (1957) formative text wherein he developed the notion of examining organizations as institutions. This approach recognizes that organizations are not merely unbiased mechanisms for completing tasks. Instead, they are ever-evolving contexts that are responsive to societal values, expectations, and advancements (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), while also shaping structures, meanings, and social processes for members (Scott, 2001; Selznick, 1957). As such, we interpret the NCAA as an institution

of "rules and shared meanings . . . that define social relationships, (that) help(s) define who occupies what position in those relationships, and guide(s) interactions by giving actors cognitive frames or sets of meaning to interpret the behavior of others" (Fligstein, 2001, p. 108).

This view of institutions recognizes that the purposive actions of leadership are key to institutionalization as leaders imbue organizations with value beyond technical functionality (Selznick, 1957; Washington, Boal, & Davis, 2008). This moves beyond the notion that embedded norms and structures self-reproduce regardless of praxis (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977) and assumes that leaders actively create, maintain, and disrupt institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Built on the theorizations of Eisenstadt (1980), DiMaggio (1988), and Oliver (1991), the institutional work framework encompasses the actions undertaken by actors seeking to institutionalize their settings into beneficial arrangements (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The institutional work framework has gained popularity within in the organization literature (Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013) and has recently been utilized in the sport management literature as means for understanding the actions of sport organizations (Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Nite, 2017; Woolf, Berg, Newland, & Green, 2016).

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) outlined three broad categories of institutional work: creation, maintenance, and disruption. Creation work and disruption work draw from DiMaggio (1988) and Eisenstadt's (1980) conceptualizations of institutional entrepreneurship which entails the various actions undertaken in the formation of new institutional arrangements or changing of existing arrangements. Maintenance work entails the activities of those seeking to defend and repair institutions when institutional arrangements are threatened or break down (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Trank & Washington, 2009). Initially, these concepts tended to be studied independent of one another; however, more recent studies have taken a more holistic approach to understand institutional work as actions are interdependent and resultant from the activities of others (Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Weiss & Huault, 2016; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Simply, every action undertaken is a response to previous actions, and institutional work is never fully reconciled (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

The position of the actor within the institution influences the type of work in which it is engaged as the actor's positioning likely impacts access to resources and its perceptions of the institution (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009). Certainly, there has been nuanced theorization of these concepts, yet generally speaking, those who are either disadvantaged by current institutional arrangements or who stand to benefit from altered arrangements tend to be the ones engaged in disruptive and creative institutional work (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

These individuals seek to leverage contradictions (Seo & Creed, 2002) and rally allies and resources to create new arrangements that are better suited to fulfill their interests (Battilana et al., 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002). Conversely, those who are in advantageous positions within current institutional scripts tend to work to maintain their favorable positions and institutional arrangements (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Those in power or leadership roles may work to maintain internal consistency, develop external support networks, and defend institutional arrangements against threats in hopes of solidifying the legitimacy of both their positions and the current institution (Washington et al., 2008).

Institutional work has been used to study numerous issues in both sport and nonsport settings. Popular topics have included: the transformation of practices and boundaries in an institutionalized field (Woolf et al., 2016; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010), the negotiation of labor standards (Helfen & Sydow, 2013), the spread (Jones & Massa, 2013) and maintenance of institutional arrangements (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Nite, 2017), and the struggles between dominant and oppressed groups (Martí & Fernández, 2013). Although scholars have recognized that technology and innovation may be catalysts for institutional work (see Raviola & Norbäck, 2013), few, especially in sport management, have examined the impact that innovation may have in the alteration and maintenance of institutional arrangements.

The dynamic nature of institutional work is particularly relevant when studying innovation. Defined as “any idea, practice or material artifact perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption” (Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973, p. 10), innovation can be troublesome to institutions because it threatens to alter institutional processes and arrangements (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Hargrave & Van de Ven, 2006; Leblebici, Salanick, Copy, & King, 1991). Innovation introduces risk and uncertainty (van Waarden, 2001), despite the belief that the continued evolution of institutions in congruence with innovation is a driver of economic growth (Nelson & Nelson, 2002). Typically, powerful actors will work to mitigate risks through regulation to maintain favorable positions within their institutions (van Waarden, 2001). However, authoritative regulation tends to exacerbate tensions as all invested parties may not have their interests accounted for in the new institutional models, thereby increasing instability (Seo & Creed, 2002). Hargrave and Van de Ven (2006) noted that institutional innovation generally occurs as a result of collective action within organizational fields whereby the interests of concerned parties are negotiated (sometimes contentiously) to create new institutional arrangements.

Although research in sport management has not explicitly examined the impact of innovation on institutional arrangements, studies have shown that various forms of innovation can alter organizational processes

and even field dynamics. For instance, Hoeber, Doherty, Hoeber, and Wolfe (2015) found that community sport organizations have sought enhanced effectiveness through innovative administrative processes. Similarly, sport organizations worldwide have been highly motivated to increase social media usage to bolster marketing capabilities (Eagleman, 2013), especially as a means for leveraging and activating sponsorships (Dees, 2011). Professional sport organizations have embraced innovation in the form of sport analytics to aid in the effective construction and management of both on-field and off-field sport products (Mondello & Kamke, 2014).

In general, research of innovation in sport management has shown the positive side of the innovation struggle. However, the impacts of innovation can be perceived differently by diverse organizational actors. Harding, Lock, and Toohey (2016) recognized disparate attitudes between judges and athletes toward the implementation of innovative scoring techniques of extreme sports. Although officials embraced technological advancements as supportive of their jobs, athletes were concerned that standardization would inhibit their creativity and individuality. Tensions may also arise from questions of equity through the process of managing innovation. As emerging technologies in sport broadcasting were beginning to take hold, Turner and Shilbury (2010) found that sport organizations in Australia displayed relevant preconditions for establishing effective interorganizational partnerships with broadcasting companies. However, these sport organizations were reluctant to pursue those types of partnerships because the league as a collective controlled the regulation of broadcasting. They also noted that questions of equitable distribution of revenue and fair treatment of clubs could become a concern if revenues were not being maximized. In short, institutional arrangements could be compromised by conflicting perceptions and questions of equity regarding the adoption of innovation.

