Leadership in sport organizations is more crucial than ever. Amis, Slack, and Hinings (2004) explain that "increasing commercialization, alterations to geopolitical boundaries, technological advancements, and greater competition in the marketplace" (p.158) has increased the complexity of the sport industry in recent decades. Leaders will need to ensure they possess the necessary capacity to meet the growing and changing complexity of the sport environment. Few leaders however, possess the capacity to be highly effective and fewer yet possess the ability to be continuously innovative in transforming their organizations to meet such increasingly complex demands (Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

Researchers contend that dramatic transformations of one's leadership effectiveness can occur by experiencing "trigger events" (Avolio, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Trigger events are characterized as both a single life changing event and a series of smaller experiences that accumulate until leadership development is precipitated. Only a life experience that results in an expansion of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive repertoire can be considered a trigger event (Avolio, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May, & Walumbwa, 2005; Rooke & Torbert, 2005).

Luthans and Avolio (2003) divide trigger events into planned and unplanned instances where, when encountered, a person may experience an increase in leadership capacity. Planned trigger events constitute those which an individual may consciously choose or are specifically arranged (Avolio, 2005). Such events include, but are not limited to new job roles; returning to school for advanced studies; workplace promotions; and, having children. Unplanned trigger events constitute natural occurrences where life experiences, both negative and positive, may stimulate one's development and may include the death or loss of a loved one; witnessing a traumatic event; receiving mentorship; and experiencing a new relationship (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

How and why some trigger events stimulate leadership development while others do not is not clearly understood. Research is needed to further understand how trigger events operate in concert with leadership development so that sport leaders can heighten their awareness around their own and others' leadership capacity within sport organizations. This presentation will include findings from a pilot study that explores how and why various trigger events contribute to leadership development. The Leadership Development Framework (LDF) will be discussed as the underlying theoretical framework (Rooke & Torbert, 2005). Specifically, the LDF provides an understanding of how individuals' thinking, emotions, and behaviors change over their lifespan (Manners, Durkin, & Nesdale, 2004). The LDF encompasses seven hierarchical "action logics" through which one interprets of "themselves and the world, of thinking, acting, and of interpreting feedback" (Rooke and Torbert, 1999, p. 2).

The LDF includes the Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist action logics, each of which represents an increasing capacity to enact more effective leadership behaviors. According to Wilber (2000), individuals develop a specific action logic and master its representative behaviors, prior to transcending to the next sequentially ordered action logic. In other words, individuals cannot skip a stage and they gain a greater ability to lead as they transition to the next action logic.

This pilot study is a work in progress and represents part of the second phase of a longitudinal study where the leadership development and capacity of alumni from an undergraduate sport management program will be tracked over time. For this pilot study specifically, a purposive sample of 15 participants was selected from the original sample of 43 alumni who are involved in the longitudinal study. These alumni have been employed full time within different segments of the sport management industry for over one year since graduating in 2006.

A mixed methods design is central to this pilot study; descriptive quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to explore how and why various trigger events contribute to leadership development. Related to the descriptive quantitative data, study participants completed the Washington University Sentence Completion Test (SCT), after which trained scorers measured their LDF action logic. While findings have not yet been derived, participants' completed SCTs will be scored to: first measure their current action logic; and, second, to determine how trigger events may have impacted changes in their previous two SCT scores (i.e., Time 1 and Time 2), taken from the first phase of the longitudinal study.

Furthermore, two rounds of semi-structured qualitative interviews were also conducted to understand how trigger events have impacted participants' leadership development. Data analyses procedures for these interviews followed the guiding tenets of...
grounded theory and constant comparative analyses, as outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990) and by Charmaz (2000). Analysis of the interview data will help to develop a conceptual model explaining further how trigger events contribute to the leadership development process.

The findings from this pilot study will provide practitioners (e.g., executive coaches) and sport leaders with a greater understanding of the leadership development process. Specifically, sport leaders may find it possible to design strategies that incorporate trigger events with an intention to expand their employees’ leadership capacity throughout their career (Cooper, Scandura, & Schriesheim, 2005; Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Such strategies may include changing the scope and complexity of employees’ job dictates to include new initiatives, or development of teams where co-workers can support one another to ensure that development occurs. As well, these findings may potentially inform sport leaders of organizational context factors (e.g., human resource initiatives, organizational cultural and structural factors) that impact employees’ leadership development. With such information, sport leaders may transform their own interactions with others as well as organizational operations to better meet the complexity of the sport industry’s demands.

Sport management educators will value the findings as well, using them to design experiential learning curricula which incorporate planned trigger events and anticipate unplanned ones as they focus on stimulating students’ leadership development. Such research may help to fill the gap in empirical evidence that supports major theories and concepts when teaching sport management students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Quarterman, 1998). As no empirical study has been conducted on trigger events and their relationship to leadership development within the sport management academy, the findings extend the empirical conversation on sport leaders and their leadership development. In this presentation, the limitations and delimitations arising through the pilot study will also be discussed.

References: