Comaparing Knowledge Management and Transfer Processes in Domestic Versus International Multi-Sport Events

Jessie Schenk, University of Ottawa
Laurence Proulx Therrien, University of Ottawa
Darlene MacDonald, University of Ottawa
Michael Naraine, University of Ottawa
Milena Parent (Advisor), University of Ottawa

Management/leadership Saturday, June 6, 2015 20-minute oral presentation
Abstract 2015-206 (including questions)
(9:30 AM) (Joliet)

Introduction/Purpose
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, 2013). Therefore, it is not surprising the International Olympic Committee 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. Since the Olympic Games is such a unique, global phenomenon, at the top of the mega-event hierarchy, there is a need to examine the KM processes occurring at other events of all levels. By doing so, we can uncover best practices, experiences, and areas for improvement for the various event levels. Thus, the purpose of this presentation is to examine the KM process at four different events, two domestic and two international sports events, respectively: 2012 Ontario Summer Games (OSG), 2013 Canada Summer Games (CSG), 2014 Commonwealth Game (CWG), and 2015 Pan American Games (PAG). The findings of each event are compared to each other, as well as with the KM process at the Olympic Games as studied by Parent et al. (2013).

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, 2013; 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 knowledge transfer (KT) 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 KT fostering knowledge creation and learning; (4) knowledge application through the use of best practices and training individuals, and (5) knowledge tailoring for external KT to the next organizing committee as well as other stakeholders.

Methodology and Data Analysis
To answer the purpose, four cases were examined: one provincial-level event and one national-level event (OSG and CSG, respectively) and two international events (CWG and PAG). Interviewees were recruited from each organizing committee and the stakeholders groups identified by Parent (2008). These stakeholder groups included the community, various levels of government, sport organizations, sponsors, media, and delegations (cf. Parent, 2008). Interviews were conducted in person, via telephone, or Skype and stopped once all stakeholders groups were represented and theoretical saturation was reached. For the OSG, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted, for the CSG, 16, for the CWG, 10, as well as archival material in lieu of an interview for one stakeholder (participant’s preference), and for the PAG, 24. Interviews were 30-100 minutes long and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were verified by the interviewees. Additionally, archival materials, such as final reports, business plans, