Knowledge Management Processes in National and Provincial Multi-Sport Events in Canada

Jessie Schenk, University of Ottawa
Milena Parent (Advisor), University of Ottawa

Introduction

A major concern of governing a successful sport event is the need to learn from the past in order to (a) determine what worked well and (b) not repeat previous mistakes (i.e., knowledge management and transfer process) (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2012). Therefore, it is not surprising that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) acknowledged the importance of knowledge through the creation of the Olympic Games Knowledge Management program. Recently, Parent, MacDonald, and Goulet (2013) examined the value of knowledge management (KM) at an Olympic Games. While these authors explored the role a KM system can play at an event of global scale, research is lacking regarding KM practices at lower-level events (i.e., domestic). As more cities are arguably able to host these domestic events, which are more prevalent, there is a need to uncover best practices, experiences, and areas for improvement. As such, we can explore how (if at all) knowledge management occurs at domestic events, compare levels, and make recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, and event managers. Thus, the purpose of this poster is to examine the KM process at domestic multi-sport events, examining one provincial event (Ontario Summer Games) and one national event (Canada Summer Games). The findings for each domestic event are compared to each other, as well as with the KM process studied by Parent et al.

Review of Relevant Literature

This study answers the call made by several scholars to examine KM principles within an event setting (e.g., Frawley & Toohey, 2009; Getz, 2007; Halbwirth & Toohey, 2001; Parent & Smith-Swan, 2012; Toohey & Halbwirth, 2005). Here, knowledge refers to both the explicit and tacit; where explicit knowledge is more easily articulated, written or codified, while tacit knowledge, in contrast, is quite inarticulate and developed through experience and hands-on activities (Parent et al., 2013). Parent and colleagues developed a KM and transfer model for the Olympic Games; the process included (1) knowledge needs identification and looking to individuals’ past Games experiences; (2) knowledge adoption through acquiring knowledge using various tools and storage mechanisms (3) internal knowledge transfer fostering knowledge creation and learning; (4) knowledge application through the use of best practices and training individuals, and (5) knowledge tailoring for external knowledge transfer to the next organizing committee as well as other stakeholders.

Methodology and Data Analysis

To answer the purpose, two cases were examined: one provincial-level event and one national-level event (Ontario Summer Games and Canada Summer Games, respectively). From the various stakeholder groups involved in each Games, between one and three people were interviewed until saturation was reached. These stakeholder groups included the community, various levels of government, sport organizations, sponsors, media, and delegations (cf. Parent, 2008). Interviews were between 45-90 minutes. The Ontario Summer Games interviews were conducted by phone, while half the Canada Games interviews were conducted by phone and the other half were conducted in-person. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and transcripts verified by the interviewees. Additionally, documents, such as final reports, business plans, Games websites, intranet, e-mails, etc., were included in the analysis. In total, 1178 pages were included. Deductive coding, based on the Parent et al. (2013) model, and inductive coding (to let additional/other findings emerge) were conducted. Coded passages were put into a table to allow for the patterns and themes to emerge (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

It was found that although the rights holder (Canada Games Council) of the national level event (Canada Summer Games) had a formal KM program in place since 2009, there was no formal KM system in place for the provincial level event (Ontario Summer Games). For the provincial event, KM implementation was left up to the discretion of the organizing committee. While many of the stakeholders were aware that a KM program existed for the national
event, they did not have access to the program, and often did not see the need to access it, even though our findings indicate that they were indeed part of an overall KM and transfer process. Rather, stakeholders understood the KM program existed as a means for the Canada Games Council to pass on knowledge from one Host Society/Organizing Committee to the next. In terms of the provincial event, interviewees discussed formal (e.g., formal committees) and informal (e.g., ad hoc meetings) knowledge transfer mechanisms. Interviewees emphasized the importance of the individual in terms of sharing and storing knowledge as well as knowledge tailoring. These results are in line with those of Parent et al. (2013) who found that in the Olympic Games, the emphasis is on the individual: knowledge exists in the individual and is passed on (or not) through individuals (i.e., tacit knowledge). Findings in the national event support the importance of individuals for KM and transfer. One problem highlighted by the data is that of having knowledge “stored” in the individual, as opposed to a database for example. Were the individual to leave, this knowledge would be lost. Finally, it seems that inter-stakeholder communication regarding knowledge is weaker than for mega events like the Olympic Games. Although stakeholders used their own past experiences as learnings for the current event, most did not compare notes, so to speak, to boost their knowledge. A figure demonstrating the KM processes within these domestic events will be presented and compared to the Parent et al. (2013) model.

Discussion/Implications

It is clear that at smaller events, the individual is the key to KM and transfer processes. Even in an age where technology has become increasingly useful and beneficial, the importance of the individual seems to prevail and trump technology. That is, knowledge exists within individuals and is held internally, so if an individual leaves an organization or hoards knowledge, the transfer of knowledge is interrupted, incomplete, or lost. Thus, it becomes important for event owners (e.g., Canada Games Council) to capture that knowledge and make it available for future organizers. This study therefore highlights the importance and need to create storage mechanisms for KM and transfer systems. In addition, the extent to which event stakeholders seek knowledge from other stakeholders or past events for their own use is rather limited in contrast to what has been found for the Olympic Games (cf. Parent et al., 2013). Such findings point to potential opportunities for greater inter-stakeholder coordination in order to help them in their event-related planning and implementation responsibilities. Perhaps organizing committees of these lower level events need to better engage the stakeholders to foster inter-stakeholder communication and learning. This can serve to help improve the quality and delivery of such events. This research therefore contributes to both the event management literature and the sport management literature by developing a greater understanding of knowledge management processes and needs for lower level events, not just mega sport events.