THE EMERGENCE OF PROFESSIONALIZATION IN SPORT: COMPLEMENTARY PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

This case-based paper explores the emergence of professionalization and professionalism in elite and amateur sport. Using a case study, and the systems representational tools of qualitative systems dynamics, it complements a systems perspective of the interdependent dynamic processes and relationships existing between dimensions of commercialism, commercialization, professionalization and professionalism within elite sport, with perspectives derived from within the frame of institutional theory. In doing so, the paper provides insights about how such relationships, and the institutional context within which they exist, have impacted on the development of professionalism within the amateur code of a major sport whose elite level has been subject to professionalization.

Keywords: commercialism, professionalism, commercialization, professionalization, amateur sport, rugby union, systems, institutional theory

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This paper complements a body of work that has sought to demonstrate the benefits of building understanding of systemic structure through the use of systems representational tools, and then how such systems representations are able to contribute to the generation of meaning [19] [21]. In particular, the paper seeks to provide insights of the systemic nature and effects of professionalization at the elite level of a major sport – rugby union, and how such insights may contribute to a broader understanding of the nature of changes manifest as professionalism and professionalization at the grass-roots or amateur level of the same sport.

Within the paper, the causal loop diagramming (CLD) approach of qualitative systems dynamics (SD) is used to surface and represent the systemic nature and structure of behaviours and relationships embedded in the processes of *commercialism*, *commercialization, professionalization and professionalism* at the elite level of sport. In addition, the approach seeks to surface the behaviours, outcomes and consequences that emerge as the result of inter-connected and interacting causal loops and systems structures, and which have been described by Senge and others [32] [33] as the emergent properties of the system.

The paper begins with brief introductory comments on the sport of rugby union, before providing a selective review of relevant literature on professionalization and related notions. These sections act as a platform for a discussion of professionalization within rugby union, from its adoption in the mid-1990s

The paper then seeks to demonstrate how the use of schematic and systems representational tools such as the causal loop diagrams (CLDs) may provide (i) systemic insight of the interdependent relationships existing between dimensions of commercialism, commercialization, professionalization and professionalism within elite sport, and (ii) build understanding and insight about the emergence of professionalization.

Following a brief outline of prior empirical research describing the changes to the amateur/grass-roots game that have occurred since the professionalization of the elite game, a subsequent section invokes the complementary framework of institutional theory to consider whether and how the institutional context of the wider game and associated institutional norms/logics may have contributed to the development of professionalism within the amateur game.

The paper concludes by offering comment on the value of using complementary systems and institutional theory conceptualisations to generate and convey insight and meaning [19].

RUGBY UNION – A GLOBAL SPORT.

Evolution and Revolution in Rugby

In the mid-1800s, various formats of the game of football were played under different rules in the public schools of England. Early attempts to formulate a uniform set of rules foundered as a divide established between the 'dribblers' and 'handlers'. The former favoured the Cambridge Rules and formed the Football Association in 1863. The latter favoured the Rugby School rules and led to the establishment of the Rugby Football Union (of

England) in 1871, as a union involving more than seventy rugby clubs, the year in which the first international match in any sport, between England and Scotland, was played. By 1873, rugby union was played in Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and together, they formed the International Rugby Board (IRB) to regulate the increasingly popular international game. Within England, association football grew rapidly amongst an expanding working man's base of competitive sport, as did rugby in the north of England, but the public school elitist origins of rugby meant that it grew more slowly as a gentleman's game especially in the south. The consequence of a difference in attitude to playing sport was that a Northern Union was formed in 1895, eventually leading to what is now known as Rugby League.

Somewhat in parallel, football of various formats, including rugby, association football and Victorian/Australian Rules, had been played in the nascent school and club system in New Zealand. However, by the mid-1870s, the rules of the Rugby Football Union were adopted, and rugby became the dominant football code. In brief, rugby in NZ represented evolution, whilst rugby in England represented revolution! [40].

Over the next century, rugby grew to be a global sport; offered in 15- and 7-a-side versions; featuring in the 1924 Olympics; introducing a quadrennial 15-a-side Rugby World Cup (RWC) in 1987; and 'Sevens' becoming an Olympic sport in 2016. Whilst such developments in hindsight, and in themselves, appear evolutionary, they have created a climate for change. Indeed, none may have had more effect than the introduction of the RWC in 1987 – an event now recognised as the third biggest global sports event behind the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup. Improved communications – in the form of air travel, satellite-facilitated global media and broadcasting, and the corresponding burgeoning growth in the value of media rights etc, gave rugby the opportunity and the financial means to grow as a global game – despite its extant amateur status. Such opportunity posed an essential dilemma that needed to be played out in much the same way as the dilemmas posed by association football and rugby football followers a century earlier. Indeed, the opportunity encompassed a similar dilemma about whether the game should remain amateur when faced with a growing desire, need or demand for the professionalization of the game.

