

## Planning Volunteers' Understandings of Diversity

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**Session 33: Organizational Theory  
Presentation (25-minute)**

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As evidenced by the number of articles published in recent years (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2004, 2005; DeSensi, 1994; Doherty & Chelladurai; 1999; Fink & Pastore, 1999; Fink, Pastore, & Riemer, 2001; Moore, Parkhouse, & Konrad, 2004; Taylor & Toohey, 1999), managing diversity has been identified as an important topic in sport management. Much of the empirical research has examined diversity with respect to employees (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2004, 2005) and sport participants (e.g., Taylor & Toohey, 1999). There is little research exploring diversity with respect to sport volunteers. This is significant because while volunteering is often seen as open to all, there is some research suggesting that volunteering is socially exclusive and thus not diverse (Institute for Volunteering Research, 2005). In addition, there is a lack of research examining and unpacking the meanings of diversity as an organizational value. The purpose of this presentation is to investigate the meanings of diversity among planning volunteers involved with the Host Society of the 2005 Jeux du Canada Games.

The Jeux du Canada Games are a national, multi-sport competition for young Canadians and have been held every two years since 1967. Of interest for this study was the 2005 Games Host Society's commitment to diversity. For example, a prominent value statement for volunteers was "We value diversity and the contribution of every person" (2005 Canada Summer Games, n.d.). One projected outcome of the Games was to establish a legacy of volunteerism in the community, particularly among youth and Aboriginals. In addition, the Host Society created two staff positions specifically charged with advocating for and managing diversity. Given the Host Society's commitment to diversity, it was important to investigate how planning volunteers understood this organizational value.

This presentation is based on interviews with a sample of planning volunteers at the 2005 Jeux du Canada Games. Planning volunteers were targeted because they were responsible for requesting and selecting games-time volunteers and other planning volunteers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 planning volunteers from the sport ( $n = 4$ ), athlete services ( $n = 3$ ), and volunteer ( $n = 4$ ) divisions of the Host Society. The volunteer division was targeted because they were directly responsible for developing volunteer-specific policies and recruiting and assigning games-time volunteers. The athlete services division was selected because they required a significant number of volunteers (approximately 1000 individuals). The sport division was selected because there is some evidence to suggest that sporting communities are reluctant to recruit individuals from outside their sport community (Riemer, Dorsch, Hoerber, & Bell, 2003).

Selected volunteers participated in a face-to-face, 40 - 60 minute interview, which was audio-taped. Individuals were asked to comment on how they understood diversity, reflect on the diversity of 2005 Games volunteers, and speak to the importance of diversity for volunteers. After the interviews were transcribed verbatim, the transcripts were coded and categorized with the assistance of Atlas.ti.

Preliminary analysis of the data has identified three themes related to diversity and planning volunteers: i) planning volunteers have a broad understanding of diversity; ii) planning volunteers were demographically homogeneous; and iii) diversity among games-time volunteers was valued, but not so among planning volunteers.

Similar to other research on diversity in sport (e.g., Cunningham & Sagas, 2005; Lapchick, 2005; Moore, Parkhouse, & Konrad, 2004; Taylor & Toohey, 1999), some planning volunteers understood diversity from a demographic perspective. In particular, age, gender, and race/ethnicity were most often mentioned. However, other dimensions of diversity were also indicated, such as language, physical ability, occupation, sport experience, volunteer experience, Canada Games experience, and knowledge of key management functions.

While diversity was espoused by the Host Society and was understood from a broad perspective, the volunteers in this study could be categorized as a homogeneous group. They were diverse in age and gender, but similar to each other with respect to occupation, physical ability, ethnicity, and previous involvement in sport. Given that the management of sport has often been characterized as socially exclusive (e.g., Hall, 1997; McKay, 1999; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Hoerber, 2003), this finding may not be unexpected. However, planning volunteers are often recruited from the larger population in the community and one could reasonably expect more diversity among them than among the paid staff who typically come from a sport background.

There were mixed impressions on the importance of diversity for volunteers. Most planning volunteers agreed that demographic

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diversity among games-time volunteers was important because they were viewed as the 'face' of the Games, and thus should be representative of the community. In contrast, a diversity of sport and volunteer experiences among planning volunteers was deemed more important than demographic diversity. Many of these individuals believed that demographic diversity did not necessarily contribute to creativity or increased capacity, which were vital to planning and managing various divisions of the Host Society.

Based on the findings of this study, sport organizations need to recognize the complexity inherent in diversity, and acknowledge this as they attempt to implement it in a broad manner. Further, if host committees and sport organizations are committed to diversity, they must re-consider if and how diversity is connected to the recruitment and selection of planning volunteers.