These aforementioned studies have shown the impacts and perceptions of various forms of innovation in sport management, yet little is known about how innovation and responses to innovation might impact institutional arrangements. In addition, although institutional work has been increasingly examined within the sport management literature, few scholars have specifically addressed the impact of innovation on sport institutions. Woolf et al. (2016) focused on how actors work to maintain institutional norms impacted the sport of mixed martial arts as the sport's popularity has spurred, which increases in participation rates. Dowling and Smith (2016) examined how a national sport organization and its stakeholders worked to institutionalize the existence and norms of high-performance sport within Canada. Neither of these recent studies addressed the impact of innovation, technological or otherwise, on the work of actors nor institutional arrangements. Although innovation was not explicit in their research, Edwards and Washington (2015) described a process of innovation in their examination of hockey recruitment in Canada. In

their account, the NCAA hockey conferences were entrepreneurial in their creation of an innovative organization that was designed to compete with recruiting efforts of the Canadian Hockey League. However, their research differed from this study as its focus was not on innovations to the field. In this sense, the institutional actors (NCAA hockey committee) in their study created the innovation (College Hockey Inc.), but in our study, the institutional actors are responding to the innovation.

The current study extends the institutional work literature within sport management by examining a little researched, yet important, topic. Understanding the impacts of innovation and institutional responses to such innovations is important because innovations can substantially alter institutional arrangements. As Hargadon and Douglas (2001) stated, "When innovations meet institutions, two social forces collide, one accounting for the stability of social systems and the other for change" (p. 476). As such, this research endeavored to understand how institutional leaders tried to control innovation and maintain institutional arrangements. This research was guided by and attempted to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What challenges might be faced by institutions amid the proliferation of (technological) innovation?

RQ2: What consequences might emerge from institutional responses to (technological) innovations?

Research Context

This study drew from the NCAA's history of governance within U.S. intercollegiate athletics. Given that high-level amateur athletics being housed within higher education is relatively confined to the United States, clarification of key concepts and actors will likely aid in the transferability of this research to other sport organizations and settings. Drawing upon DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) description of fields, we recognize the NCAA as the institutional leader within the contentious organizational field of the U.S. intercollegiate athletics. The field is described as contentious because of the different interest groups and contradictory logics that all vie for dominance (Nite, Singer, & Cunningham, 2013; Southall, Nagel, Amis, & Southall, 2008; Washington & Ventresca, 2008). The tenuousness of the field was felt from the beginning with some praising the coupling of athletics with higher education (Adams, 1890) and others criticizing the marriage of the two (Deming, 1905; Godkin, 1894). Furthermore, the field has been rife with legitimacy struggles. Early, the legitimacy of football on college campuses was questioned after numerous deaths and serious injuries to players (Stagg, 1946) with more recent concerns focusing on the treatment of college athletes (see Singer, 2015; Southall & Staurowsky, 2013). The competing logics within

intercollegiate athletics and legitimacy issues suggest turmoil in the field that would predicate significant change (Seo & Creed, 2002).

With this research, we examined the NCAA's policies regarding the televised broadcasts of college football games. The advent of television broadcasting was a significant technological achievement and innovation that almost immediately impacted the field of intercollegiate athletics. The first televised college sporting event occurred on May 17, 1939 (baseball game between Princeton and Columbia) with the 1940s seeing the growth and expansion of the new technology (de Oca, 2008). Although televised college sports, in particular football, are commonplace in current times, the early years of the technology presented significant challenges to college and university presidents and athletic directors alike. By the early 1950s, gate receipts to college football games were on the decline as televised football games were becoming more prevalent (Dunnivant, 2004; Watterson, 2000). This ultimately led to the NCAA commissioning a study from the National Opinion Research Company (NORC) to survey college football attendance issues, which subsequently led to the formation of a television committee to begin addressing the issues created by televised broadcasts of live sports (Dunnivant, 2004). As discussed in the review of NORC's findings, members of the NCAA television committee noted:

The concern of the colleges of the country with the effects of television upon football attendance and thus upon the future of intercollegiate and intramural athletic and physical training programs became more and more evident as television sets began to saturate important collegiate areas. (*Yearbook of the NCAA, 1951–1952*, p. 152)

Although history has proven that television broadcasting contracts are substantial sources of revenue for NCAA members and conferences, the early years of this technology were a nervous time. Recognizing the uncertainty, the NCAA sought to protect the membership's interests through extensive regulation of the televised football games. This inquiry examines the NCAA's history of regulating televised football broadcasts. Certainly, the NCAA has been heavily involved in the regulation of television for other college sports. We limited the scope of our inquiry to college football because the documents we compiled indicated that football broadcasts were the major source of conflict whereas the regulation of nonfootball telecasts was not as tenuous. We specifically look at how the NCAA's policies evolved and were shaped by new challenges presented by regulating a new technology. Furthermore, we examine the fallout from the NCAA's regulations and how that has likely influenced its governance of other key issues. As such, we provide insight into understanding how dominant institutions are maintained through advancements in the field.

Methods

This research consisted of a historical case study wherein archival research methods were employed (see Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). When studying institutional processes, the aim of historical research is to understand the conditions under which change was brought about and the struggles of trying to maintain normative arrangements despite erosion (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009). Hargadon and Douglas (2001) suggested, “Because the changes that accompany innovations often occur over years and even decades, historical cases can provide the necessary distance to study how an innovation both emerges and reshapes its institutional environment” (p. 476). Through rigorous, systematic data collection from credible sources, historical research sheds light on the construction of institutional arrangements by affording researchers informed understandings of the change process (Kieser, 1994; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2009). That is, we sought to understand the life course of the institution (Scott, 2001) by studying the chosen context from commencement to culmination. The implementation of historical case study methods allowed us to understand not only the time period of addressing the innovation of televised college football, but it also allowed us to understand the aftermath of the NCAA’s policy decisions.