The following section provides a brief review of relevant literature on professionalization, as a prelude to discussion about professionalization within rugby union.

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND PROFESSIONALISM

In this paper, the term *professionalization* has specific meaning and connotation. The professionalization of sport not only encompasses the player change from amateur status to a paid professional; or the emergence and development of professional clubs; but also the provision of a platform for growing professionalism within the sport. That is, we regard professionalization as more than payment of players alone.

We therefore use the term *professionalization* in the broader sense that has been applied in sport, but not necessarily how it is used in the more restrictive or specific manner as used by the medical, legal or accounting professions. We neither use the term in the way that it is commonly pitted against a view of *amateurism* and the formal strictures of amateurism, practised by various sports codes, that players at grass-roots levels should *not* be paid. Indeed, we espouse a view, as noted by O'Brien and Slack [26: 418] that amateurism carries with it "much more than a simple prohibition on athletes' financial remuneration", especially so because of its connotations with informality and volunteer contributions at club operations and governance levels. Additionally, amateur 'informality' has often meant a resistance to over-organization and, elsewhere, a concern that players should enjoy the amateur game for *its own sake* [22], rather than the game exist as a showpiece for spectators (as would occur on the professionalized stage), or for the extrinsic rewards of payment. These latter views may be contrasted with the more limited interpretations of amateurism mentioned earlier.

Professionalization and professionalism are also viewed as extending to various domains: management, governance, coaching, player development, etc. In this regard, we may refer to the work of Taylor and Garratt [39] who studied professionalism within the domain of coaching in the UK. However, whilst they regarded professionalism as reflecting, amongst other things, "clearly benchmarked standards, novel forms of commercial engagement and ever-present systems of formal accreditation" [39], in this paper, we see such notions as comprising the dual concepts of professionalization and professionalism.

Others have noted that professionalism reflects an intrinsic "commitment to work to improve one's capabilities" [15: 268], in combination with an appropriate level of functional capability and independent critical thinking in order to improve competitiveness within a field [16]. More generally, the notion of professionalism encompasses the "the skill, good judgment, and polite behaviour that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well" [24]. It is not surprising then that many have suggested that professionalism can be realised through education

and training, and through associated socialisation processes. Professionalization offers one of these processes [16] [17] [34] [38].

As an aside, and somewhat by contrast, Nichols et al. [25] have provided insights about other extrinsic motivations underpinning the emergence of professionalism. For example, in a study examining the voluntary sport sector in the UK, they commented on the impact that private sector providers of pay-to-play sport have on volunteer and member-based amateur club sport when setting up in direct competition. These new competitors are considered to have contributed to the pressure on amateur clubs to professionalize, in the sense of acting with professionalism, and correspondingly, in providing 'professional' service and delivery [25].

Nichols et al. [25] have also referred to other perceived pressures leading to a need to exhibit professionalism. Such pressures include those considered to reflect an institutional or societal aversion to different types of risk, including, not only the risk of sporting injury, but also the risk associated with an increasing litigiousness - a willingness and ability to take legal action against organizations or individuals deemed to be 'negligent'. In some cases, some such pressures have led to government legislation imposing conditions on organizations and their activities; including the up-skilling, training, qualification and screening of volunteers [25]. We note that these responses parallel a similar top-down move towards professionalization of sport-related 'work', where it has been suggested that professionalization has often led to an unintended bureaucratized rather than a professionalized sports system [35].

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the related notions of *professionalization* and *professionalism* feeding on, and feeding one another, and parsimoniously depict the relationships in Figure 1 as a simplified double hermeneutic process [12], where *professionalization* embodies *professionalism*, and *professionalism* engenders *professionalization*.

Figure 1: Professionalization, Professionalism, Commercialism and Commercialization
A Schematic Interpretation

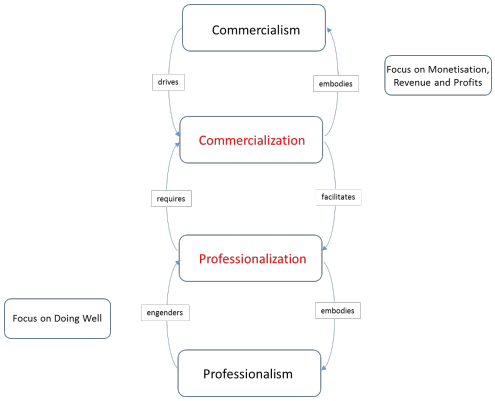


Figure 1 also manifests the view that the growing commercialism in sport (the belief that sport-related activity can be monetized, and the allied desire to secure commercial revenues) drives *commercialization* (the packaging of sport as an activity that could bring in funds). As such, the funds received from *commercialization* facilitate *professionalization* – that is, the paying of players. Similarly reflecting a further double hermeneutic or mutual dependency process, we note that *professionalization* - the payment of players, coaches etc, requires or needs *commercialization* – also annotated in Figure 1 as a 'focus on profits' - if sporting bodies are to be financially viable.

In addition, professionalism exemplifies the values and behaviour that enable the pursuit and demonstration of skill and elite levels of play - 'a focus on doing well' – that would nevertheless be enjoyed by spectators and viewers. Such enjoyment or approval would then encourage or endorse further pursuit of professionalization through payment of players etc in a manner that would increase the likelihood of superior performance.

Indeed, the benefits of professionalization in sport can be myriad; manifest as better conditioned and prepared athletes, with higher skill levels leading to better performance and greater spectacles of skill, and highly competitive contests attracting larger spectator audiences. The latter often lead to greater commercial opportunities, in general, and to enhanced media rights and greater interest in developing sponsorship relationships, in particular (for example, [30]. Such additional streams of commercial revenues may then fund development or recruitment of more talented players or more qualified and experienced support staff, who may then further contribute to an ethos of professionalism. They may also fund the improvement of venue and spectator facilities. Furthermore, enhanced commercial revenues also make it possible to pursue a wider range of commercial opportunities, and aid initiatives for the packaging and monetizing of sport experiences to bring in

these revenues (commercialization).
In such environments, spectators/fans also contribute directly and significantly to sport's embracing of commercialism and commercialization through their willing purchase of stadium memberships, season and match tickets, as well as sport and team-related merchandise [2] [14] [29] [30]. These funding streams linked to fan-bases also provide a platform for, and facilitate the professionalism of, athletes by improving training facilities, medical services, and through guidance on personal development. Given this 'virtuous circle', it is not surprising that there has been an increasing focus on the sustainability of commercial revenues, the related financial viability of professional teams, and the financial impact of on-field performance [1] [14] [26] [29] [30].
Several studies have suggested that professional sport brings rewards to a wide array of stakeholders - its athletes, teams, team and competition owners, fans and supporters [14] [30]. Recent research in New Zealand has explored how professionalism emanating from the professionalization of elite rugby in rugby has manifest itself in the amateur (grass-roots) game amongst the rugby clubs of the Wellington Rugby Football Union's (WRFU) clubs. In the following section, we provide selective coverage of the emergence of professionalization within rugby union, and of such recent research, to facilitate the development of complementary perspectives that shed insight on the relationships between commercialism, commercialization, professionalization and professionalism.

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF ELITE RUGBY

In 1995, at a time coincident with the success of the third Rugby World Cup, the South African, New Zealand and Australian Rugby Unions formed a composite entity/joint venture known as SANZAR to develop and manage the sport's first professional rugby competitions – the international, inter-provincial Super Rugby competition and the Tri-Nations competition between the national representative teams.
This initiative was a response to what FitzSimons [10] had termed a "battle" for global control of rugby union, or the riches of rugby union, led by Australian media magnates, Kerry Packer and Rupert Murdoch. It was a manifestation of change that led to the elite game becoming fully professional, and constituted more revolution than evolution. In addition, it reflected confidence in the growth of interest in the elite game, and in the potential of rugby union to be financially self-sustaining.
It had been recognised that to facilitate the professionalization of the elite game, and the payment of elite athletes/rugby players/coaches/ medical and other support staff, access to guaranteed funding streams not previously available to the global, national and provincial governing bodies of the game, was required. Perversely, as far as the media magnates, Packer and Murdoch, were concerned, the necessary funding arose from a multi-country billion dollar contract for television media rights in the three SANZAR nations. As a consequence, professional rugby was able to emerge at the national level and at the provincial (or state regional) in each country. Initially, a Super 12 (then expansion to Super 15, 16 and now 18 teams) competition was established for regional franchises fielding professional teams from each country [29], and what become known as a Tri-Nations competition between the national representative sides – the Springboks (SA), the All Blacks (NZ) and the Wallabies, for Australia.
For New Zealand rugby therefore, what we may refer to as the institutional logic of professionalism had manifest itself in concert with commercialism – that is, the lure of lucrative revenue-generating commercial opportunities associated with the international inter-provincial rugby competitions. As stated earlier, these competitions were conceived by the SANZAR grouping. However, in order to secure the then massive media rights payments that were on offer (approximately US$800m over a ten year period for the NZRU) in return for delivering attractive competitions and competitive play (the commercialization of sport), it was recognised that players would need to be 'professional'. That is, the new competitions would require greater demands on player time in terms of travel, fitness, conditioning, and skills; and as such, rugby players in these new elite international competitions would need to become full time employees; and similar expectations could be made of coaches, managers, etc. This new dominant logic of professionalization was in contrast to the prior amateur status of the same players, coaches etc.
At the outset of professionalization, the organizational, managerial and financial structures put in place by the NZRU differed from Australia and South Africa. For example, the NZRU created and held ownership of five regional franchise teams representing all geographical areas in NZ, but mandated that one host provincial union (PU) in each region hold and operate the management license for each team. In addition, all players and coaches were centrally contracted to the NZRU, an arrangement which aligned with a modified player draft system. This employment arrangement meant that potentially unhealthy competition between franchises for players and coaches was minimised, as was the possibility of the strong getting stronger at the expense of the weak, or, for example, financially stronger regions accumulating the top players. To further address issues of maintaining competitive balance, the NZRU also chose to distribute funds to its franchises for player development and

