Exploring Development through Sport Initiatives: Sharing a Research Program within the Commonwealth Games Association of Canada

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Development through sport is an emergent area of importance in both academic and practical settings, and is seen as a vehicle to facilitate sustainable social and economic improvement in regions of the world targeted for assistance (Darnell, 2007; Kidd, 2008). Kidd (2008) remarked that the extent to which sport and physical activity interact with social development is a challenging issue in need of more empirical examination to understand further the processes and outcomes of such initiatives. In this realm, it is widely believed that “sport can help bridge cultural and ethnic divides, create jobs and businesses, promote tolerance and non-discrimination, reinforce social integration, and advocate for healthy lifestyles” (International Olympic Committee, 2008, p. 1). In this presentation, the authors address Kidd’s call for research and share about a series of systematic studies of one particular development through sport initiative operated by the Commonwealth Games Association of Canada (CGC), known as the Canadian Sport Leadership Corp (CSLC) program.

Similar to other development through sport initiatives (e.g., Right to Play), the CSLC program operates with an assumption that the power of sport can bring people together to discuss various issues deemed important within host communities (e.g., gender equality, healthy living). In an effort to assist in social and educational development, the CGC recruits and appoints recent Canadian university graduates as CSLC program participants and sends them overseas to embark on an internship placement within host organization communities (e.g., Trinidad & Tobago, Zambia). Once in the field, sport is used as a tool in which to deliver information targeted towards specifically identified local community objectives. Hence, two main organizational objectives anchor the CSLC program: (1) personal development for interns; and (2) capacity support for host organizations.

The purposes of this presentation are first, to discuss how the CSLC program is conceptualized and delivered, according to viewpoints held by key CSLC program stakeholders (i.e., CGC leaders, interns, host community leaders) and second, to share the degree to which these stakeholders are accomplishing the two main organizational objectives. In meeting these purposes, this presentation is centered on sharing a research program developed on the CSLC, which includes three distinct research phases. In the first research phase, the core values inherent in the CSLC program will be uncovered and shared. In the second research phase, the leadership development experienced by graduate interns who partake in the CSLC program will be further explored. Lastly, in the third research phase, empirically analyzed perceptions of host community leaders will be shared and discussed.

The first research phase took place from January to September 2009, where the authors conducted qualitative semi-structured interviews with CSLC program alumni and organizational leaders to uncover the core values and beliefs of this development through sport initiative (e.g., Schein, 1990, 1996). Findings indicated 13 core values operating at the espoused, perceived, and ideal levels of the CSLC program. Notably, participants perceived varying degrees of importance for each of the core values, indicating that cultural gaps are existent in the program; such gaps further highlight aspects of what Martin (1992) referred to as orthogonal culture. Thus, certain values (e.g., justice) existed alongside the dominant organizational culture shared by program alumni and organizational leaders (e.g., power of sport) suggesting that there is some inconsistent understanding of and expectations about how things are within the CSLC program. Based on findings and implications drawn in this first research phase, the second research phase has been initiated and involves measuring CSLC program interns’ leadership development over the duration of their 8-month placement.

In this empirical study, the Leadership Development Framework (LDF) (Cook-Greuter, 2004; Rooke & Torbert, 2005) guides the exploration. Widely considered the most reliable and valid diagnostic and feedback tool in the leadership development field (Manners & Durkin, 2001; McCauley, Duff, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006), the LDF represents numerous transformative pathways that individuals can undergo to become “learning leaders” (Rooke &
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Torbert, 1998). This research phase commenced in September of 2009 and will be complete in the fall of 2010 to
align with completion of the interns’ placement.

Lastly, the third research phase will commence in January of 2010, where we will qualitatively explore perceptions
of the host community leaders. Specifically, we seek to uncover the existing core values of the program from these
leaders’ perspectives to provide us with critical additional data related to potential differences in national culture
orientation (c.f., Hampden-Turner, & Trompenaars, 2000; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998). Such differences
will be relevant to future managerial implications drawn by CGC administrators and leaders within the context of the
CSLC program.

Conducting these three phases of research will enable us to gather multiple perspectives from all primary
stakeholders of this development through sport initiative, culminating in an original research study aimed at
understanding both organizational and national culture and leadership development theories to a deeper degree.
Hence, all three research phases will contribute empirical evidence to important managerial aspects related to this
development through sport initiative.

In this presentation, we first briefly introduce the wider development through sport research and its applicability to
sport management contexts. We next provide details about our progress on each research phase and then explain
the links within and between each phase, the nature of the data collection and analyses, and share respective
findings as this research program evolves. Last, we share the importance and implications that this research
program has on the sport management field from both theoretical and practical perspectives as well as our intended
future research directions.

References

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