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A framework for critical reflection in sport management education and graduate employability

Jos de Schepper [ID] and Popi Sotiriadou [ID]

Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management, Griffith University, Southport, QLD, Australia

ABSTRACT

Sport management education is increasingly including opportunities for critical reflection in both formal and informal learning environments to improve graduate employability. This paper outlines potential reasons why there is disconnect between the skills employers want in the sport industry and the skills that sport management programmes equip graduates with. The findings of this review suggest that critical reflection in tertiary sport management education is individually oriented, and neglects the social dimensions and other contextual aspects (e.g. organizational culture) of the sport industry. This paper proposes an operationalization of critical reflection into three individual dimensions (experimentation, asking for feedback, and career awareness) and three social dimensions (challenging group-think, openness about mistakes, and sharing ideas). The paper concludes with suggestions for further research and higher education policy direction that combines formal and informal learning environments in enhancing the social aspects of critical reflection in sport management curricula.

Introduction and theoretical background

Enhancing students' employability has become one of the most desirable outcomes for tertiary education (Kinash et al. 2014) and sport management programmes (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012). The term employability is used in this paper with a broad reference to students' work-readiness and is not confined to merely securing a job (Light and Dixon 2007). In this sense, employability also means that students are able to move between different contextual environments (e.g. commercial and non-commercial) of the industry during their careers (Edwards 2014; Feldmann 2016; Jackson 2016). The employability of graduates is desirable for educational institutions, future employers, and students (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012; Jackson 2016). Similar to managing any organization, the management of sport organizations is a complex process that encompasses careful planning, organizing, and leading and monitoring functions (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015). Management, and by extension sport management, is also about being aware that an organization is comprised of employees, managers, and customers, all with individual identities, who tend to interact socially (Cunliffe 2009, 2016).

Sport management has enjoyed an exponential growth and an unprecedented demand for university education (Costa 2005; Shilbury et al. 2017). Course offerings of undergraduate sport management programmes typically offer courses including sport sociology, sport finance, sport marketing, sport facility management, strategic sport management, sport law, and internship (or Work-Integrated Learning – WIL) (Eagleman and McNary 2010; Martin 2013). These courses help students develop sport industry-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes (SKAs). Besides context specific courses, during their degree and through tutorials, workshops, and assessment tasks, students are encouraged to think critically about complex social, cultural, and political aspects of the sport industry. Examples include doping, gender inequality, and uneven distribution of financial resources (Amis and Silk 2005; Frisby 2005; Skinner and Edwards 2005).

WIL is used in sport management programmes to enhance the application of SKAs and to provide students with industry experience prior to graduation (Edwards 2014). The term WIL is also used to describe other cooperative education programmes, such as work placements, internships, and apprenticeships (Atkinson, Rizzetti, and Smith 2005). However, several studies (e.g. Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012; Mathner and Martin 2012; Sotiriadou 2011) have highlighted that due to a disconnect between what employers in the sport industry require and what the sport management graduates offer, universities continue to struggle in their efforts to provide students with the necessary SKAs. In an audit of the Australian sport management job market, sport management students reported a lack of guidance (e.g. on how to 'navigate' the industry and how to be successful in career development) during their university studies (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012). Despite the attempts of tertiary sport management education to improve the application of SKAs, current research fails to explain how students' employability can be assured more effectively (Feldmann 2016). Even when WIL is included during a student's course, there is insufficient empirical proof of increased student employability at the end of an internship (Feldmann 2016). Student awareness and experience of the organizational context, moving beyond individual reflection, is essential to achieving the optimal application of SKAs (Boyatzis 2008; Feldmann 2016; Howorth, Smith, and Parkinson 2012).

In the context of these challenges, the main purpose of this paper was to examine the potential role of critical reflection in improving graduate employability. The study presents a case for increasing students' cultural and social awareness of the sport industry, and suggests ways (e.g. the inclusion of social dimensions into critical reflection) in which sport management programmes can achieve this increased awareness. A review of the pertinent literature was performed using EBSCOhost, Emerald, ProQuest, ScienceDirect, Scopus, and Web of Science as databases and the search was guided using key terms such as 'social interaction', 'critical reflection', 'internship', 'employability', and 'organizational context' and 'culture' in sport management education. The resulting relevant articles, as well as other generic works on critical reflection and critical thinking, are used to inform this review.