marketing purposes [29]. Nevertheless, in a manner dissimilar to the English experience (see [26], there was a clear distinction between the professional (Super 15, All Blacks and semi-professional provincial teams) and the amateur clubs at the grass-roots where payment was not allowed.

O'Brien and Slack, in their study of the emergence of professionalization of rugby union in England [26], noted that professionalization not only benefited the players via salaries, but also facilitated professionalism amongst players, administrators and support staff - and changed the elite clubs' mode of operations. They also found the emergence of professionalization to be a turbulent process, characterised by uncertainty of revenues; by the financial failure of some formerly amateur clubs which had made constitutional changes to governance structures to facilitate operation as limited liability companies (LLCs); and by conflict between long-standing club members and new owners. While amateur values and voluntarism had previously underpinned operational norms, the 'dominant logic' of professionalization meant that new funding streams would not only facilitate more expansive operational forms, drive commercialization, and create virtuous cycle of revenue and market growth – but also that such economic benefits would permeate professional clubs as they moved towards sustainable financial structures.

In the following section, we seek to shed light on such matters by illustrative use of a systems approach and systems perspective to better understand the systemic nature of the embedded relationships between key variables.

A SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

The approach we now illustrate is redolent of Senge in its use of systems notions and systems representations [32] [33]. In particular, we use the causal loops diagrams (CLDs) of qualitative systems dynamics (SD) to capture and represent forces that impacted the introduction of *professionalization* to the world of rugby, and which depict the mutually reinforcing systemic relationships between *commercialism*, *commercialization* and *professionalization*.

Firstly, via Figure 2, we provide such a CLD systems representation of a subset of variables and relationships that reflect the inter-related notions of *commercialism* and *commercialization*. We note it as a deceptively simple way of capturing causal relationships that are subtly interdependent as they play out over time. The importance of identification and effective operational definition of variables within the CLD becomes apparent in the narrative that is necessary to convey the causal logic and to give meaning to the underlying systemic structure embedded in the CLD. The accompanying narrative(s) below seeks to illustrate the latter points and to provide appropriate understanding and meaning to our situation.

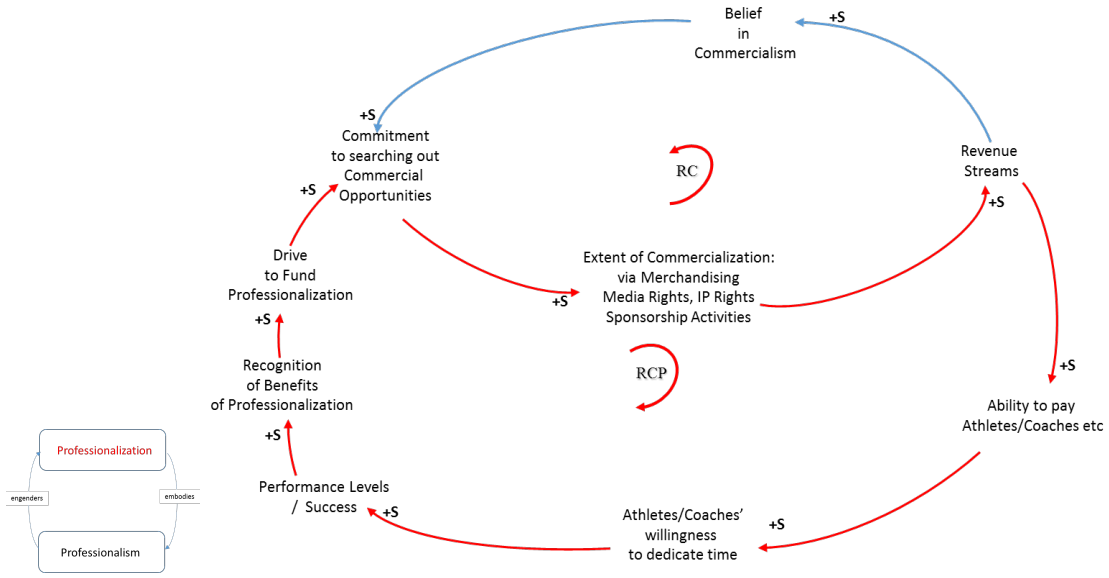
For example, for Figure 2, we note how the **growing** media-magnate *Competitor Willingness to Pay Players* put the national rugby unions and especially, the global governing body, the International Rugby Board (IRB) – since renamed as World Rugby [43] - under **increasing** *Pressure to Professionalize,* resulting in the IRB recognition of an **increasing** *Need to fund Player Payments,* consequentially **bolstering** the *Drive to Fund Professionalization*. The *Drive to Fund Professionalization* necessarily **heightens** *Commitment to searching out Commercial Opportunities*. This *Commitment* then **impacts** the nature and *Extent of Commercialisation via Merchandising Media Rights, IP Rights, Sponsorship Activities*, and in turn, **boosts** *Revenue Streams*. Such **higher** *Revenue Streams* can then lead to a **stronger** self-fulfilling *Belief in Commercialism*, that further **adds** to *Commitment to searching out Commercial Opportunities,* in what Senge [33] refers to as a reinforcing cycle or loop (Loop RC) – which is dynamic in nature, that is, it plays out over time. In this depiction, we have a **virtuous** reinforcing cycle or loop, suggesting that *Commitment ...*, *Belief ...* etc, will grow as time unfolds, in a manner reflective of the emergent properties of the wider system and manifest of the systemic structure, other things being equal. However, it may also be noted that if the *Drive to Fund Professionalization* diminishes, *Commitment ...* may be **adversely affected**, and Loop RC may instead play out as a **vicious** reinforcing loop, with key variables spiralling **downwards**.

Figure 2: The Systems Representation – CLD Ia – The Commercialism/Commercialization Loop

Note: The cause effect links in Figure 2 are denoted by arrows. An arrow with a '+S' indicates that 'if the cause increases, the effect increases *above what it would otherwise have been'*, that is, a change in the cause is positively associated with a **S**ame direction change in the effect. So, if the cause decreases, the effect would decrease. That is, if *commitment to Searching out Commercialisation* grows, then the *Extent of Commercialisation via Merchandising Rights, IP Rights, Sponsorship Activities* will also grow.
A negative arrow with a '−O' would indicates that 'if the cause increases, the effect decreases *below what it would otherwise have been'*, that is, a change in the cause is associated with an **O**pposite direction change in the effect.

In a similar way, we can represent the systemic relationships between *commercialization* and *professionalization* as a CLD (see Figure 3.). By way of narration, we note again how a **strong** *Drive to Fund Professionalization* necessarily **heightens** *Commitment to searching out Commercial Opportunities*, and how this *Commitment* then **impacts** the nature and *Extent of Commercialisation Activities*, which in turn, **boosts** *Revenue Streams*. Such **higher** *Revenue Streams* can then **increase** *Ability to pay Athletes/Coaches etc*, **lifting** *Athletes/Coaches' Willingness to Dedicate Time* to their sport, and **boosting** *Performance Levels/Success*. With **increased** *Performance Levels* leading to **greater** *Recognition of the Benefits of Professionalization*, not surprisingly, there would be an **stronger** *Drive to Fund Professionalization* – thus 'closing the loop' as another as another virtuous reinforcing cycle or loop. As such, Loop RCP in Figure 3 provides an alternative perspective on the mutually reinforcing systemic relationship between *Commercialization and Professionalization*.

