Uncovering Organizational Capacity for Sport for Development

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Organizational theory/culture

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Sport-for-development (SFD) is an increasingly popular context of study in sport management (Arnold & Spence, 2014; Giannoulakis & Lyras, 2014; Rich & Misener, 2014; Shulenkorf et al., 2014; Smith & Melton 2014; Svensson & Hambrick, 2014; Wegner et al., 2014; Welty Peachy et al., 2014). With support from the United Nations (UN, 2014), the International Olympic Committee (IOC, 2013), and Canadian Sport Policy 2.0 (Canadian Heritage, 2012), the utility of sport to influence social change is widely promoted.

Research in SFD has taken a more critical approach (Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2007; Darnell, 2012), with an emphasis on program outcomes and evaluation criteria (Levermore, 2011; Nichols & Crow 2004). As a result, the literature in SFD is contentious, as scholars debate the merits of sport as a development tool (Coalter, 2008; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011; Kidd, 2008; Levermore & Beacom, 2012; Schnitzer et. al., 2013). With few exceptions (Rich & Misener, 2014; Smith & Melton, 2014; Svensson & Hambrick, 2014) the management of SFD organizations and particular initiatives have taken a back seat to the social-merit debate.

Building on existing management research in SFD, this study examines the organizational capacity of sport organizations engaging in SFD initiatives. For the purposes of this study, organizations receiving external funding to conduct SFD initiatives are described as ‘implementing organizations’. They are organizations whose missions are not exclusively in the area of SFD, and represent a growing population of sport organizations that are engaging in sport for development initiatives. These organizations include community sport organizations, recreation centres, and private sport clubs, to name a few. Their SFD initiatives include health promotion, providing pathways to higher education, community development, promoting life skills, developing social capital and networks, and eradicating homelessness. These organizations pursue and receive funding through grants from government agencies, philanthropic organizations, and the private sector. Were it not for such partnerships, and funding, their SFD initiatives would not be possible.

Organizational capacity is defined as “the extent to which (an organization) has certain attributes that have been identified as critical to goal achievement” (Horton et. al, 2003 from Misener & Doherty, 2009). Hall et al. (2003), whose framework for non-profit organizational capacity is increasingly utilized in sport management research (e.g., Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sharpe, 2006; Smith & Melton, 2014; Wicker & Breuer, 2011), define the critical attributes of capacity as human resources, finances, infrastructure, and planning and development, and external relationships. Beyond identifying the critical attributes for capacity, Hall et al.’s framework highlights the multidimensional and dynamic nature of organizational capacity. An organization’s ability to achieve its objectives are, according to Hall and colleagues, determined by its capacity strengths and deficiencies, and how those strengths and weaknesses interact within the organization and with its environment. Further, Wing (2004) suggests that capacity “is not going to be the same across such a diversity of kinds of [nonprofit] organizations;” what is critical in one context may not be as relevant in another (Eisinger, 2002). Thus, the purpose of the current study is to uncover the specific nature of organizational capacity within the emerging SFD context, and specifically within SFD implementing organizations.

A semi structured interview methodology is utilized with personal one-on-one interviews with a purposeful sample of key members of sport organizations engaged in at least one SFD initiative (e.g. president, managers, and volunteer implementers). Audio-recorded interviews are under way. Data analysis consists of a-priori coding based on Hall et al.’s (2003) five dimensions of capacity, followed by emergent coding to capture sub-themes unique to the context under study. The findings are expected to provide valuable insight into the nature of sport organizations engaging in SFD initiatives, and specifically, their capacity to achieve social change this way. Where existing SFD literature has
tended to focus on SFD programs and their impact, this research will contribute to existing scholarship by focusing on the organizational capacity of the implementing organizations, and their experiences initiating and managing a SFD program.

Select References


