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Qualitative Research in Sport Management: Case Study as a Methodological Approach

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Abstract

This paper presents qualitative research in sport management and suggests that case study is an appropriate qualitative methodology for research and practice in sport finance. The purpose of qualitative methodology is presented along with the process of a case study. The intention of this paper, for academicians working in sport management, is twofold. The first aspect is for researchers to consider using qualitative case study methodology in instances where such practice will progress the knowledge and understanding of specific situations while invoking a deeper response to research questions. The second facet of this paper focuses on the framework of case study methodology, as applied to a research project in the field of sport finance.

Keywords

Qualitative, Case Study, Sport Management, Finance, Ticket Pricing, Baseball

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Qualitative Research in Sport Management: Case Study as a Methodological Approach

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This paper presents qualitative research in sport management and suggests that case study is an appropriate qualitative methodology for research and practice in sport finance. The purpose of qualitative methodology is presented along with the process of a case study. The intention of this paper, for academicians working in sport management, is twofold. The first aspect is for researchers to consider using qualitative case study methodology in instances where such practice will progress the knowledge and understanding of specific situations while invoking a deeper response to research questions. The second facet of this paper focuses on the framework of case study methodology, as applied to a research project in the field of sport finance. Keywords: Qualitative, Case Study, Sport Management, Finance, Ticket Pricing, Baseball.

The purpose of this paper is to convey instruction through demonstration of the case study method as it was applied to a research study in the field of sport finance. This paper will explain how to analyze perceptions and practices of a Major League Baseball (MLB) organization regarding ticket pricing strategies. The definitive goal of the primary research study, used in this paper as a demonstration, was to gain a greater understanding of how an MLB organization views different ticket pricing strategies, and what influences the decision-making process when pricing tickets. After comparing qualitative and quantitative methodologies it was determined that qualitative design provided the best method for discovering the perceptions of ticket pricing strategies within one Major League Baseball organization. The qualitative paradigm created a better opportunity for a deeper understanding of the subject matter by utilizing “what” and “why” questions to help identify and describe the pricing method(s) being implemented within that particular organization. At the conclusion of this paper, readers should have a complete understanding and working knowledge of how to implement case study design in similar situations within the field of sport finance.

Background

When searching for a deeper understanding in research it is important to have a holistic account of the issue from multiple perspectives. Data is collected by the researcher in a natural setting from multiple sources of data, in opposition to relying on a single source of data (Creswell, 2009). Researchers following a qualitative research protocol have the ability to find a deeper understanding of what is yielded from a decision or a process. This strategy of inquiry also allows research to be critical of the decisions and process, which gives the researcher yet another perspective and the potential to open up a breadth of new information (Creswell). Olafson (1990) previously indicated a continued need for theoretical foundations to guide research in sport management and suggested the use of qualitative methodologies to

take research further than the traditional quantitative designs. Arguably, the notion exists, that sport management researchers tend to favor the quantitative paradigm even though qualitative teaching and research methods have been endorsed and utilized to generate new knowledge across various disciplines (Inglis, 1992). Further, Olafson also referred to rigorous standards and the need to consider other designs. Taking the aforementioned views into consideration, researchers must be open to identifying the paradigm best designed to explore the topic at hand, and then base their choice of research methodology upon which method best meets those needs as it is important to utilize research designs that are the best method for answering the research questions at hand (Frisby, 2005). While qualitative research is starting to be published more frequently in sport management journals, this perception still appears to hold true in the field of sport finance research. Since the inception of the International Journal of Sport Finance, in February of 2006 through the current issue, there has not been a single qualitative case study published. Researchers must understand the balance between both, sport and finance, paradigms.

When conducting research in sport, it is imperative to understand sport revolves around participation and human interaction. In sport, “our subject matter is comprised of human processes and experiences that are reflected in thoughts, emotions and purposeful behaviours which are shaped by the dynamic flux of social life,” (Brustad, 2009, p. 112). This interaction should have an impact on how research is conducted in our field. The subject matter at hand and the types of research questions we seek to answer should create a different perspective than that of a quantitative researcher. If a lack of understanding and appreciation affects the types of questions we ask, it will invariably limit the knowledge that we gain (Brustad). Therefore, it is important for researchers to understand and respect the value of qualitative research in the field of sport finance in order to understand the human component of our research.