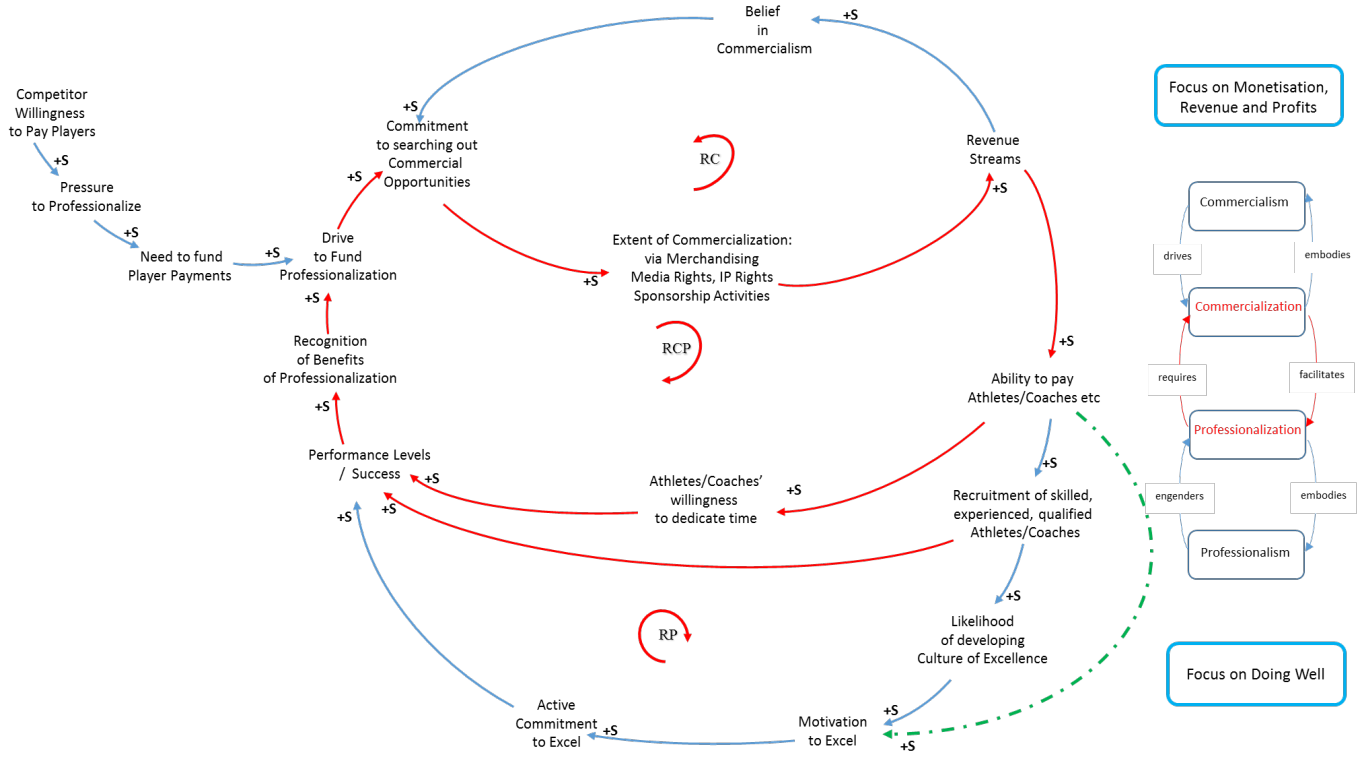
Figure 3: The Systems Representation – CLD Ib – Commercialism/Commercialization/Professionalization Loops



Next, in Figure 4, we provide an illustration of the systemic links that exist between *Commercialization*, *Professionalization* and *Professionalism,* before offering in illustration the broader system-wide view of what we be regarded as interacting sub-systems or causal loops, in Figure 5.

Figure 4: The Systems Representation – CLD I c –Commercialization/Professionalization/Professionalism Loops

Figure 5: The Systems Representation – CLD II –
The Commercialism/Commercialization/Professionalization and Professionalism Loops



Having considered how the inter-related notions of *commercialism*, *commercialisation*, *professionalization* and *professionalism* may contribute to an understanding of the emergence of professionalization, the following sections provide preliminary comment on the impact of professionalization on amateur rugby. First, we provide an overview of recent research which has shown how, in the nearly twenty years since the decision to 'professionalize' elite sport in rugby union, there have been allied changes to the behaviour and expectations within the organizational field of amateur sport clubs. This, then, provides opportunity to discuss how such individual changes may be better understood by developing perspectives using the concepts and frame of institutional theory. In particular, and in keeping with the studies undertaken by O'Brien and Slack [26] [27] and

Cousens and Slack [5], we may use an institutional theory framework, including the notion of institutional logics [8], to frame the discussion of amateurism in the context of professionalization.
As such, we seek to develop complementary perspectives from the use of different frameworks, first by taking a systems approach to examine the emergence of professionalization at the elite level, and then complementing a systems approach with an institutional theory frame to consider how professionalization and professionalism at the elite level may impact the sport at amateur level.