Findings from several studies (e.g. Froehlich, Beausaert, and Segers 2015; Nauta et al. 2009; Wingrove and Turner 2015) reinforce the role of critical reflection on graduate employability and highlight the need for further study into the potential benefits of socio-cultural aspects of learning and critical reflection in WIL (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015; Martin et al. 2010). Furthermore, the literature suggests that even though sport organizations operate in a very similar manner to other organizations, the sport industry

has several unique attributes that influence how management theories, principles, and strategies are applied by sport managers (Hoye et al. 2015). Specifically, Smith, Stewart, and Haimes (2012) discussed the development, expression, and potency of organizational culture and identity within sport organizations that necessitates graduates to develop a cultural and social awareness of the organizational context (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015).

The paper is organized as follows: The first section explains the concepts of critical reflection and critical thinking, outlines the key differences between these two concepts, and locates this comparison in the context of sport management education. The next section introduces the operationalization of critical reflection into three individual and three social dimensions. The third section compares the formal learning environment of tertiary education sport management programmes to the informal learning environment of the workplace. This is followed by the discussion section, which presents the reasons why critical reflection should be inclusive of social dimensions. Furthermore, the practical and theoretical implications of including the social dimensions of critical reflection for the field of sport management are discussed. The paper concludes with suggestions for future research areas that emanate from this study.

Critical thinking and critical reflection in sport management

The terms critical thinking, reflection, critical reflection, reflective practice, reflective thinking, and reflexivity tend to be confused in the literature (Argyris and Schön 1976; Brookfield 2009; Mezirow 1990). The general consensus is that critical thinking places more emphasis on the rational component of thinking, while critical reflection focuses on the emotional and behavioural aspects of thinking (Burns and Bulman 2000; van Woerkom 2010). The emotional and behavioural components of critical reflection occur through social interaction (Argyris and Schön 1976; Ramsden 2003). Research (e.g. Froehlich, Beausaert, and Segers 2015; Nauta et al. 2009; Wingrove and Turner 2015) suggests that critical reflection is beneficial in several ways to students, to employees who interact with students during WIL, and to the organizations that employ sport management graduates. First, critical reflection facilitates learning at an individual level as it is a key factor in putting theoretical knowledge into practice (Fook 2013; Schaap, Baartman, and de Bruijn 2012). Second, critical reflection fosters learning at a social level as a result of sharing knowledge and discussing ideas with others (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008). Third, critical reflection connects individual performance with organizational outcomes (Knipfer et al. 2013). During WIL, this connection happens when individuals have the opportunity to share, compare, and discuss their thoughts and experiences with others. These opportunities allow individuals to develop a greater awareness of different perspectives within an organization (Brown and Starkey 2000; Cunliffe 2004, 2009).

As opposed to the emotional and behavioural aspects of critical reflection, the rational component of critical thinking emerges predominantly from cognitive perceptions (Dewey 1933; Halpern 2001; Ku and Ho 2010). The process of individual, logical, structured cognitive thinking involves reasoning, problem-solving, and the ability to present arguments in a systematically structured way (Bowell and Kemp 2014). For example, in a sport management study, which applied critical thinking practices within student assessment, Sotiriadou and Hill (2014) operationalized critical thinking into 10 dimensions. These

dimensions were based on Beyer's (1988) framework of critical thinking. Beyer's framework was then linked to the six cognitive levels (i.e. knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) of Bloom's information-processing skills taxonomy (Bloom and Krathwohl 1956). Sport management students in the study were presented with a problem. By scaffolding the problem, the whole task was broken down into separate smaller parts and students first tried to master each of these. When the students progressively learned to complete each separate task independently, they were gradually able to complete the whole task and solve the initial problem. Dawn et al. (2011) also found that scaffolding assessment tasks increased a student's ability to think critically rather than relying on lecture-based coursework.

Although the results of scaffolding tasks are promising for further developing students' critical thinking in a formal environment, it could benefit students to critically reflect on their experiences with organizational practice (e.g. knowledge that is specific to the sport industry in which learning takes place) in informal environments (i.e. social dimension of critical reflection). Martin et al. (2010) found that during WIL, students' critical reflections were mainly targeted towards personal growth (i.e. individual dimensions of critical reflection) rather than critical reflections on organizational practice. The social dimensions of critical reflection contribute to developing skills, including communication and the ability to work with people, which result in higher employability (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser 2013). According to Pope (2010), the inclusion of social dimensions in critical reflection is important because it allows sport management students to understand managers' actions and decisions. Furthermore, applying critical reflection skills in a real organizational setting enables students to better understand the complex social and cultural context that exists within a continuously changing organization, especially when critical reflection is combined with work experience (Carson and Fisher 2006; Edwards 2014; Pope 2010). The significance of critical reflection in sport management is twofold: it helps sport management students to develop and understand these contextual aspects (e.g. organizational values), and at the same time it allows experienced sport managers to make informed business decisions (Cunliffe 2016). Furthermore, in agreement with Amis and Silk (2005), Frisby (2005), and Shaw, Frisby, and Wolfe (2008), critically reflecting on organizational values goes beyond merely optimizing organizational effectiveness and efficiency in managing sport. Despite its recognition and contribution to greater employability, the social dimensions of students' critical reflection are not sufficiently understood (Martin et al. 2010). The next section operationalizes critical reflection into three individual and three social dimensions, and shows how sport managers experience critical reflection at the individual and social levels.

