

A proposed model for knowledge transfer within a major games host society

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**Organizational theory/culture
Session 1**

**Thursday, May 29, 2008
8:00 AM - 8:25 AM**

**Presentation (25-minute)
Abstract 94**

A great deal of research has been conducted on the impact of hosting a Major Games (O'Reily & Knight, 2007; Preuss & Solberg, 2006; Halbwirth & Toohey, 2001; Parent & Seguin, 2007, O'Brien, 2007). While this collection of work offers insight on the opportunities and threats of hosting major sport events, very little addresses the specific managerial challenges within a host organization. An interesting element of a host society is its temporary nature. Events are generally transient - that is they are held in different geographical locations and staged by different organizations - and as a result capacity building within the event staging context is very difficult. Specifically, the short life span of a host society makes intra-organizational knowledge transfer arduous and complex. As Halbwirth and Toohey (2001) point out in the case of the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games, "once the Sydney Games were over there was no value in what SOCOG had learned unless it was able to pass on its knowledge to future OCOGs or to the IOC" (p. 97). The ability of an event host organization to create and foster an environment where knowledge sharing is encouraged, so much so that it becomes embedded in the daily routine operations of the organization is a critical aspect of capacity within Major Games staging (O'Reily & Knight, 2007).

In order to better understand the capacity- knowledge management relation within a Major Games host society, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, a transfer of knowledge model was developed from relevant literature as a conceptual basis for the inquiry. Second, the model was empirically examined within the context of a specific Major Games host society in order to provide preliminary insight into its relevance.

Utilizing three different areas of literature, a conceptual framework for intra-organizational knowledge transfer within a Major Games host society was developed to guide this inquiry. First, the '4I framework' developed by Bontis, Crossman and Hulland (2002) addresses the "social and psychological processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing" (p. 440) by linking the individual, group, and organizational processes through feed forward and feedback learning. Second, the '4 Nodes of Conversion' as explained by Nonaka (2002) include socialization, combination, internalization, and finally externalization. These four different nodes encompass aspects of both individual and group knowledge, and highlight some of the different methods that can be employed to transfer knowledge. The third area of literature deals with the 'knowledge spiral', which applies the '4 Nodes of Conversion' across the individual, group, and organization levels. The spiral explains how knowledge transfer builds speed as it moves up organizational levels, and as a result, enhances capacity (Nonaka, 2002).

A qualitative case study design was utilized. The instrumental case analysis involved the 2007 Canada Winter Games Host Society (CWGHS). A CWGHS provides a rich context in which to examine the transfer of knowledge process because its nonprofit status and short life-span heighten conditions for resource scarcity, which in turn, place significant pressure upon knowledge management practices within the organization. Data collection involved the triangulation of interviews, direct observations and document analysis. Purposeful and intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) were utilized in order to access informed volunteers and staff. A total of 28 (n=28) interviews were conducted with senior and middle management planning volunteers and staff during the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. Specifically, 19 middle management volunteers, five executive volunteers, and four senior staff were interviewed in order to capture a broad and deep interpretation of knowledge transfer within the host society. Interviews ranged from 20-30 minutes (snapshot) to 45-60 minutes (in-depth). Direct observations were conducted during the two-week event and included informal (n=4) and formal (n=15) forums (Turner, 2002). Finally, documents were gathered from the host society intranet such as minutes, reports, project plans, and charters as well as the final reports from 12 divisions.

All interviews, direct observations and field notes were transcribed verbatim. An iterative analysis approach was utilized which accounted for the use of both a priori and emergent themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994). As the data analysis progressed interpretive coding was added. Transcripts were uploaded into the Atlas.ti software data management program. Separate cases were created for each participant, levels of participant (executive vs. volunteer), methods of data collection (interviews, observations, document analysis), attributes (gender, age), and sets (timelines). Reports, queries, and models were generated from Atlas.ti to support findings.

The findings from this completed study indicated that structural, systemic, and interpretive integration is far more crucial to intra-organizational knowledge transfer than initially proposed in the model. Data revealed the design of the host society resulted in three main 'knowledge barriers', particularly at the group level of the organization. First, the rigid hierarchical structure

2008 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2008)

inhibited many of the knowledge transfer processes. Second, there were limited opportunities for knowledge sharing through socialization among key members of different divisions and venue teams. Third, the knowledge combination process was restricted by the lack of a systemic communication network. As a result, knowledge conversion became labourous and the knowledge transfer spiral outlined in the model failed, particularly in the critical times when planning shifted from strategic to operational mode.

These findings concur with existing literature that argues excessive hierarchical structure and ineffective communication systems will impede knowledge transfer within an organization (Rijinders & Boer, 2004; Abou-Zeid, 2005; Janczak, 2004). However, the data also identified integration as a key area for further investigation. Consequently, this study builds upon arguments for structural, systemic and interpretive integration (Carney, 2004; Oltra, 2005; Drucker, 1988), in order to refine the proposed model of knowledge transfer within a Major Games host society. In so doing, this work extends our understanding of the integration-knowledge dilemma, albeit within a limited context.

The implications for this study relate to the need for a proactive approach to knowledge management as a capacity building strategy within Major Games host societies. Major Games event managers, be they executive volunteers or staff, must instil an integrative organizational design at the outset of the host society life cycle. In this way, the structures, system and culture of a Major Games organization will enable as opposed to inhibit knowledge transfer, and as a result, enhance organizational capacity.