PROFESSIONALIZATION AND THE AMATEUR GAME

Changes to and within the organizational field of amateur sport, have taken different forms – changes in expectations, behaviour, values, attitudes etc. They include expectations associated with professionalism, such as the preparation and conditioning of players; the provision of para-medical, physiotherapeutic and medical care; the development of coaches and coaching programmes; the development and provision of training facilities and conditioning equipment; the creation of player/talent identification and development systems; and of course, the consequent expenditure and funding arrangements. With such changes or developments, it may not be surprising then that views have been expressed that a growing professionalism is 'good for the game'.
Whilst prior studies [26] [27] [41] have identified tensions between emerging professionalism and erstwhile amateurism within clubs at the elite level, other findings [3] highlight a different form of financial tension that surfaces in amateur clubs seeking to embrace what they perceive to be professionalism. Notwithstanding such tensions, in England and NZ, the amateur game has continued to be the life blood of the professionalized sport, funnelling promising players into the professional code, yet still providing opportunities for fans to watch elite amateur competition in their local area. In NZ, amateur clubs are expected to continue to operate in an 'amateur way', with no payments for those playing or coaching the game, and with no payment for those involved in organisational, managerial or administrative roles - that is, depending on volunteers.
Nevertheless, it has been noted that the opportunities provided by professionalization of the code as a whole can impact amateur clubs' operations, in particular their expenditures as they seek to attract, support and develop promising players. For example, even without player payment being used as an attractor at amateur level, clubs vie for gifted players in different ways to ensure on-field and off-field success [28]. Recent studies exploring the impact of professionalization on the amateur game, have not only surfaced significant patterns of expenditure, but also revealed volunteers' perceptions of the prevailing rationale for such expenditures. For example, in a recent study of amateur rugby clubs within the Wellington Rugby Football Union (WRFU) in NZ, it was noted that amateur club officials make significant conceptual distinctions between what they consider to be *discretionary* and *non-discretionary* expenditures that have been impacted by the seemingly osmotic absorption of notions of professionalism observed in the elite game. Such distinctions are mainly of a sporting nature reflecting *player/playing/match preparation*, and *game-development* or player-*development* initiatives.
The WRFU context is typical in many ways of the 27 provincial unions (PUs) that operate and field semi-professional teams in a national provincial competition. However, the WRFU context is different in that it hosts, and owns the license for one of the five professional teams, the Hurricanes, in the SuperRugby competition also involving five Australian and five South African teams. Owning and managing the Hurricanes license has generated revenues for the WRFU which have helped it counter the decline of revenues experienced throughout the NZ game [6]. The institutional context of rugby in NZ, and the related institutional context provided by the WRFU, are of significance in understanding impacts on the amateur game, especially as the WRFU as a *union* of the amateur clubs, like other PUs, also have responsibility for fostering the game's development. These matters are further explored in the following section.

PERSPECTIVES FROM AN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY FRAME

Institutional theory provides a conceptual framework for understanding how aspects of environmental context, for example, the normative structures, traditions and 'rules' within that environment, may impact the behaviour of organisations as well as behaviour within organisations [4]. It can also help develop perspectives on "how cultures, structure and routines operating at multiple levels become the carriers through which institutions impact ... (organizations)" [20: 418], and how organizations as "cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities give meaning to ... behaviour" [7]. As such, institutional theory can illuminate how organisational behaviour and practice can become infused with implicit values, or be implicitly embraced in a search for legitimacy [6]. In particular, it can help us understand how contextual factors can effect change, resistance or inertia in organizations within the same environment conceptualised as an organizational field [7] [8] [11.

In all these respects, institutional theory may therefore shed light on the emergence of professionalization and professionalism, on associated values and practices within the domain or organizational field defined by a rugby football union, and on the expression of rugby at different levels: amateur club level, semi-professional provincial level, and the elite international and professional level.

As such, analysis of rugby as an organizational field goes beyond single organizations, such as clubs, to include the formal and informal network ties linking them at different levels within the field [5]. Institutional theory requires us to conceive of changes within a field as being dynamic processes associated with the emergence of new organizational entities, new linkages between organizations and new actors and, above all, shifts in what may be termed as the dominant logics shaping the relationships or arrangements between actors [13]. We note, in passing, the value of CLDs as complementary systems representations of dynamic processes and relationships.

According to Cousens and Slack [5], where change occurs, it occurs within and between members, as well as to the organizational field. Not surprisingly, all sports organizations are subject to institutional and environmental pressures to change [28]. Hence, the emergence of professionalization at the elite level of rugby, and the surfacing of professionalism at club and provincial levels, are not only representative of significant change phenomena, but characterise an organizational field that may be better understood using conceptualisations of institutional theory. Selectively drawing on prior work, the manner in which professionalism and amateurism have been examined as dominant logics in sport is described below in relation to selected examples of what may constitute professionalism.

For example, recent research [23] has identified significant perceptions and expectations within amateur clubs about the need to support the clubs' elite or Premier team(s) in various ways. These include, for example, the funding of *match-related* expenses: uniforms, playing equipment, medical/physiotherapeutic expenses, laundry, meals etc.

These findings mirror those of Nichols et al. [25], in as much as they both capture amateur rugby clubs' attempts to provide, mimic or match many of the player-related services that have become standard within elite professional clubs. As well as including medical and para-medical services, they also include the provision of in-house player development academies, or participation in residential coaching programmes. In doing so, many amateur clubs have willingly sought to replace uncertified coaches, *trainers*, *strappers* and *rubbers* with qualified coaches, fitness conditioners, doctors, physiotherapists and masseurs – in their attempts to act with professionalism. As such, the clubs have contributed to the development of professionalism amongst these 'support' actors – not just coaches, but also specialist fitness-conditioners, sports doctors and sports physiotherapists – by creating entry points to what may be a career in professional sport – a bottom-up grass-roots phenomenon. Indeed, these are examples that go beyond putting the interest of the amateur organisation first. They may be interpreted as examples of amateur clubs enhancing the system within which, and through which the clubs exist; and as reflecting an acceptance of implicit duties and obligations to the sport and its player participants. Drawing on institutional concepts, it may be said that the amateur clubs recognise the value/benefit of 'conforming' to, or enhancing the broader organisational system [37]. Using a complementary institutional perspective and interpretation, it can be argued that the 'support' actors have emerged in their distinctive forms and have entered the organizational field concurrent with professionalism gaining dominance as a prevailing institutional logic (see [5] [18] [31] [36]).