Data Sources

Data for this study entailed the compilation of documents from various sources that have documented and interpreted the actions of the NCAA’s governance of televised college sport. Given the popularity of intercollegiate athletics in the United States, ample data from various sources were readily available. This was essential as a primary shortcoming of historical research is the reflected bias of those reporting the findings (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001; Kieser, 1994). Multiple data sources allowed for triangulation of our findings and aided in the credibility of our interpretations (Berg & Lune, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Particularly, we drew from the postgraduate works of Flath (1963), Hoover (1958), and Land (1977); the NCAA’s yearbooks¹ and conference proceedings from the NCAA library and archives (years from 1951 to 1985); and various other accounts of the NCAA’s history with television such as Byers (1995), Dunnivant (2004), de Oca (2008), Oriard (2009), and Shulman and Bowen (2011). In total, we consulted more than 6,000 pages documenting the NCAA’s governance of televised college sport (see Appendix) and spent nearly three full days reviewing documents at the NCAA library and archives. As such, we believe that our research has provided an accurate portrayal of this issue.

Data Analysis

The analytic strategy for making sense of the data for this study was consistent with Langley’s (1999,

2009) approach to process research. We also referred to the work of Zietsma and Lawrence (2010) to develop an appropriate strategy for understanding the complexities of the NCAA’s work over nearly four decades of governing televised college sport. In this regard, we engaged in the process of abductive reasoning (see Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) wherein observations from the empirical context yield theoretical insights that can be further developed (Gehman et al., 2017). We observed the context through known theoretical lenses (e.g., institutional theory, institutional work) in efforts to extend understandings of how innovation impacts institutional arrangements within sport (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Langley (1999) noted multiple approaches to analyze process data and suggested that these approaches can be used in combination to produce emergent theoretical insights. Our analysis entailed multiple steps to develop theory-driven answers to the guiding research questions of this study.

The first step in our process was to develop a timeline of notable events and compile the relevant documentation surrounding each (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). This allowed each author to formulate an understanding of the time period, the primary actors within the field, and a broad view of the strategic approaches of the NCAA in addressing the growth of television (Table 1). The data surrounding each of these moments of change were cross-referenced among our documents to ensure the accuracy of the reports of the NCAA’s actions during each timeframe. For example, the NCAA’s general approach for regulating the number of broadcasted football games did not significantly change between the late 1950s and late 1970s. We consulted the NCAA’s convention notes as well as the narratives compiled by historians and critics to confirm that our interpretations of this time period were indeed consistent.

By adopting this approach, our aim was “to present as completely as possible the different viewpoints on the process studied” (Langley, 1999, p. 695). Through the rigorous collection of multiple data points, this narrative approach has been shown to produce a highly accurate depiction on the issue being studied (Langley, 1999). Our technique was iterative wherein we would consider viewpoints of multiple authors and perspectives to ensure a comprehensive narrative surrounding the NCAA’s governance of televised college football. As an additional step, we would also discuss this narrative with colleagues who were knowledgeable of the history of college athletics to aid in the refinement of our understanding of the NCAA’s governance.

Once we were comfortable with the accuracy of the narrative of the NCAA’s governance, data coding commenced. We followed Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton’s (2012) approach to coding and analyzing qualitative data. Initially, we openly coded the data to begin the process of understanding the events and reactions

Table 1 Timeline of Notable Events

Year	Event
1939	First televised college football game (September 30, Waynesburg vs. Fordham)
1950	National Opinion Research Center study showing declines in football attendance (between 4% and 15.5% depending on region)
1950	University of Michigan, Notre Dame, and the University of Pennsylvania negotiated their own television deals
1951	NCAA membership voted 161-7 to approve plan allowing NCAA to restrict television contracts
1951	First nationally telecast football game (September 29, Duke vs. Pitt)
1952	First NCAA television contract (NBC for \$1,144,000), one game per week televised
1952	First nationally telecast football game under NCAA television plan (September 20, Texas Christian University vs. Kansas)
1952	First bowl game national telecast (Rose Bowl)
1953	NBC allowed to broadcast regional games
1955	NCAA television plan allows eight national televised games plus 5 weeks of regional telecasts
1956	Auburn University sanctions for recruiting violations include television ban
1961	Sport Broadcasting Act allowed NFL antitrust exemption for negotiating television contracts, and NCAA did not seek inclusion in exemption
1973	NCAA reorganizes into three divisions
1975	NCAA limits the number of scholarships that a school can assign in response to growing gaps of television revenues
1977	CFA forms (63 universities from ACC, Big 8, SEC, Southwest, WAC conferences, and independents and service academies)
1981	CFA negotiated television deal with NBC (NCAA had deals in place with ABC and CBS)
1981	University of Oklahoma and University of Georgia filed lawsuit against NCAA in U.S. district court as a response to NCAA's attempted sanctions from CFA television deal with NBC
1984	NCAA versus Board of Regents of the University of Oklahoma, Supreme Court of the United States ruled 7-2 against NCAA
1985	200 televised college football games
1997	CFA terminated

Note. NBC = National Broadcasting Company; NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association; NFL = National Football League; CFA = College Football Association; ACC = Atlantic Coast Conference; SEC = Southeastern Conference; WAC = Western Athletic Conference; ABC = American Broadcasting Company; CBS = Columbia Broadcasting System.

associated with the impact of television on the NCAA. This process informed the development of first-order concepts from the data. As the first-order concepts emerged, we would theorize the connections among the concepts through axial coding. During this step, we would draw from previous literature and theoretical explanations to inform our understandings of the data. For instance, the first-order codes “fear of lost revenue,” “TV equals revenue opportunity,” “Small schools fear alienation,” and “Larger schools want greater opportunities” were similar to constructs in previous studies showing that different interests of actors within an institution may have a destabilizing effect (see [Seo & Creed, 2002](#)). Referring to these previous conceptions, we grouped these under the second-order theme “disparate perceptions.” We followed a similar process with the entirety of the first-order concepts (see [Figure 1](#)). The final step of our coding and analysis was to develop aggregate theoretical dimensions from our data. Through our analytic process, we had cultivated an acute understanding of the context of our study and of the governance struggles

the NCAA faced with its regulation of college football telecasting. From our second-order themes, we identified theoretical constructs that ultimately resulted in substantial changes to the institutional arrangements of the NCAA.

As this research approach might lack in transferability of the emergent concepts to other contexts ([Langley, 1999](#)), we undertook certain strategies to aid in the transferability of our findings. Notably, we engaged in thick description of the context and the roles in which the actors in the field played ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)). The explanation of these contextual details affords those from other similar contexts to place themselves within the story and see how the theoretical underpinnings from our story may be found in their unique contexts. Furthermore, we consulted with disinterested, third parties to aid in the transferability of our theoretical findings. We discussed our findings with people who were familiar with the context of research to ensure the accuracy of the narrative. Then, we conferred with people who were situated in both sport and nonsport organizations regarding our emergent theoretical tenets. Thus, we believe that our research

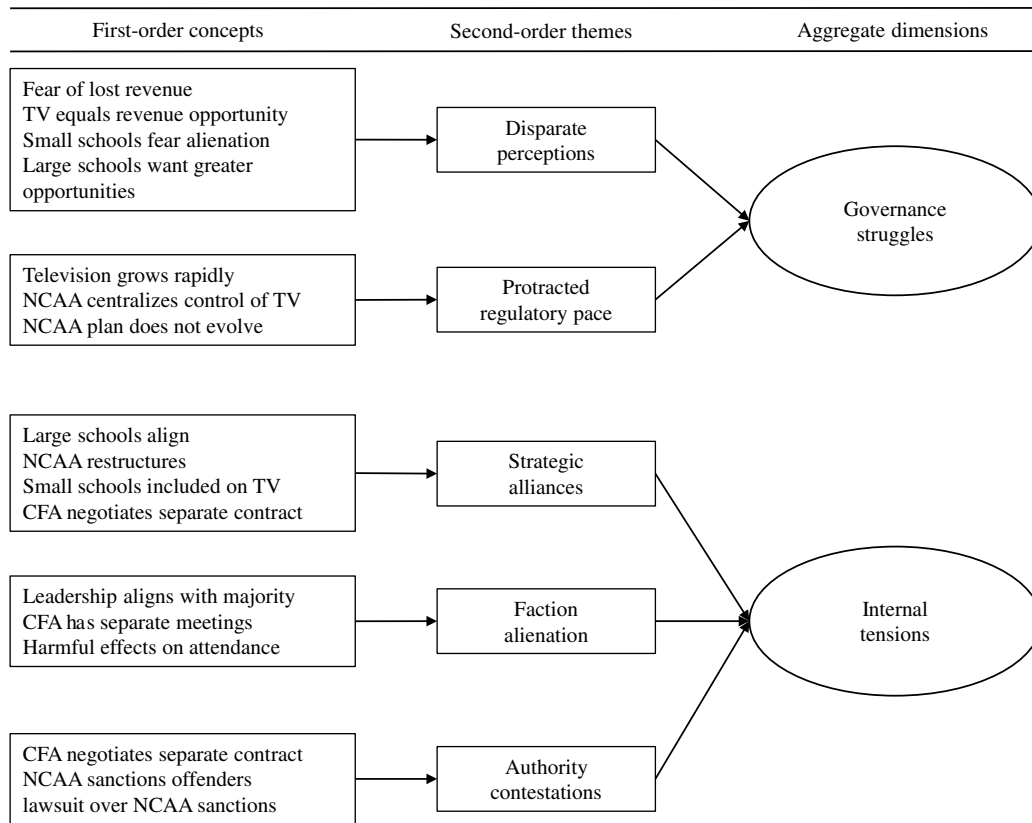


Figure 1 — Data structure. NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association; CFA = College Football Association.

process was rigorous and exhibits credibility and transferability to other contexts.

Findings

In this section, we present the narrative we constructed from our numerous sources regarding the NCAA's efforts to incorporate and regulate the telecasting of college football games. We outline the narrative chronologically and highlight the themes that emerged. To summarize, the pace of the growing technology of television created issues such as disparate perceptions of the role of television within the institution. The NCAA's regulation reflected this and was slow to evolve. The manner in which the NCAA maintained its dominance in regulating television resulted in members forming strategic alliances and ultimately contesting the authority of the institution. Following the presentation of our findings, we discuss the emergent aggregate dimensions we identified and how these dimensions provide answers to the research questions of this study.

Taking Control of the New Technology (1940s–1950s)

In the 1940s, the technological innovation of television was in its infancy, but evidence was mounting that it was

going to be immensely popular in U.S. households. From 1946 to 1949, the sales of television sets grew from 7,000 sets sold to more than three million (de Oca, 2008). This time period also saw the increasing popularity of sports broadcasting, especially college football. College sport administrators were leery of the live broadcasting of college football games due to the potential losses in ticket revenues. However, some universities, particularly the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) and Notre Dame, were more entrepreneurial in embracing television and saw it as a medium for strengthening their universities' profiles (Dunnavant, 2004). Given the uncertainty surrounding televised college football, in 1950, the NCAA commissioned a study from the NORC that showed a decline in tickets sales anywhere from 4% to 15% depending on region of the country (de Oca, 2008; Dunnavant, 2004).