The qualitative study used in this paper to demonstrate the framework for case study focused on ticket pricing strategies in Major League Baseball. As discovered in pricing literature, psychological and sociological influences play a decisive role in pricing strategies. With the combination of the psychological aspects of pricing along with the sociological aspects of human interaction of sport it seems natural to use qualitative design to “focus on the “what” and “why” of doing research and let the “how” follow from a logical, rather than a prescribed, process” (Brustad, 2009, p. 114).

As Inglis (1992) and Brustad (2009) have noted, sport is highly “connected” to people. This connection occurs in a practical sense, whether it is through competitive interaction involved in sport or management and administration of sport. This connection also transcends into research through a theoretical perspective as Inglis also suggested that qualitative methodologies are valuable as they can offer meaningful answers to our research questions as researchers tend to have a “close interaction” with their participants, and those participants are “involved in the social phenomenon” (Inglis, p. 3).

Qualitative and Quantitative Paradigms

There are deeply rooted philosophical and theoretical differences between qualitative and quantitative design. These distinctive differences begin with different worldviews. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers have a constructivist worldview while quantitative researchers have a post-positivist worldview, also known as epistemologies. The difference between a constructivist and a post-positivist is their approach to research. The constructivist focuses on observation and behavior while the post-positivist is more concerned with “experimental strategy of inquiry and pre- and post-test measures” (Creswell, 2009, p. 16).

These worldviews dictate the methodological approach to research making it important to know the fundamental differences between the two. Creswell (2009) explains that when using qualitative research “the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the views of the participant” (p. 16). This approach differs from quantitative design which tends to focus on “testing theory by specifying narrow hypotheses and the collection of data to support or refute the hypotheses” (p. 16). These definitions demonstrate a distinct difference in purpose. While quantitative researchers set out to answer a set of research questions by either rejecting or failing to reject the null hypotheses, the qualitative researcher’s main goal is to find meaning within the phenomenon. Denzin & Lincoln (2005) explain the difference occurs since “qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them” (p. 3). This definition refers to the difference in research settings. Quantitative researchers rely on an experimental approach, also known as a laboratory setting, while qualitative researchers rely on the field, or natural research setting.

This distinct research setting allows qualitative researchers to add their own personal experiences to the subject matter and allows the researcher to build an intimate relationship with the phenomenon being studied. The qualitative approach allows, and focuses on, “*how* social experience is created and given meaning” while quantitative studies “emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 10). This paper focuses on the constructivist worldview and the process of case study design used in a natural setting to investigate the meaning of a specific phenomenon.

Case Study as a Qualitative Methodology

Case study has been defined by Creswell (1998) as “an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (p. 61). Stake (1995) narrowed the definition by defining case study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (p. 27). Cassell and Symon (2004) described the appropriateness of a case study when it is important to “understand how the organizational and environmental context is having an impact on or influencing social processes” and when attempting to “understand everyday practices and their meanings to those involved, which would not be revealed in brief contact” (p. 325).

Merriam (1998) acknowledged, “By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity (the case), the researcher aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (p. 29). The case study method facilitates the collection of more extensive amounts of information than other methodologies. This provides for more comprehensive data and a greater understanding of the phenomenon. In the case of understanding perceptions of ticket pricing strategies within the Colorado Rockies organization, extensive collection of information from individuals involved in the pricing process and understanding the specific phenomenon through their perceptions was ideal.

Yin (2003) provides the following criteria for which a case study strategy is ideal. First, the study needs to define the type of research questions being asked. What, how, or why questions are ideally addressed through case study design. Secondly, the degree of control the investigator has over actual behavioral events must be taken into consideration. The less control the investigator has, the more appropriate case study design becomes. Thirdly, the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events should determine the usage of a case study design. According to Yin, a case study is more appropriate for contemporary events than historical events.

Based on Yin's and other qualitative criteria, the topic of ticket pricing in Major League Baseball (MLB) satisfies all three qualifications of a case study strategy. First, the research questions focus on the investigation of the process or understanding of various perceptions on a phenomenon, while implementing what and how questions. Secondly, the topic does not require the investigator's control of behavioral events. Finally, the issue of ticket pricing is one of the most contemporary issues in sport ticketing. The type of case study paradigm that we applied is an instrumental case study (Stake, 2000).

A particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest: it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else. . . . The choice of case is made because it is expected to advance our understanding of that other interest. (p. 237)

The issue examined in this study is the phenomenon of ticket pricing in MLB and the case is the Colorado Rockies organization. This research focused specifically on what influences the organization's decision-makers with regard to ticket pricing. Additionally, this study aimed to explore these influences in order to gain a greater understanding of the decision making process.