Additionally, parent governing bodies, such as the WRFU and the NZRU have facilitated professionalization and professionalism with the imposition of conditions on whom could be appointed to these roles at different levels in the system – a top-down phenomenon. Provincial Unions (like the WRFU), require all coaches appointed to representative teams to meet appropriate education, training and qualification requirements. As such, we see aspects of professionalization of the coaching community, and enhanced professionalism in terms of appropriate attitudes to striving for excellence and developing skills within that community. This mirrors the NZRU's expectation at elite level that there will be a *de-facto* professionalization of the disciplines within rugby. As such, rugby is neither alone in being conceptualised as an organization field or in its movement towards the professionalization of the disciplines, for as Whitson and MacIntosh [42] have commented, the 'institution of sport' has produced a number of career patterns or pathways within sport for different groupings including athlete, coach, physical education teacher, sport journalist, sport physician, and sport scientist.

As a further particular example of this phenomenon within the WRFU, and in addition to the *match-related playing* expenditure, it has also been found that significant sums have been spent on *game-development* programmes by amateur clubs. This activity focuses on developing the game within the clubs' affinity or geographical catchment area, by employing and deploying Rugby Development Officers (RDOs). Where clubs have employed RDOs with grant subsidies or matching funds from the WRFU, they have also accepted subsidy

conditions that require such RDOs have appropriate qualifications obtained from courses of study and practice prescribed by the NZRU. It is evident that clubs not only consider that the RDOs' development work contributes to the sustenance and sustainability of rugby in their localities, and also to the national game, but that employment of RDOs also reflects the clubs' acceptance of, participation in, and contribution to a growing professionalism within the sport. As such, many clubs perceive expenditure on *game-development* via RDOs, and associated coaching and *player development* programmes offered by private organisations, as *non-discretionary*. Such values and perceptions are redolent of the institutional norms present within the wider organizational field that have emerged at the amateur club level, and which are strengthened by interaction at the club level, and between actors within clubs and others at the professional level. Indeed, such commitments may again be interpreted as examples of amateur clubs enhancing the system within which they exist; as reflecting acceptance of implicit duties; and as demonstration that amateur clubs recognise the value of enhancing the broader organisational system of which they are a part [37].

In summary, such professionalism occurs at different levels, and affects a variety of occupational groups operating within the rugby sector. As the dominant logic changes from amateurism to professionalism, the field expands to include these new 'professional' actors as Greenwood et al. [13] suggest. We may therefore infer that expenditures by amateur rugby clubs to mimic professionalism will mirror behaviours associated with the professional game as well as similar behaviours exhibited within the amateur game. Indeed, allocation of resources reveals the dominant logic of professionalism, its values, attitudes, behaviours etc., infiltrating not only the professional game, but also challenging the logic of amateurism within the grass-roots clubs. Indeed, such behaviours provide evidence that the isomorphism or apparent mimicry, which has been found in other studies [8], and which is routinely denied by clubs who perceive themselves as autonomous, can be extended to the organizational field of rugby union, in general, and the normative structures and values embedded in professionalization and professionalism, in particular. Notwithstanding benefits already recognised, some have suggested that such professionalism is anticipated to reduce the use of volunteers, potentially side-lining the 'local enthusiast' within the amateur game [15] [39]. These suggestions are beyond the scope of this paper, but pose questions for further research about how amateur sport can be sustained financially and operationally in the longer term. Such matters of sustainability will grow in significance if the freely donated volunteer contributions of time and effort are diminished; are perceived as being of lower value; and/or lead to consequential greater dependence on the services of professionals. They may also grow in importance, given the related rise of commercialism and the strengthening of commercialisation practices in the professional code, and the targeting of similar funding sources by both professional and amateur codes.

CONCLUSION

The paper has demonstrated how the use of schematic and systems representational tools associated with qualitative systems dynamics may provide systemic insight of how interdependent relationships between dimensions of *commercialism*, *commercialization*, *professionalization* and *professionalism* play out as a set of dynamic processes over time within elite sport. In addition, the paper has shown the benefits arising from the mutually reinforcing use of complementary conceptual frameworks, and the mutually reinforcing insights arising from a systems perspective and from perspectives derived from an institutional theory frame. The paper has demonstrated, through recognition and understanding of the systemic structure tying together dynamic mutually dependent processes and relationships, how important sport-related matters may be elevated beyond anecdote to convey insight and meaning [19]. The paper adds to an understanding of the emergence of professionalization in elite sport, and to changes to the amateur/grass-roots level that have followed, and that may be attributed to, professionalization.

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