Although it was recognized that television was an issue that needed to be addressed, there were *disparate perceptions* as to the severity of the television problem and the proper manner in which to regulate. This was acknowledged in one of the first reports from the NCAA television committee that was noted in the 1951 NCAA yearbook, "The Committee was struck at once with the prevalence of opinion on the subject and the absence of factual information" (p. 153). Some individual schools were intrigued by the possibilities of television's ability to provide a new source of revenue, yet others were

fearful of lost revenues and the threats to gate ticket receipts. Individual conferences approached television differently also with the Big Ten banning live telecasts for the 1950 season whereas other conferences had minimal regulations. As such, the NCAA deemed television a national issue that necessitated encompassing policy. The NCAA commissioned a new television committee with the task of interpreting the findings from the NORC study and developing a proposal of regulations for television broadcasting of college football games, which were approved in 1951 by the membership (*Yearbook of the NCAA, 1951–1952*). Notably, this policy allowed only one game per week to be broadcast, limited the number of appearances by any single university on television to two games that season, and afforded a revenue split of 40% of the proceeds going to participating schools and 60% being paid to the NCAA for further research and promotion.

This initial plan had overwhelming support from the membership, yet some universities opposed the plan. (The vote tally was 161-7 in favor). Notably, Penn was defiant in its opposition and even went so far to negotiate its own separate television contract with American Broadcasting Company. In response, the NCAA threatened to sanction Penn with many of its fellow Ivy League members (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Columbia, Dartmouth, and Cornell) suggesting that they would cancel their scheduled football games with Penn (*Dunnavant, 2004*). These actions resulted in Penn backing away from its defiance and ultimately complying with the NCAA television plan. Notre Dame was similar in its discontent with the NCAA's regulations but stopped short of Penn's outright defiance but remained the primary dissenter of NCAA television proposals throughout the 1950s and subsequent decades (*Byers, 1995*). Having Penn and Notre Dame express discontent was important as they were both among the schools with the more successful football programs during that time-frame. Despite these dissents, the NCAA's members largely supported the strict regulations as most remained fearful of the harm television could inflict. Asa Bushnell, director of the television committee, captured these sentiments in his address at the 1953 NCAA convention:

While it is not possible to show precisely what would have been the effect of unlimited telecasting of football games in 1952, it is clear that the NCAA limited program substantially reduced the losses in attendance caused by television...it is obvious, therefore, that the more television, the greater the loss; the less television, the less hurt. (*Yearbook of the NCAA, 1952–1953*, p. 169)

While there was considerable consternation over the NCAA's plan, a lack of unified alternative allowed the NCAA to maintain control over television (*Crepeau, 2017*).

Throughout the 1950s, television continued its rapid growth in the United States. From 1950 to 1959, the

number of television sets grew from nearly 10 million to approximately 67 million, with an average of about 6 million new sets being sold per year ("*Television History*," n.d.). With this growth, television networks were in need of programming and college football's popularity and loyal fan base made it highly attractive to the networks. Thad Brown of the National Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters spoke to this during the general round table meeting at the 1955 NCAA Convention, stating

The television broadcaster recognized the field of sports as one of the finest and most wholesome in his many and varied program sources It recognizes, as does each individual telecaster, that intercollegiate football has a place in a station's yearly program content. There is the challenge of the game itself, its popularity in the American sports scene, the alumni interest, the interest of those who would know more about more of the colleges and universities of the United States, big or small, and the great and untapped reservoir of those who have never attended a college football game. (*Yearbook of the NCAA, 1954–1955*, p. 189)

For the 1955 football season, the NCAA Television Committee proposed five different plans to the membership that were all designed to both protect live game attendance but also fuel the growth of television. Fueled in part by the urgings of the Big Ten and Pacific Coast conferences, the membership voted to enact significant changes to the NCAA's television plan which allowed for the inclusion of regional telecasts (193 voted in favor, 27 voted against). Universities were still allowed to only appear twice on television (once for home games and once for away games). This was seen as a compromise between conferences desiring regional control and those favoring the national broadcasting limits ("*NCAA draws basic plan for football TV*," 1955). This expansion was notable because it grew the number of broadcasted games and afforded more opportunities for schools to appear on television.

Despite the rapid growth of television, the NCAA's television plan did not significantly change over the 20 plus years following the 1955 expansions of regulations. The NCAA continued to maintain centralized negotiations of broadcasting contracts for college football and prohibited individual schools from entering into their own deals with networks. Although the dollar amounts of each contract continued to grow, there was noticeable discontent among the members of the universities who appeared on television most often as they were dissatisfied with the growth rate of the television revenues and believe that their earning potential was being stifled. Fueled in part by the adversarial nature of the NCAA President Byers, who was still acrimonious toward television, the NCAA's regulations were slow to adapt to the pace of innovation in the broadcasting markets (*Dunnavant, 2004*).

Rapid Growth and Unevolving Regulations (1960s–1970s)

Two events were indicative of the NCAA's *protracted regulatory pace*. In 1961, the NCAA declined to seek inclusion in the National Football League's (NFL) request for exemption from antitrust laws for negotiating television contracts. Although the NFL saw television as a means for growing its league, the NCAA leadership viewed their television plan as a means for protecting the sport and did not see the need to be included in the exemption (Dunnivant, 2004). On the heels of this decision, in 1966, the NCAA's regulations prevented the national televising of the matchup between Notre Dame and the University of Michigan that were ranked number one and number two in the college football rankings. It did not sit well with the television partners or the powerful members of the NCAA that such a high-profile game was not allowed to be shown nationally. Astutely put, "The bureaucracy was beginning to strangle the logic right out of the plan" (Dunnivant, 2004, p. 83).

Although there had been *disparate perceptions* of the benefits and threats of television during the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s escalated the tensions within the field and laid the groundwork for the defining battle over television negotiation rights. The slow to evolve regulations became the source of heated conflict between the leadership of the NCAA the high-profile football universities (i.e., those frequently appearing on television). The primary catalyst of the tension was incongruence between the evolution of the NCAA policies and the success of external negotiations of television contracts. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, NCAA executives, notably president Byers, had become adept at creating competition between the television networks to make revenues from each contract increasingly more lucrative (Dunnivant, 2004). At the same time, the NCAA became more aggressive in enforcing its rules and threatening to television revenues of offending universities. These developments did not sit well with the football powers as the centralized NCAA regulations remained highly restrictive to their earning potential. Frustration mounted as the leadership continued to operate paternally to protect the lower profiled football schools (the vast majority of the NCAA membership) while limiting the high-profile members.