Operationalization of critical reflection into individual and social dimensions

The literature on what skills the industry expects from sport management students shows that sport management graduates need to be able to plan, solve problems, communicate, work with people and in teams, and provide customer service (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012) as well as understand and fit in with the organizational culture (Sotiriadou 2011). Due to its complex nature, there is little consensus about the way organizational culture is defined. Most definitions view culture as a process where knowledge, meanings, and

beliefs are socially constructed and shared (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015). This process involves interaction between employees, managers, and customers (Alvesson 2013). Understanding, or becoming aware of such a process is often complicated and difficult for organizational members (Alvesson 2013). For example, sub-group cultures may emerge, that may contradict one another, within the dominant culture as each group member (e.g. volunteers, spectators, and employees) has their own sub-set of values (Colyer 2000). Sport studies on organizational culture (e.g. Amis and Silk 2005; Frisby 2005; Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015) confirmed that graduates need to understand that an alignment between social norms, values, and behaviours within an organization is important. Sotiriadou (2011), for instance, found that a student's fit with the culture of an organization during WIL influenced whether they would be employed by the organization. Furthermore, managing a company or its people is a more complex process than reproducing procedures that have been learned in university courses (Malloy and Zakus 1995; Martin et al. 2010). Developing these skills is considered to be a learning process that requires critically reflecting on experience (Boyd and Fales 1983; Gray 2007; Higgins 2011). Hence, it is likely that sport management education should move beyond a structured cognitive educational process, which involves reasoning, problem-solving, and the ability to present arguments in a systematically structured way (Bowell and Kemp 2014; Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor 2002), and include more opportunities for critical reflection to improve graduate employability.

To examine this proposition, the present study used van Woerkom and Croon's (2008) refined theoretical framework on critical reflection, which was first published in 2002 (van Woerkom, Nijhof, and Nieuwenhuis) to operationalize critical reflection in sport management. Van Woerkom and Croon explored critical reflection within human resource development and in the context of the banking industry, a call centre, a post office, and three factories. Their findings suggested that employees who were able to critically reflect were aware of their value as competent members of the organization (van Woerkom, Nijhof, and Nieuwenhuis 2002). Furthermore, managers and employees stated that critically reflective employees contributed positively to the organization (e.g. optimizing work policies). The next section discusses the individual (i.e. experimenting, asking for feedback and career awareness) and social (i.e. challenging group-think, openness about mistakes and critical opinion sharing) dimensions of critical reflection and uses examples of some of the unique features of the sport industry (Hoye et al. 2015; Smith and Stewart 2010) to clarify them. In doing so, the section that follows synthesizes a theoretical framework of critical reflection in sport management education. This framework is subsequently illustrated (see Figure 1) and discussed.

Individual dimensions of critical reflection

van Woerkom (2004) explained that *experimenting*, the first individual dimension of critical reflection, is about exploring options, thinking of alternatives, and being open-minded towards other methods of working. Attempting new or unknown practices could result in new experiences. For instance, alternative approaches for sport management students could include looking at other ways of distributing organizational resources between volunteers and paid staff, or between elite athletes and community participation programmes.
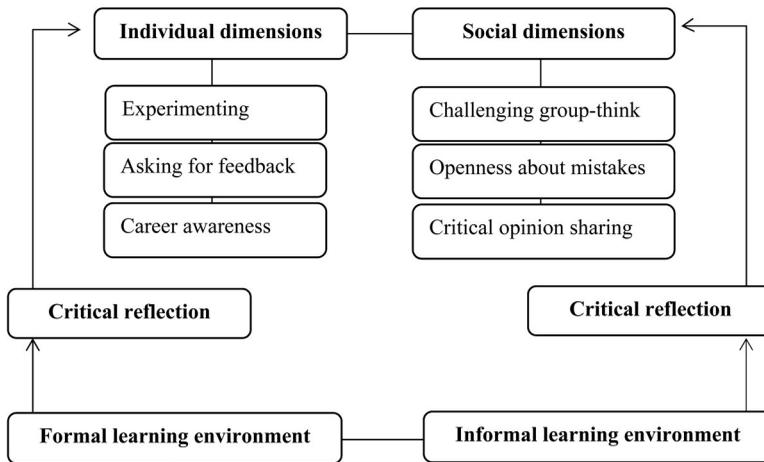
Figure 1. Critical reflection in sport management education.

