

Leadership in Large-Scale Sporting Events: The Case of the 2005 FINA World Championships

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Organizing committee members of the 2005 FINA (Federation Internationale de Natation) World Championships held in Montreal (Quebec, Canada) believed their event was successful despite having lost and regained the chance to host the event only five months before the opening ceremonies. One issue identified as being critical to this loss/regaining was the organizing committee's leadership. When the event was regained, the organizing committee's leadership completely changed, with the Mayor becoming co-president. This allowed the organizing committee to gain stakeholders' - any actor who can impact or be affected by the organizing committee's actions (Freeman, 1984) - support and, ultimately, deliver the event successfully. Leadership can be seen as involving "a process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person over other people to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization" (Yukl, 1998, p. 3). The concept is defined in the sport and broader management literature using different key words such as motivation, task completion, and stakeholder relationships (cf. London & Boucher, 2000; Schneider, 2002; Yukl, 1998). Yet, leadership research in sport management has been limited in scope, typically focusing on coaches, athletic directors, and boards of directors in universities and national sport organizations (e.g., Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Chelladurai & Quek, 1995; Inglis, 1997). Studies have yet to focus on sporting events, which are increasingly popular around the world. What we do know about sporting events is that they evolve from a planning mode, to an implementation mode, to a wrap-up mode, and that the various issues the organizing committee faces can be temporally-specific (Parent, 2005).

Besides Parent (2005), sport event studies have been done without full attention to all the stakeholders, which are invaluable to an organizing committee in its preparation and hosting of a given event. In other words, there is no consensus in the sport event management literature on a leadership definition and description applicable to sporting events from the various stakeholder perspectives, given the importance of the stakeholders involved. Using stakeholder theory as a framework (Clarkson, 1995; Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Putler & Wolfe, 1999; Wolfe & Putler, 2002) for examining leadership allows for the various stakeholders' needs and perspectives to be considered, thus helping to inform future organizing committee leadership choices.

As such, this study seeks to examine the characteristics and impact of leadership on the organizing committee, its stakeholders and the event over time, using Montreal 2005 as the case study and stakeholder theory as the theoretical framework. Findings from this study contribute to the sport management literature by testing and extending leadership concepts in order to provide a framework of leadership as the organizing committee evolves. Knowledge gained from this study will be of interest to all involved in sporting events, including existing and future organizing committees, national and regional sport organizations, and policy makers at all government levels.

Case studies have been shown to be especially valuable for providing in-depth knowledge of complex events as they unfold over time, events over which the researchers have little or no control (Yin, 2003). In order to develop the case study, multiple sources of information were used (archival material and interviews) from all major stakeholders of the organizing committee, where stakeholders were identified as organizing committee and bid team members, the sport federations, the governments, the media, the delegations, and sponsors (Yin, 2003). The archival material consisted of: organizing committee internal documents (e.g., meeting minutes, memos, letters, final reports), stakeholder documents (e.g., annual reports, newspaper articles), and commemorative material (e.g., commemorative books). Over 75 documents totaling more than 500 pages were analyzed. In turn, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted (12 by phone and 13 in person) with representatives of all stakeholder groups to understand the perspective of all stakeholders involved with the event. These interviews lasted, on average, between 60 and 90 minutes. All data collected were converted-if necessary-into electronic format for subsequent analysis. Interviews were professionally transcribed before analysis. Data were coded using the data analysis software ATLAS.ti for all references to leadership. These passages were then coded for their reference to leadership qualities (characteristics) or impacts. Codes were also attributed for the organizing committee's mode, and patterns were determined for this temporal aspect. The analysis was a combination of inductive content analysis and pattern matching in order to iterate and integrate between theory development and theory testing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

Emerging findings indicated the need for the leadership of large-scale sporting events to have key characteristics, not necessarily associated with sport. More precisely, the leadership should have strong human resource management skills, be a motivator, a

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visionary, a communicator, and be positive while staying cool under pressure. Second, these characteristics were not found to be needed consistently throughout the event, except for two key qualities: being a good motivator and human resource management skills. More precisely, from the planning, through the implementation, and into the event's wrap-up, the leadership skills needed changed from having to be politically and business savvy, through to ensuring the delivery of the event, and into transparent and accurate reporting skills (financial or otherwise).

Finally, leadership was found to have a significant impact on a variety of key issues in the management of large-scale sporting events, notably the organization's structure, access to resources, stakeholder relationships, marketing/sponsorship opportunities, and stakeholders' perceived outcome of the event. These impacts were highly noticeable when comparing the autocratic pre-loss leadership style to the rassembleur post-regaining leadership style, styles which were based more on the personality of the leader than the context. Despite the city initially losing the event and this first organizing committee's executive director committing suicide, the autocratic style of the first organizing committee's leadership (including the executive director) was deemed appropriate by many stakeholders in terms of planning the event, without which the second leadership group would not have been able to have the event ready in only five months.

While Emery (2001) stated that a figurehead is needed for the bidding phase of a sporting event, sport management researchers have not examined the leadership of large-scale sporting events. This study found that the key characteristics of a leader are not necessarily associated with sport. As well, different skills are needed of the leader as the organizing committee evolves. Finally, the importance of examining leadership in large-scale sporting events is highlighted by the impact leadership seems to have on a wide range of event and organizing committee management issues. It is therefore clear that the first critical aspect when preparing a major sporting event is choosing the best individual(s) to be the organizing committee's leader(s). Interestingly, according to interviewees, this leader ought not to be the host region's political leader; nor does this leader need to be solely from the sport world. In fact, the best leader option seems to be a top business person in the host region. These findings therefore only partially support Emery's (2001) call for more professionalization of event organizing committee members. More precisely, the professionalization must first be business skills-related, and then it may be sport/event experience-related.