Recognizing the diversity of its membership, the NCAA underwent significant organizational changes during the 1970s in hope of quelling much of the tension. As noted by Richard Bowers from the University of South Florida at the 1972 NCAA Convention, "The real idea is to get the divisions in groups that have similar athletic philosophies, similar objectives and, therefore, I think there is a great deal of connection here with the third division discussions" (NCAA Convention Proceedings, 1972, p. 101). Although most were in favor of restructuring, some small school representatives were leery of the football powers control of resources.

Indeed, Ross Smith of the Massachusetts Institute for Technology stated

There are 40 or 50 colleges involved in making all the TV money, and unless we can write in some statement of faith that would be strong, that would indicate that the type of funding we have had which has been very basic to the operation of the College Committee would continue, I, for one, wouldn't be willing to vote for any kind of restructure. (NCAA Convention Proceedings, 1972, p. 104)

Despite these types of concerns, the overwhelming majority of NCAA members believed that restructuring was necessary.

In 1973, the NCAA convened its first ever special convention wherein the association was restructured into three divisions. The larger, high-profiled universities comprised Division I whereas the smaller universities made up Divisions II and III. Each division remained subjected to NCAA authority but was allowed to develop its own rules that better suited its members. However, this restructuring failed to alleviate the television tensions as the NCAA maintained centralized negotiating authority and operated to uphold equality in its television policies at the expense of allowing autonomy for its members. That is, the NCAA tried to minimize the widening of the gap between the television haves and have-nots. This was seen in the NCAA's move to limit the number of football scholarship offerings provided by each school. Television powers had been able to offer nearly unlimited scholarships, whereas the lower profiled schools were severely limited in their scholarship offerings. This infuriated the football powers as they believed that the NCAA was overstepping its bounds in regulating business operations of its membership. Indeed, "the powers felt absolutely powerless within the structure of the NCAA" (Dunnivant, 2004, p. 112).

Tensions continued to boil as the NCAA's policies were unrelenting and unevolving. Still trying to protect member equality, the NCAA leveraged its television contracts to include Division II and Division III football games, which the television powers saw as taking away from viable timeslots that they could leverage for greater revenues. The NCAA's distribution of revenues was also equal, regardless if the school appeared on the national or regional broadcasts. In many regards, the NCAA's television plan was stuck in the 1950s and had not significantly changed. Finally, the television powers had enough and decided to fight back against the NCAA. In 1977, 63 universities from the Atlantic Coast Conference, Western Athletic Conference, Big Eight, Southwestern, and Southeastern conferences (such as Ohio State University, University of Michigan, University of Oklahoma, University of Georgia, and University of Nebraska) along with the service academies (i.e., U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Military Academy, and U.S. Air Force Academy) and independent affiliates Notre Dame and Penn State formed the College Football Association (CFA).

This *strategic alliance* openly opposed the NCAA's limitations and acquiescence to the smaller schools' interests. The CFA positioned the financial interests of the football powers as supreme to the protection of the nonpowers. Despite initially disjointed and relatively powerless, the CFA began holding separate meetings to discuss strategies for leveraging better television contracts beyond NCAA control. Byers (1995) suggested that the CFA was "eager to establish itself and cripple the NCAA" (p. 258). The growing dissent between the CFA and the NCAA led to significant *faction alienation* as the NCAA maintained the focus of protecting the interests of the entire membership.

The Culmination of Tensions (1980s)

The culmination of the tensions occurred in 1981 when the CFA negotiated a separate television contract with National Broadcasting Company. The NCAA already had contracts with American Broadcasting Company and Columbia Broadcasting System and had maintained its policy that prohibited separate television contracts by its members. As had become commonplace, the NCAA attempted to sanction members of the CFA as being in violation of its regulations. Despite contempt from members of the CFA, the NCAA membership approved resolution number 49 at the 1981 convention that would further extend the sanctioning authority of the NCAA Committee of Infractions or Council to impose television sanctions (NCAA Convention Proceedings, 1981). As such, the NCAA sought to punish members of the CFA for negotiating television contracts outside of the NCAA's current contracts (Dunnavant, 2004). In response, the University of Oklahoma and the University of Georgia filed a lawsuit in U.S. federal court against the NCAA as the ultimate *authority contestation*. Relying on its position established in the 1950s, the NCAA defended its regulations as protective for its members. The lack of foresight in the 1960s wherein the NCAA declined inclusion in the NFL's request for antitrust exemption ultimately backfired as the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 7-2 that the NCAA was in violation of antitrust statutes (Scully, 1984). The NCAA's unwillingness to evolve its governance had led to it losing control of college football television contracts. This was significant on many fronts as the NCAA lost control of a primary revenue stream, but perhaps more importantly, its power had been substantially diminished. The NCAA had lost a high-profile public battle with a faction of its members who challenged the legality of its authority.

Following the Supreme Court's decision, the CFA tried to maintain as a coalition and collectively negotiate television contracts. However, the initial fears of the NCAA were soon realized as the prices for college football television contracts were driven down by market being flooded with potential games for televising. Indeed, "with three times as many games on the air, the college teams still earned \$25 million less in the first

year of their free market chaos" (Dunnavant, 2004, p. 173). In 1990, the collapse of the CFA was initialized as Notre Dame broke from the coalition and secured its own television contract with National Broadcasting Company (Oriard, 2009). The Southeastern Conference followed suit in 1994 by negotiating a lucrative 5-year, \$85 million contract with Columbia Broadcasting System. Soon the major football conferences in the CFA were competing against one another and securing their own television deals. Ultimately, the CFA disbanded in 1997. As predicted by the U.S. Supreme Court, the NCAA's regulations were unnecessary for protecting competitive balance within college football (Bennett & Fizez, 1995). These events led to the current climate wherein college football broadcasting contracts are negotiated by individual conferences and universities with little NCAA involvement.

Discussion

This research sought to understand how innovation might impact institutional arrangements. In the previous section, we outlined the major events that ultimately led to the NCAA's loss of regulatory power over television contracts in college football. In this section, we discuss how our findings address the research questions posed in this study. Although the specifics of our study are contextually bound, we believe that the concepts presented here are transferrable to other contexts and offer relevant insights to both theory and practice.

Certainly, innovations likely provide catalysts for institutional work (Raviola & Norbäck, 2013), yet previous research within sport management (and to some extent the broader organizational literature) has yet to provide answers the issues created by and responses to innovation. The first research question of this study asked what challenges might be faced by institutions amid the proliferation of innovation? Our research suggested that the primary challenges stemmed from disparate perceptions of impact of innovation and the institutions slowness to evolve (protracted regulatory pace). Disparate perceptions of innovation are not unique to our context as others have also shown this as well (see Harding et al., 2016). By its very nature, innovation provides uncertainty to those who are institutionalized as "purely novel actions and ideas cannot register because no established logics exist to describe them" (Hargadon & Douglas, 2001, p. 478). In the case of the NCAA, the institutional leaders (i.e., executives such as Byers) recognized the disparate perceptions of its membership and drew from its established legitimacy to fit television regulations into the NCAA's governance model. Although this was meant to alleviate uncertainty and quell the apprehension of some members, this strategy ultimately became a key source of tension as the NCAA's regulations became stifling to the interests of powerful members. These *governance struggles* destabilized institutional arrangements and eventually became precursors to substantial institutional change. In short, we

suggest that innovation is seen differently in an institutional field. Although innovation can be viewed as means for updating practices (i.e., viewed in a positive manner), innovation could be perceived as a threat for the actors wanting to maintain the institution. This is because for the actors wanting to destabilize the institution (in our case the schools like Penn or Notre Dame), the innovation offers a way to bypass the regulatory power of the institution.

This leads into the second research question that inquired about the consequences that might emerge from institutional responses to innovations. Previous research has shown that institutional change is often the result of destabilizing conditions such as exogenous shocks (Dacin, Goodstein, & Scott, 2002) or conflicting logics (Seo & Creed, 2002). These provide windows of opportunity for change agents to exploit institutional weaknesses and institute new arrangements (Battilana et al., 2009). In our study, the proliferation of television destabilized the NCAA as it was indeed an exogenous shock that operated within logics that could be perceived as contradictory to the amateur model of college athletics. This created *internal tensions* within membership of the NCAA. These tensions were resultant of the governance struggles as the disparate perceptions of television and protracted regulatory pace of the NCAA created conditions from which tensions arose. In this regard, the NCAA was trying to use its previous institutional scripts to address new problems (Raviola & Norbäck, 2013). Members strategically aligned; faction alienation became prevalent; and those who felt alienated contested the authority of the NCAA. Consistent with previous theorizations (Battilana et al., 2009; Seo & Creed, 2002), the infighting within the institution and inconsistencies of logics became the precursors to the institutional changes that saw the NCAA stripped of its centralized regulatory power in college football.

Our research outlines the process whereby innovation leads to institutional change. We have outlined how innovations can destabilize institutional arrangements and how the institutional leadership's attempts to regulate eventually result in destruction of institutional arrangements. This process is outlined in Figure 2. We

theorize that when innovation is introduced into existing institutions, governance struggles created by disparate perceptions and protracted regulation may lead to internal tensions. These tensions likely entail the fracturing of institutional members with those being disadvantaged by the current institutional arrangements will battle with leadership to leverage more favorable arrangements. Ultimately, this leads to substantial institutional change.

Through the process outlined here, there were some interesting elements that extend conceptions of institutional work and institutional change. First, our research tells a story of power struggles within an institution. Scholars have limited understanding of the role and evolution of power within institutions (Greenwood et al., 2008). In our study, an exogenous shock (i.e., television technology) initiated a crisis within the institution. Prior to the exogenous shock, there was perceived stability between the institution (its ability to regulate) and the members (willingness to be regulated). The shock (in our case creation of television) not only provided the opportunity for the institution to tighten its control (further regulation), but also provided a way for the members to resist control. As the institutional leader, the NCAA drew from its established legitimacy to exert power in the form of stifling regulation. In this regard, the power of the institution was able to defend against an innovation that could have led to destruction of the institution. Interestingly, the same power that was employed to defend the institution ultimately became the catalyst to significant change. Once the threat imposed by the innovation was mitigated, the unrelenting exertion of power from NCAA executives led to tensions within the institution. Institutional elites (in our case, the CFA) coalesced to combat the authority of the institutional leadership. As understandings of the impacts of innovation evolved, the unwillingness of the institution to morph its power structure resulted in significant changes to institutional arrangements.

More broadly, our study suggests that innovations are moments of opportunities for institutions and its members to rearrange the existing relationships. In addition, our study further shows how the relationship between intrainstitutional dynamics (conflict between

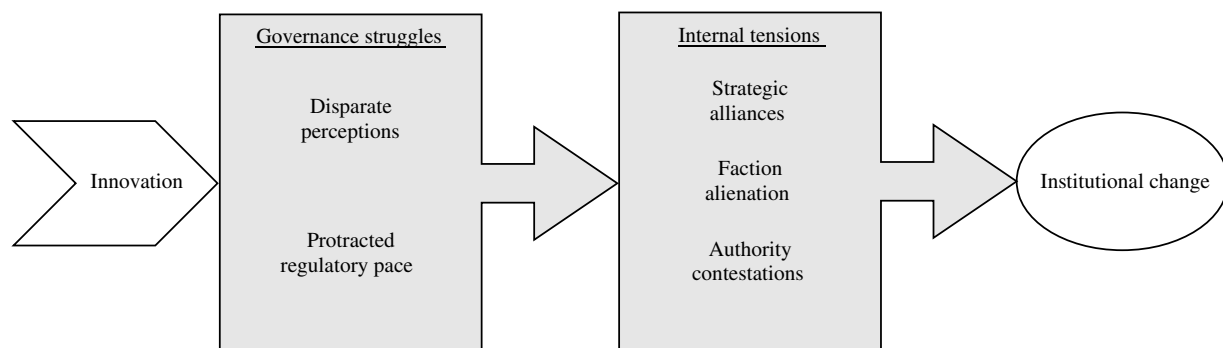


Figure 2 — Innovation leading to institutional change.