The second individual dimension of critical reflection is *asking for feedback*, which is important as it enables and requires social interaction. In particular, having conversations and discussing issues with peers, supervisors, and colleagues are important for receiving feedback and gaining support for ideas that promote individual improvement (van Woerkom 2004; Weisweiler et al. 2013). Although asking for feedback clearly involves social interaction, it is considered to be an individual component of critical reflection because it focuses on personal performance and learning (van Woerkom and Croon 2008). Students use feedback (e.g. performance reviews, best practice tips, clarification of learning targets) from others (e.g. peers, supervisors, and colleagues) to assess whether they are performing well, or to compare their performances with those of other students (e.g. in class) or colleagues (e.g. during work experience) (Molloy and Boud 2013).

The third individual dimension of critical reflection is *career awareness*. This includes the student's ability to reflect on their current and future position in a formal or informal environment. Sport management students in the final stages of their education need to take control of their own employability (Hendry 2006). They are on the threshold of becoming professionals and need to engage in the process of searching for a job. The nature of work, in the sport industry, as in other fields, is dynamic so graduates need to be able to adapt to changes (Sage 2015; Wingrove and Turner 2015). At the same time, students have to realize that tertiary sport management education is preparing them for entry-level jobs rather than for higher management positions in the sport industry (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012). Moreover, simply having a degree does not guarantee a job because employers expect more than technical know-how and cognitive skills (Tomlinson 2008). Students who are able to display career awareness can optimize their employability (Sumanasiri, AbYajid, and Khatibi 2015; van Woerkom 2004; van Woerkom, Nijhof, and Nieuwenhuis 2002). Students with career awareness become more aware of their own motives and are more likely to find a job that matches their career ambitions (van Woerkom and Croon 2008). For example, students will be able to make informed decisions about whether they would like to work in a community sports

organization with a focus on achieving social change or in a financially orientated commercial sports organization.

Social dimensions of critical reflection

The first social dimension of critical reflection, *challenging group-think*, is about trying to make changes, or suggesting changes, to other members of the organization (e.g. colleagues or supervisors). As people tend to adhere to the status quo, challenging group-think is an important tool for diminishing the lack of progress in an organization (e.g. growth stagnation and organizational ineffectiveness) and instead promoting continuous improvement and innovation (Argyris and Schön 1996; van Woerkom, Nijhof, and Nieuwenhuis 2002). For example, reflecting critically and speaking out against sports-related controversies, such as sexual abuse of athletes by coaches, match-fixing, or the use of performance enhancing drugs, has the potential to initiate discussion, transparency and change in an organization.

The second social dimension of critical reflection is *openness about mistakes*. It enables people to learn from their mistakes and see them as opportunities to realize that the accepted views about reality may be misguided. Being open about mistakes means that students share and compare with others what went wrong, and they become conscious of behaviour that did not go as expected. It allows them to see opportunities to evaluate and learn about what is effective or ineffective in practice. For example, in a social context like volunteering at a sport event, students receive feedback from actual customers. Being defensive or trying to cover up mistakes could reduce the possibility of discussing their actions or learning from others. Consequently, defensiveness could mean that both the individual student and the organization are less able to respond effectively in a future event.

The third social dimension of critical reflection is *critical opinion sharing*. This social dimension targets the contributions of individuals to the organization and is achieved through sharing one's vision, suggesting improvements, and discussing one's views with others (van Woerkom and Croon 2008). The development of the social dimensions of critical reflection is often linked to the use of dialogue through social interaction (Frijters, ten Dam, and Rijlaarsdam 2008). Therefore, reflection through social interaction is often more effective than individual reflection (van Woerkom 2004). Exchanging ideas with others makes the critically reflective person aware that there are multiple ways of looking at an issue (Brown and Starkey 2000; Cunliffe 2004, 2009). The process of comparing one's own perspective to that of others facilitates making informed decisions, another essential management skill. For example, critically addressing policies and practices which lead to gender inequality (e.g. the overpayment of male athletes compared to female athletes) is one of the potential outcomes of the development of this social dimension.

