Developing a Competency Model for Athletic Directors Using Behavioral Event Interview

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Competency, defined as “an underlying characteristics of an individual which is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job” (Boyatzis, 1982, p. 21), is one of the areas sport managers should pay great attention to. As the market place in sport has become more competitive, the challenging for managers is to hire competent employees and further enhance their competencies in order to increase organizational performance, decrease turnover, reduce supervisory problems, and conflicts among individuals in the organization (Chang & Kim, 2003). Several competency studies have been conducted in sport management as the field has grown greatly in complexity and scope over the past 30 years. Previous competency studies in sport management have focused on identifying competencies among university recreation sport administrators (e.g., Barcelona & Ross, 2004; Jamieson, 1980; Jennings, 1984), college sport facility managers (e.g., Skipper, 1990), fitness club instructors (e.g., Chang & Kim, 2003; Koustelios, 2003), and coaches (e.g., MacLean & Chelladurai, 1995; Phillips & Jubenville, 2009; Solomon, 1999). Yet, these studies all focused on the perceived competencies rather than the actual competencies. While studying perceived competencies provide meaningful insights to the managers, the practical application of the results is limited because the actual competencies used at work may be different from the perceived competencies.

According to Spencer and Spencer (1993), there are three methods for studying competencies: using criterion samples to differentiate superior performers from average performers, asking panel of experts to identify competencies of interest, and a single case study if there is not enough job holders. While the first method, called Behavioral Event Interview (BEI), provides an opportunity to identify the real competencies used in the job settings, the others merely provide perception of needed competencies. Past sport management research has used the second method, mainly using Delphi technique, in their competency studies; therefore, the focus was on the perceived competencies. Another issue of using the panel of experts is the fact that it leaves out some of the key competencies unidentified. Whereas the BEI method has been successful in identifying 80% to 98% of the key competencies in the previous studies (Spencer & Spencer, 1993), Delphi technique has suffered from low percentage of variance explained. Therefore, using BEI would be more beneficial in competency research.

Behavioral Event Interview (BEI), developed by McClelland and Daily (1972), combined Flanagan's (1954) Critical Incident Interview (CII) with the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT). One of the big differences between BEI and CII is that BEI is focusing on the generic characteristics of the people who did a job well, whereas CII is interested in identifying the task elements of jobs (Spencer, 1997). The advantage of the BEI is the ability to develop practical competency models. In fact, BEI allows the researchers to obtain practical data from real superior performers who lead the organizations. Therefore, BEI seems more accurate and proper to diagnose the organization’s current level and status than the other methods.

The purposes of the current study are threefold. First, the study introduces behavioral event interview as a research method for identifying competencies in sport organizations and occupations. Second, the study attempts to determine key competencies needed for athletic directors. The third purpose of this study is to propose a competency model that is applicable to athletic directors based on the results of the second step.

Fifteen superior athletic directors and 10 average athletic directors at Division III institutions will be selected as a sample. This is more than the recommended sample of 20—12 superior and 8 average performers for using BEI (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). The ratings of all Division III athletic departments will be obtained to select superior and average performers. The criteria for the selection of superior and average performers will be established following Spencer and Spencer's (1993) guideline. The five step protocol, initially developed by McClelland (1976, 1998) include introduction and explanation, job responsibilities, behavioral events, characteristics needed to do the job, and conclusion and summary. In order to analyze the data, all the interviews will be transcribed and coded using the NVivo qualitative data analysis package following McClelland Competency Dictionary, which provides a scoring system for level of competency emerging from the BEI. Once inter-rater reliability is established, one-way analysis of
variance (ANOVA) will be conducted to test if the differences among the competencies are significant between superior performers and average performers. Based on the statistical findings, a competency model for athletic directors will be developed, and the model will be validated on a second criterion sample using t-test.

The results of the study would contribute much to sport management literature in several significant ways. First, the current study would suggest the way to identify the actual competencies needed rather than relying on the perceived competencies at work. Second, key competencies identified using BEI would greatly contribute to human resource management practice, such as selection, performance appraisal, career development, succession plan, and training in sport organizations. Lastly, the competencies identified would help developing sport management curriculum by providing linkage between education and the field. Similarly, the results would suggest key competencies that need to be developed by aspiring people who wish to work in the field of collegiate athletics administration. Details of the methodology used in the current study and the significance of the study will be discussed in the presentation.