Theoretical Stance

Epistemological framework is defined as the "theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). My epistemology is constructionism (or constructivism). Constructionism is a theoretical lens through which the researcher conducts the study. Constructionism claims that meaning is constructed by interactions between people and their environment (Crotty). Often times, diversity allows people to make sense of the same reality in reasonably different ways. Constructionism encourages us to approach research with an openness instead of the conservative meanings we have been taught [by our environment] to associate with an entity (Crotty).

This study collected information for the purpose of creating knowledge from the interaction of human beings. From the constructivist perspective, knowledge of ticket pricing will be created through social constructions. Experiences and accounts of the participants in this study will help create knowledge and theory about this focus of interest (Stake, 2005). Constructivists tend to focus on collecting knowledge and constructing theory, which was the goal of this study (Crotty, 2003).

Although the constructivist lens does not appear favorable for generalizations, Stake (1995) suggests that generalizations can be made provided the researcher presents a thick description of the case as well as "interpretations of the people most knowledgeable about the case" (p. 102). Conducting research using the constructivist lens also allows the researcher to present findings that potentially allows readers to make their own generalizations (Stake).

Sampling Procedure

Creswell (2009) suggests that a case might be selected "as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 13). For this study, the Colorado Rockies were the case since ticket pricing is an issue of relevance in MLB and an analysis of this case would lead to a greater understanding and better implementation of ticket pricing strategies.

Merriam (1998), identifies two types of sampling: probability sampling (or random sampling) and nonprobability sampling (or purposeful/purposive sampling). Quantitative researchers believe the strength of random sampling lies in its generalizability. However, the focal point of most qualitative research does not lie with generalizability, as cases are bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2009), thus the use of nonprobability sampling. Random samples are “not necessary or even justifiable in qualitative research” (Merriam, p. 61). In this particular case, a convenience sample is most sensible to use since “the investigator must use naturally formed groups” (Creswell, p. 155), this procedure is also referred to as a “quasi-experiment” (Creswell, p. 155). Convenience sampling, “is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, p. 61). In this case study, the Colorado Rockies were purposefully selected for the reasons previously stated.

For this study, a team was selected from Major League Baseball because of the extensive supply of tickets and the use of various ticket pricing strategies. Next, it was important to select a team that has a high supply of tickets and varying demand for those tickets. Therefore, creating an ideal situation where variable ticket pricing, dynamic pricing, tiered pricing, or real-time could have, or already had, a role in the organization. The Colorado Rockies are known around the league as a pioneer for their efforts in implementing creative pricing strategies. In 2007, the Rockies ranked 24th out of 30 teams in the major leagues in percentage of tickets sold at 57.4% (Major League Baseball Attendance Report, 2007). However, the Rockies were near the middle of the league (19th out of the 30 and 17th out of 30) in average attendance and total attendance, respectively, despite making an improbable run to the World Series. According to Merriam’s criteria of a typical sample this team was selected since “it reflects the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (p. 62).

Sources of Evidence

It is important to collect data in a variety of forms to give the researcher multiple data sources (or sources of evidence). Creswell (2009) stressed the importance of utilizing multiple forms of data, such as “interviews, observations, and documents, rather than relying on a single source of data” (p. 175). Yin (2003) identified the six most common sources of evidence as “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts” (p. 85). Patton (1990) agrees with Yin about the importance of including multiple sources of evidence: “Multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective (p. 244).” Yin then continued explaining the importance of using multiple sources of evidence when stating, “By using a combination of observation, interviewing, and document analysis, the fieldworker is able to use different data sources to validate and cross-check findings” (p. 244).

This study converged evidence from documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, and any other relevant material that supplied useful data which contributed to the overall understanding of the issue being studied. The following outline lists the sources of data utilized during data collection.

Documentation and Archival Records

According to Stake (1995), documents serve as “substitutes for records of activity the researcher could not observe directly” (p. 68) while Yin (2003, p. 89) suggests using archival

records in conjunction with other sources of information in the case study process. Documentation and archival records in this study consisted of:

- all available documentation regarding ticket policies
- www.coloradorockies.com
- ticket memos
- ticket pamphlets
- ticket policies
- seating manifest

Archival records consisted of any available documentation regarding the history of ticket sales in the Rockies organization.