The benefits of paying attention to the social dimensions of critical reflection for employability are clear. Consequently, embedding more opportunities to advance these social dimensions in sport management education is important to students and interns aspiring to become successful sport managers. Indeed, research indicates that critical reflection is necessary for aspiring sport managers because they often have little actual managerial experience, let alone an understanding of their experiences in practice (Billett 2009; Coulson and Harvey 2012; Smith et al. 2009). Furthermore, developing critical

reflection is necessary for more experienced managers because it helps them to become aware, or to remain aware, of the complexity of managing an organization (Gray 2007).

In summary, the individual dimensions (i.e. experimenting, asking for feedback and career awareness) are aimed at self-development and personal growth (van Woerkom and Croon 2008). The social dimensions (i.e. challenging group-think, openness about mistakes, and critical opinion sharing) emphasize the role of individuals sharing and discussing their unique contextual knowledge with the other members of their organizations. When employees create or advance a climate which encourages the sharing of knowledge, they contribute to a learning organization's culture in which improvement and change can occur (Kontoghiorghes 2014; Lim and Nowell 2014; Roussel 2014). As the next section illustrates, various aspects of sport management education and curricula (e.g. whether learning is offered through a formal or informal educational setting), can advance individual or social dimensions of critical reflection to various degrees.

Learning in formal and informal environments

There are two dominant learning environments that are commonly used in tertiary education: formal and informal. There are benefits from learning in both settings and when used together, formal and informal learning environments can be complementary (Aarkrog 2005). However, these two environments are very different. As Table 1 shows, learning in formal environments is characterized as intentional, uncontextualized, predictable, individual, and leading to explicit knowledge and generalized skills. In contrast, informal learning is predominantly characterized as unintentional, contextualized, unpredictable, collaborative, and leading to implicit knowledge and specific skills. Formal learning offers students intentional and formal curriculum opportunities to practice teamwork and consider the opinions of others (e.g. group assignments). Although students learn to work in groups, these learning outcomes are predictable, and there appears to be little to no linkage between working in group assignments and the teamwork expected at the workplace. This is because the dynamics of working in a team in the workplace are different to the dynamics within a group of fellow students at university (Feldmann 2016; Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008; Tomkins and Ulus 2015). Working as a

Table 1. Differences between formal and informal learning.

Learning in formal education	Learning in the workplace
• Intentional (+ unintentional)	• Unintentional (+ intentional)
• Prescribed by formal curriculum, competency standards, etc.	• Usually no formal curriculum or prescribed outcomes
• Un-contextualized-characterized by symbol manipulation	• Contextual – characterized by contextual reasoning
• Focused on (meta) cognitive activities	• Focused on tool use + (meta) cognitive activities
• Produces explicit knowledge and generalized skills	• Produces implicit and tacit knowledge and situation-specific competencies
• Learning outcomes predictable	• Learning outcomes less predictable
• Emphasis on teaching and content of teaching	• Emphasis on work and experiences based on learner as a worker
• Individual	• Collaborative
• Theory and practice traditionally separated	• Seamless know-how, practical wisdom
• Separation of knowledge and skills	• Competencies treated holistically, no distinction between knowledge and skills

Source: (Tynjälä 2008, 133).

team towards achieving shared organizational goals offers collaborative learning opportunities, and can have unpredictable learning results. It is considerably different to working as a group for individual marks, or for the purpose of passing a course. In formal programmes students are predominantly assessed on their individual performances (Doornbos, Simons, and Denessen 2008; Tynjälä 2008) (see Table 1), because in the end it will be the individual student who will receive a certificate, diploma, or degree. Exams assess students' explicit knowledge, which is a result of the emphasis on course content and has a focus on the development of cognitive skills and abilities (e.g. critical thinking and scaffolding). This kind of learning in a formal environment can be seen as predominantly individual learning because the result is personal growth and development. Gray (2007) considers reflecting on experiences and prior knowledge as a form of individual development. Therefore, formal environments are primarily targeted towards the development of the individual dimensions of critical reflection.

If sport management graduates are to enter the sport industry successfully, it is essential that they have employability skills, such as the ability to communicate with others and the ability to work in teams (Paul 2005; Willingham 2008). Compared to formal learning experiences, work environments differ substantially in the ways that interns experience organizational cultures and contexts (Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008). A work environment is not merely a place of work experience; it is also an effective, important learning environment and its social, economic, and personal requirements need to be understood (Harteis and Billett 2008). When workplace experience is included in sport management programmes, the knowledge that students have gained from their formal learning experiences becomes more contextualized as students come into contact with different norms and values within an organization (Feldmann 2016; Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008). Consequently, competence in the social dimensions of critical reflection becomes more important.

In recognition of the importance of blending formal and informal learning experiences, sport management programmes integrate formal learning and workplace experience in the form of WIL or work-based learning. WIL integrates the learned theory and practice acquired in formal educational settings into the situational contextual environments of the industry (Schaap, Baartman, and de Bruijn 2012). Although the learning outcomes are less predictable than in formal environments, the workplace produces implicit and tacit skills or knowledge (e.g. experiencing everyday activities or dealing with new and unexpected situations). The integration of curriculum-related tasks during the students' work experience makes the application of their formally created SKAs easier (Smith et al. 2014).

WIL is beneficial to all stakeholders (including students, potential future employers, and educators) who are involved in the informal learning environment (Ferkins and Fleming 2007). Students gain work experience in professional practice. The partnership between leaders of sport management programmes and sport industry leaders serves to elevate the programme's reputation, and employers can trial future possible employees (Sotiriadou 2011). Work placements accommodate the demand of employers for motivated student workers and the need for experience in the application of SKAs in work settings (Martin and Hughes 2009).

In a workplace, interns are part of an organization that is concerned with the sustainability of its productivity or performance. The efforts of all individuals (employees,

interns, and apprentices) can determine whether the organization as a whole will continue to be sustainable. Business environments are primarily concerned with achieving organizational outcomes, such as productivity, profit making, and customer service (Schaap, Baartman, and de Bruijn 2012). During WIL, sport organizations seek to increase the intern's ability to critically reflect, work together with employees, and contribute to the overall organizational goals (Doornbos, Simons, and Denessen 2008; Sotiriadou 2011). In short, working together as a team, sharing, and discussing ideas, being open about making mistakes, and providing feedback to each other are considered examples of the social dimensions of critical reflection (van Woerkom and Croon 2008) that are key business expectations.

In recent years, the focus on critical reflection in sport management programmes has been centred on the kinds of methods or tools that can be used in formal environments to develop students' critical reflection, such as portfolios or learning journals. However, formal environments have been found to be unable to offer the same contextual stimuli as those found in the work environment (Feldmann 2016; Hodkinson, Biesta, and James 2008). Learning in a formal environment is more conceptual and individual, while learning in practice is more informal, contextual, and social (e.g. interacting and working with real customers) (see Table 1).

The informal environment offers sport management students a different perspective and a more realistic picture of the potential complexity of a future job (Baartman and Ruijs 2011) because of the intricacies of the range of social, cultural, and political factors associated with professional practice. For example, compared to the structured and uniform situations offered in formal educational settings, work places tend to present students with situations of ambiguity, and place them in situations of constant change where they have to deal with external influences (e.g. pressure of market competitors, demographic changes, dissatisfied customers) (Choy 2009; Roussel 2014). Research (e.g. Berings, Doornbos, and Simons 2006; Marsick and Watkins 2003) supports the premise that learning in practice may be less controlled by the educator or instructor, yet it is more social, informal, and inherently more contextual than learning in a formal environment. As a result of these external influences, and as interns learn how to participate within an organization, communicate with other employees, and engage with customers (Noe, Tews, and McConnell Dachner 2010; Smith et al. 2014), their employability increases (Hogan, Chamorro-Premuzic, and Kaiser 2013). As the next section stresses, it is essential that sport management students obtain optimal benefits from WIL experiences by critically reflecting on individual, social, and organizational features of the sport industry.

Discussion

The objective of this paper was to analyse and operationalize the role of critical reflection in sport management tertiary education. In doing so, it has outlined the key differences between formal and informal learning, critical thinking, and critical reflection, and operationalized the individual and social dimensions of critical reflection in the context of sport management. The literature (e.g. Martin et al. 2010; Pope 2010; Zakus, Malloy, and Edwards 2007) suggests that WIL, combined with critical reflection, is an essential element of a sport management programme in many Western countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom) because it enhances graduate

employability. It should be noted that worldwide, the provision of sport management pro-grammes varies in terms of where the programme is housed (e.g. in a school of education, business, or health and exercise science), the focus of the programme (e.g. emphasis on sport marketing, sport tourism management, or sport administration), or the inclusion of WIL in the programme (de Haan 2011; Eagleman and McNary 2010; Hoye et al. 2015). Even though sport management students learn similar principles of sport policy, develop-ment, planning, programmes, and other managerial functions as they relate to the sport management industry (de Haan 2011; Hoye et al. 2015), each programme or country may differ in terms of graduate employability, trends, and cultural contexts.