the NCAA and its member schools) is influenced by interinstitutional dynamics (Supreme Court decision, NCAA decision to not join in on antitrust concerns with other professional sport associations). Last, our study focused on technological innovation, but often, innovation is more social in nature. Future research could extend this line of inquiry by examining issues such as concussion protocols, how sport institutions attempt to address and incorporate LGBTQ concerns in sport, cultural sensitive issues such as mascot names and dress (can women athletes wear hijabs or not), or the appropriate use of social media. Future research could look at how institutional actors work to address issues such as social innovation, political change, globalization, and other environmental issues that have the potential to disrupt the existing arrangement between the institution and its members.

Conclusion

This research offers keen insights for sport managers facing innovation in diverse sport contexts. First, it is important for sport managers to be cognizant of disparate perceptions from stakeholders regarding the viability and impact of innovation. Here, the NCAA was ineffective in its management of disparate perceptions, and this ultimately led to a splintering of its membership. The institution never truly recovered from this destabilization. Sport managers would be wise to develop strategies for reconciling differences in perceptions and work to maintain stability within their institutions. This likely entails refined social skill to induce cooperation within these institutions (Fligstein, 2001). Second, this research points to the importance of maintaining congruence between the pace of innovation and the pace of institutional evolution. In our study, the proliferation and refinement of the television industry quickly outpaced the modernity of the NCAA's regulations. It soon became apparent that television was not the threat once envisioned but instead was a viable revenue source. However, the NCAA maintained its restrictive regulations that limited the revenue potentials of a significant portion of its membership. This led to infighting and contestations of authority that destabilized the institution. Thus, we contend that it is imperative that sport managers remain adaptive with their management of innovation so that rules and policies are current with advancements in the field.

We would be remiss not to address the limitations of this research. Notably, this study focused on an institution that failed to maintain its arrangements when an innovation was introduced. While we are confident that the conclusions drawn here are theoretically applicable, future research should consider examining institutions that managed innovation in a manner that did not result in substantial changes. This would be a valuable extension of our findings. Furthermore, this study focused on U.S. college basketball, baseball, and hockey having substantial television contracts with varying levels of NCAA involvement in their television negotiations.

However, the data sources from which we drew focused almost exclusively on the regulating of football television contracts. The NCAA convention proceedings only presented college basketball television contracts as secondary to the NCAA's concerns of football.

Innovation remains an important topic within sport management as advancements, whether technological, operational, or procedural, can have lasting impacts on institutional arrangements. As with any research project, we often end up with more future questions than answers. The goals of this research were to examine how dominant regulatory institutions (NCAA) address technological innovations (television) in the field that they regulate (college football). Although our research may have been contextually bound, we believe that we have provided a valuable extension to understandings of how innovation impacts institutional arrangements. Future research could see if this pattern of overly controlling regulation is consistent in other sports, as well as if the institutional work of dominant actors and change agents seeking to leverage innovation is similar in other contexts. It is clear that innovation spurs institutional work and may result in significant change to institutional arrangements.

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Note

1 In the 1950s, the NCAA yearbooks detailed the events and conversations taking place at the NCAA's convention. The yearbooks were later retitled to "conference proceedings."

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Appendix

Data Sources

S. No	Name	No. of Page
1	Flath, A.W. (1963). <i>A history of relations between the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the Amateur Athletic Union of the United States</i> (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation). University of Michigan.	276
2	Hoover, F.L. (1958). <i>A history of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics</i> . Unpublished master's thesis. Indiana University.	42
3	Land, C.B. (1977). <i>A history of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics</i> (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation). University of Southern California.	70
4	Dunnivant, K. (2004). <i>The fifty-year seduction: How television manipulated college football, from the birth of the modern NCAA to the creation of the BCS</i> . New York : St. Martin's Press.	281
5	Oriard, M. (2009). <i>Bowled over: Big-time college football from the sixties to the BCS era</i> . Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.	334
6	de Oca, J.M. (2008). A cartel in the public interest: NCAA broadcast policy during the early Cold War. <i>American Studies</i> , 49(3/4), 157–194.	37
7	Shulman, J.L., & Bowen, W.G. (2011). <i>The game of life: College sports and educational values</i> . Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.	310
8	Byers, W. (1995). <i>Unsportsmanlike conduct: Exploiting college athletes</i> . Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.	413
9	1951–1952 Yearbook of the NCAA	275
10	1952–1953 Yearbook of the NCAA	151
11	1953–1954 Yearbook of the NCAA	252
12	1954–1955 Yearbook of the NCAA	260
13	1955–1956 Yearbook of the NCAA	241
14	1956–1957 Yearbook of the NCAA	257
15	1957–1958 Yearbook of the NCAA	203
16	1958–1959 Yearbook of the NCAA	232
17	1959–1960 Yearbook of the NCAA	216
18	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1972	191
19	NCAA Special Convention Proceedings 1973	110
20	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1973	173
21	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1974	274
22	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1975	183
23	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1976	230
24	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1977	177
25	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1978	194
26	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1979	179
27	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1980	165
28	NCAA Special Convention Proceedings 1981	90
29	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1981	215
30	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1982	155
31	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1983	196
32	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1984	184
33	NCAA Convention Proceedings 1985	171
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