Interviews

Face-to-face, one-on-one interviews are considered the most valid form of data collection during the interview process. Telephone interviews along with electronic mail interviews are considered acceptable forms of data collection (Creswell, 2009). All three methods were implemented in this case study. Yin (2003) discussed the vitality of interviews in qualitative research which resemble Brustad's comments, discussed earlier in this paper, pertaining to sport revolving around participation and human interaction:

Overall, interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs. These human affairs should be reported and interpreted through the eyes of specific interviewees, and well-informed respondents can provide important insights into a situation. (p. 92)

This research relied on human interaction and insights with professionals in the field who are well-informed. The most knowledgeable personnel regarding the Rockies' ticketing policies and strategies who worked in the areas most affected by the ticket pricing model were purposefully selected as participants for this study. The interviewee list included representatives from the Rockies' front office, specifically from the ticket pricing committee.

During the entire research process, I also made use of a theoretical sampling method which is the process of selecting "incidents, slices of life, time periods, or people on the basis of their potential manifestation or representation of important theoretical constructs" (Patton, 2001, p. 238). According to Strauss & Corbin (1998), theoretical sampling is "sampling on the basis of the emerging concepts, with the aim being to explore the dimensional range or varied condition along which the properties of concepts vary" (p. 73). Theoretical sampling "is important when exploring new or uncharted areas because it enables the researcher to choose those avenues of sampling that can bring about the greatest theoretical return" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 202).

The value of interviewing is explained by Seidman (2006): "interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of the behavior" (p. 4). There are several types of interviews that can be implemented to collect data. Interviews can range from highly-structured to informal. Merriam (1998) discusses how "interviewing in qualitative investigations is more open-ended and less structured" (p. 74). Denzin & Lincoln, (2005) explain that "unstructured interviewing can provide greater breadth than do other types given its qualitative nature" (p. 705). Interviews for this case study were conducted with an interview guide, while allowing for a semi-structured interview format. This allowed the interviewer to react to the "situation

at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, p. 74). Conducting semi-structured interview questions that were open-ended helped facilitate the data collection process by allowing for in-depth follow-up questions to the opinions of these industry professionals regarding their ticket pricing model (Yin, 2003). Interviews were conducted with:

- All five team representatives on the ticket pricing committee
- A variable ticket pricing researcher with a Ph.D. in Economics from the University of California, Berkeley who is considered, by many, as an expert in the field due to his background and publications on the topic.

Direct Observations

By attending games, I was able to make direct observations by purchasing tickets at the ticket window. I was also able to track ticket sales and potential price changes online and by telephone.

Qualitative Internal Validity

Internal validity threats are “experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the participants that threaten the researcher’s ability to draw correct inferences from the data about the population in the experiment” (Creswell, 2009, p. 162). Merriam raises the question: “Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring” (p. 201)? This case study utilized several strategies to enhance internal validity, as discussed in the next few sections.

Triangulation

Triangulation is the process of using “multiple perceptions to clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation” (Stake, 2005, p. 454). “We assume the meaning of an observation is one thing, but additional observations give us grounds for revising our interpretation” (p. 110). Many researchers suggest the use of triangulation to make certain we have the most complete information available (Stake; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). Triangulation encompasses “using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data, or multiple methods to confirm the emerging findings” (Merriam, p. 204). Utilizing Yin’s (2003) six most common sources of evidence enhances internal validity. Stake suggests using multiple sources of data will help the researcher verify repeatability of an observation or interpretation, or in other words, “to see if the phenomenon or case remains the same at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently” (p. 112).

Member Checking

Member checking is defined as, “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible” (Merriam, 1998, p. 204). Member checking is considered an element of triangulation and diminishes the threat of researcher misinterpretation. Member checking helps increase the validity and accuracy of the researchers’ observations and findings. In this study, the researcher remained in communication with each of the participants to ensure the truth value of that data (Creswell, 2009). Findings from the analyzed data that derived from the semi-structured interviews were sent back to the participants for verification of accuracy. This procedure was

conducted in follow-up interviews with the participants. It is important to note that raw transcripts do not need to be reviewed by an interviewee for clarification (Creswell, 2009).

Researcher Bias

Clearly defining all assumptions and theoretical orientations at the beginning of a study will help the reader understand how the data may have been interpreted by the researcher (Merriam, 1995). My constructivist view was previously discussed and the following section describes my previous experiences and established opinions regarding ticket pricing strategies.

Personal Statement

As someone who has worked in ticket sales [season, single-game, and group], and frequently attends sporting events, movies, and purchases airline tickets, I have experience with a variety of different ticket pricing strategies. In my opinion, the younger generation of sport fan is more tolerant to change. Is the average baseball franchise aware of fan perceptions regarding ticket pricing strategies? What do MLB teams do to help educate fans on pricing strategies? Are MLB teams aware of a more tolerant generation of fans, or are they still catering to the baseball “naturalists?”