The present review helps to synthesize a framework of critical reflection in sport man-agement education (see Figure 1). Figure 1 offers an operationalization of the role of criti-cal reflection in both formal and informal learning environments in enabling the development of individual and social skills. This framework represents a significant advancement in sport management education for two reasons. First, critical reflection has been recognized as a desirable skill in various fields (Zakus, Malloy, and Edwards 2007). As a result, there has been wide acceptance of its inclusion in the curricula within business schools (e.g. Amis and Silk 2005; Antonacopoulou 2010; Frisby 2005). However, critical reflection has not been adequately integrated within sport management education (Frisby 2005; Martin et al. 2010; Skinner and Gilbert 2007). Therefore, this review is the first effort in advancing a framework for the analysis and inclusion of critical reflec-tion in sport management education.

Second, this review expands van Woerkom and Croon's (2008) work on critical reflec-tion in the context of sport management. As Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the different educational contexts and resulting skills (individual and social dimensions of critical reflection) have a common denominator; critical reflection. This finding reinforces previous studies in other management contexts, which suggest that individual and social dimensions of learning are interrelated and complementary (Billett 2013; Billett and Choy 2013; Endedijk and Bronkhorst 2014).

In addition to these theoretical learnings, the examination of critical reflection in the area of sport management enables educators to deconstruct the otherwise complex nature of critical reflection into six specific dimensions and translate them into curriculum activities. Specifically, the identified dimensions and relationships depicted in Figure 1 allow for several suggestions on sport management curriculum activities that would blend formal and informal learning environments to advance the development of critical reflection skills. For instance, a key recommendation to sport management educators and WIL supervisors is to design and offer authentic assessment experiences to students in order to encourage the integration of teaching, learning, and assessing in real organi-zational scenarios. The use of authentic assessment has been previously reported for the multiple benefits it presents to enabling students to connect with industry, experience real sport management issues, solve problems, and apply theoretical learning into case studies to gain practical experiences from informal learning environments (Gulikers, Bas-tiaens, and Kirschner 2006). These interventions align student awareness and the develop-ment of individual and social dimensions of critical reflection and improve their career identity (Freudenberg, Brimble, and Cameron 2011).

Furthermore, this review shows that formal learning helps advance the individual dimensions of critical reflection. The findings also advance the notion that even though

informal learning, especially through WIL, has the capacity to advance the social dimensions of critical reflection, that development does not appear to be enacted to its full potential. A curriculum recommendation then is to foster social skills through a stronger collaboration between university and industry partners and to further enhance graduate employability (Feldmann 2016). This collaboration will bring awareness to all parties involved that due to the fundamental differences between formal and informal learning contexts, it is harder to develop the social dimensions of critical reflection in a formal learning environment. Rigg and Trehan (2008) argued that because the socio-cultural context in a work environment differs from a university environment, the use and development of critical reflection will also be different.

The proposed framework (see Figure 1) allows us to articulate and analyse the individual and social dimensions of critical reflection within formal and informal learning environments. The individual dimensions allow students to become aware of their own role in the organization, their individual strengths and weaknesses, and compare their practical experiences with what is acquired in a formal environment. The social dimensions provide tools (e.g. recognizing, sharing, and discussing issues) for students to interlink their own experiences with those of other members of the organization. Interlinking the individual and social dimensions of critical reflection leads to a more in-depth exploration of organizational norms and values.

The benefits of critical refection in general, and in sport management in particular, are well documented. Apart from focusing on the individual, the team members, and the organization, critical reflection allows sport management students to take into account power relations and gender issues (e.g. workplace politics, use of influence, favouritism, manipulation) within an organization (Edwards and Skinner 2009; Frisby 2005). During WIL, students are members of a team and as team members they are more likely to feel, or to experience, power structures in the broad range of environments that can be found in the workplace, rather than in the relatively clearly defined, individualized or formal group assignment setting at university. Empowering students to reflect critically on organizational politics and culture (e.g. the use of influence and power for strategic career advancement), is one way of enhancing their capacity to learn managerial processes (Carson and Fisher 2006; Cunliffe 2016; Vigoda 2002).

Comparing their own perspectives to various alternative organizational views enables sport management students to effectively apply their theoretical knowledge (e.g. leadership styles). As a result, critically reflective students are more likely to understand the effects of their personal (e.g. developing self-confidence) and professional (e.g. developing an awareness of organizational culture) learning objectives in practice (Ferreira, Keliher, and Blomfield 2013). This understanding of power structures is a goal beyond the reach of sport management interns, but it cannot be denied that organizational politics are part of reality.