When conducting a pilot study in a qualitative research class, I interviewed college students on their perception of variable ticket pricing. My findings suggested MLB teams need to educate fans on what variable ticket pricing is. If fans were more educated about the philosophy and strategy of variable ticket pricing they could take advantage of specific situations, and in turn, help increase revenue for the MLB team. Teams are always looking for ways to increase revenue and educating fans on the pricing system in place would help mitigate complaints about ticket prices. Many people like the ease of purchasing the same ticket for the same price each and every time. However, fans might feel differently about this approach after being educated on the pricing process and instilled with the knowledge of being able to possibly purchase a ticket for a less-expensive price on certain occasions. This of course leads to the question: “Do fans want to pay less for certain games at the risk of paying more for higher value games?” In my previous experiences selling and purchasing tickets, people are always willing to pay more money for something they value more. In an extreme example: who wouldn’t be willing to pay more to see a World Series game than a regular season game on a Wednesday afternoon in June?

There is a high probability that anyone who has ever attended a high valued event of any variety has likely had some interaction with ticket scalpers. Ticket scalpers are people in the secondary ticket market, who are a separate entity from the organization, from whom you can purchase tickets to an event from. Most of my interaction with ticket scalpers has been at sold out events. High value games usually have a demand higher than the supply available, thus the term sold out. This high demand and low supply creates a higher ticket price than the reference prices set by the organization. Many organizations despise ticket scalpers and the organizations I worked for felt that ticket scalpers were ‘taking money out of our pockets.’ However, in my opinion this was not the case. In my opinion, the problem was that we were not setting optimal ticket prices to meet the market value. By underpricing our tickets, we were in fact, taking money out of our own pockets. The ticket scalpers were just taking advantage of an obvious business situation in a free market. They were buying a product at a low cost and selling it at a higher cost, similar to how a day-trader would buy and sell stocks on the stock market (buy low, sell high).

History shows people are willing to pay higher prices for tickets, as long as they see the value. In my opinion, organizations should take into consideration the value of the event before setting the price and price the potential of the event, not the cost of the event. This would help narrow the gap between the primary market price of a ticket and the secondary market price, which would allow the organization to increase ticketing revenues by retaining a higher percentage of the market value of a ticket.

Qualitative External Validity

Creswell (2009) defines external validity as potential threats that “arise when experimenters draw incorrect inferences from the sample data to other persons, other settings, and past or future situations (p. 162). Qualitative external validity is also acknowledged as generalizability and/or transferability (Merriam, 1998). To address concerns with qualitative external validity, this study utilized thick description and typicality.

Thick Description

Providing a rich, thick description of the case and its participants permits readers to vividly understand the setting and to recall their own circumstances that might match that of the research situation (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). When the researchers provide a thick description, it allows readers to identify their own level of transferability with the setting, the participants, and potentially the findings. Stake (1995) stated: “Following a constructivist view of knowledge does not require the researcher to avoid delivering generalizations. But a constructivist view encourages providing readers with good raw material for their own generalizing” (p. 102).

Typicality

Typicality describes the similarity of cases in the same class, so readers can compare their own situations to this particular case (Merriam, 1998). How similar are the Colorado Rockies to other MLB teams? As discussed earlier, based on attendance figures the Rockies are quite similar to the majority of MLB teams. Major differences between MLB franchises deal mostly with demographic differences from market to market and broadcasting contracts, both of which influence a team’s market share.

Qualitative Reliability (Dependability)

Creswell (2009) discusses qualitative reliability as the researcher’s approach to the research and the importance for consistency across different researchers and projects. Merriam (1998) and Yin (2003) identify reliability as the issue of whether or not the study would yield the same results if it were repeated. Merriam outlined three traditions to address reliability concerns: investigator position, triangulation, and audit trail.

Investigator Position

According to Merriam (1998), outlining the researchers’ assumptions, theoretical background, sampling methods, details about the participants being studied, and the situation in which they will be studied is what makes qualitative research more dependable.

Triangulation

Converging multiple methods of data collection to establish themes enhances both internal validity as well as dependability (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003). The use of triangulation in this study was discussed in-depth in the previous section on internal validity.