In view of these benefits, this paper highlights the need to increase students' cultural and social awareness of the organizational context, and move beyond individual reflection to include the social dimensions of critical reflection in sport management curricula, particularly through WIL. Even though this review paper supports the notion that the individual dimensions of critical reflection in sport management students may be well developed through learning opportunities and learning environments, there is a strong need to further advance knowledge and practice in ways that enhance the social dimensions of critical reflection (Boyatzis, Stubbs, and Taylor 2002; Howorth, Smith, and

Parkinson 2012). Critical reflection during WIL is not automatic or guaranteed, and interns need social interaction to help convert their WIL experiences to critically reflective opportunities. As critical reflection helps managers and interns to see how and why they act and react in complex relational situations, it is suggested that an increased focus on critically reflective practice in sport management curricula can contribute to the development of high-quality sport managers. Gaining industry experiences that offer a more realistic image of professional practice has the capacity to help students understand the responsibility required to make a contribution to the organization in which they engage in, and increase their employability.

Future research and conclusion

Given the wealth of evidence of the benefits of developing the social dimensions of critical reflection, and based on the analysis in this paper, these development benefits offer directions for future research and investigations into the ways that curriculum design and changes to higher education policy direction can enable sport management graduates to become more critically reflective, thereby increasing their employability. Specifically, further research should investigate students' views, experiences, and abilities to critically reflect within WIL environments and it should investigate the ways in which students can add value to the host organizations during WIL. This information could inform curriculum design to foster experiences that facilitate the development of the social dimensions of critical reflection. Further to this, future research on the role, value and advancement of critical reflection in sport management education should be inclusive of the perspectives of WIL supervisors, educators, and host organizations. Including the views of all stakeholders would result in greater insights on issues surrounding the application of SKAs in organizational settings by sport management students.

From a methodological viewpoint, using a sequential mixed methods design or action research could provide a deeper understanding of the role and advancement of critical reflection and learning through WIL. Quantitative research could offer an insight into the extent of interns' abilities to critically reflect during WIL, and qualitative data could produce knowledge on the how and why of potential differences between the perspectives of the different groups of stakeholders. By identifying and exploring the meanings associated with critical reflection through analysing the responses of WIL supervisors, lecturers, and students, future research could contribute to the development of theory about the meanings associated with the concept of critical reflection.

The outcomes of these studies would lead to a greater understanding of the value of critical reflection in sport management education, particularly in regard to its significance for interns in organizational settings. Furthermore, it could provide a clearer definition of critical reflection in a work place context as a result of integrating the social aspects of critical reflection rather than just focusing on its individual benefits. Consequently, students, universities, and practitioners will become more aware of the possibilities and applications of developing critical reflection in their programmes. Above all, the impact of future research on interns' employability and work-readiness could be used for national and international benchmarking.

The sport management industry is undergoing a continuous professionalization (Dowling, Edwards, and Washington 2014). Even though sport organizations tend to

have unique features, they still operate in similar ways to other businesses (Hoye et al. 2015; Smith and Stewart 2010). Sport management curricula offer students a core of first-year courses that blend mainstream management, marketing, human resources, finance, and economics with the application of these concepts in a sport context in sub-sequent courses during the programme (Hoye et al. 2015). It is common for sport management graduates to find employment opportunities in general businesses rather than sport business (Emery, Crabtree, and Kerr 2012). This leads to the conclusion that, even though this analysis is sport management specific, it is likely that the positive implications of further developing the social dimensions of critical reflection are relevant and equally important to mainstream management and business graduates and degrees. However, this generalization should be considered with caution because further research on the potential of critical reflection to increase graduate employability is required.

Disclosure statement

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Notes on contributors

Dr *Jos de Schepper* is an academic in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management with a specialisation is sport management and sport development at Griffith University, Australia. He started his career as a physical education teacher and physiotherapist. His expertise and research interests are in critical reflection and WIL. Jos is a reviewer for the top rated peer-reviewed journal *Vocations and Learning*. As part of his extension as a former lecturer of Sport Business at the Fontys University of Applied Sciences (School of Economics) in the Netherlands, he has been appointed as a research affiliate at the University.

Associate Professor *Popi Sotiriadou* is an expert in the field of Managing High Performance Sport and Strategic Athlete Development. She started her career as an elite athlete in yachting and in her role as the Vice President for the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand she was instrumental in designing the organisations strategy and a template mapping its priorities, key success factors and KPIs, actions and responsibilities for 2013–2016. Popi has delivered large consultancies including a project titled 'Sports Development Master Plan Study for Sarawak to the Year 2020'. Popi is the editor of the first handbook on *Managing High Performance Sport* (2013) which outlines challenges and strategies in managing and sustaining high performance in sports. In addition, she has published her work on strategic management of sport development at a top rated refereed journal, the Sport *Management Review* and the *Journal of Sport Management*.

ORCID

Jos de Schepper 🔗 http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3482-8709
Popi Sotiriadou 🔗 http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2498-2179

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