Audit Trail

An audit trail is comprised of details about the data collection process, the methods used, and how the data was analyzed. “If we cannot expect others to replicate our account the best we can do is explain how we arrived at our results” (Dey, 1993, p. 251). The researcher may not be willing or able to replicate the study precisely; however, they should be able to attain the same conclusions if the researcher explains how their conclusions were reached (Merriam, 1998). The creation of the audit trail began with notes on the data collection process and the methods used. The audit trail also included field notes, which is the “written account of the observation” (Merriam, p. 104), and a researcher’s journal along with full transcriptions of all the interviews. These included my description of the setting, notable quotations, and my comments and interpretations about the observation (Merriam). The journal was used to characterize thoughts that were not necessarily related to one exact observation but are relevant in terms of the progression of this research topic.

Grounded Theory Analysis

While there are various investigative techniques available for researchers; this study utilized grounded theory analysis. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe grounded theory as methods that “consist of simultaneous data collection and analysis, with each informing and focusing the other throughout the research process” (p. 508). Throughout this case study, I repeatedly reviewed, evaluated, and organized interview transcripts, field notes, my research journal, and all other relevant documents. I also took notes from each data source (primarily the interviews) to interpret the information gathered and to help identify categories and concepts from that data. Once categories were identified, I restructured the data according to categories as all data sources were coded into a matrix.

The coding “procedure is established and developed by the research participants as a process of storying and restorying” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 126). The coding process helps construct further meaning within a series of interviews. Coding in grounded theory is based on a systemic process.

Grounded theory “involves generating categories of information (open coding), selecting one of the categories and positioning it within a theoretical model (axial coding),” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). During the process of open coding, I developed categories of relevant information collected from the data and then used the data to define the properties of each category. The next step was to take the categories developed in the open coding process and relate the categories and subcategories to each other (axial coding). Once the axial coding process was complete, the selective coding process began. Selective coding is the explanation of the “interconnection of these categories” (p. 184).

Throughout the coding and analysis process, it is important to keep in mind Yin’s (2003) four principles of a high-quality analysis, regardless of analytical method:

1. “Your analysis should show that you attended to all the evidence” (p. 136).
2. “Your analysis should address, if possible, all major rival interpretations” (p. 136).
3. “Your analysis should address the most significant aspect of your case study” (p. 136).
4. “You should use your own prior, expert knowledge in your case study” (p. 136).

With detailed interview transcripts, observations, field notes, documentation, and my researcher journal, I had an extensive amount of data to examine. The implementation of grounded theory analysis was an effective way to manage and analyze all of the information collected. This rigorous organizational process was the most vital step in the development of valuable results in hopes of contributing meaningful research to the field of sport management.

Summary

As McFee (2009) discussed, studying human interactions in “real world” settings allows qualitative researchers the ability to conceptualize and critically analyze specific situations. Situations presented in case studies are often times “impossible to replicate” (McFee, p. 3). This creates generalizability concerns for the quantitative minded researcher. However, the purpose of a case study is to research a specific situation and often to report on a sample size of one.

The findings from the case study on the Colorado Rockies focus only on the Rockies organization and how decisions were made within their organization. As this case discovered, the Rockies organization has a unique way of pricing tickets. Their organization does not factor in fixed or variable costs. They chose to implement a pricing strategy their owner saw in the ski industry and wanted his organization to use. Each MLB team may very well have their own unique pricing instructions from their ownership as well, or they may use quantitative calculations that revolve around fixed and variable costs.

The Rockies ticket pricing committee takes into account the fans perceptions of their organization. They want to encourage as many people as possible to attend games. This is apparently an attempt to grow their market. The organization is confident they offer a great product with high entertainment value. The unanimous perception was that if the Rockies can get people to one game, they can get them to come back time and time again. Also, the committee made it clear that they wanted to be “fair” to their customers as there was awareness from the organization of the support from the local community. The local community helped build Coors Field through a tax increase and the organization recognizes that commitment from their fan base.

Through in-depth conversations with everyone in the organization that is on the ticket pricing committee, it was apparent the organization was following the mission set forth by the owner of the organization. While not everyone had similar views on what pricing strategy should be implemented, everyone understood the direction the organization was headed and everyone bought into the system. The interviews which lead to in-depth conversations and back and forth questioning would not have been possible without the qualitative approach. Collecting data using a survey as an instrument for data collection might have yielded similar end results, but would not have been able to tell the story of how decisions were made and why those decisions were made. The interview process gave an insight into everyone’s thoughts and opinions on each matter. Each story told was unique in their own way and it was interesting from a researcher’s perspective to see how each area

(season-ticket pricing, group pricing, single-game pricing) took a different avenue to end up meeting together at the end for the greater good of the organization.

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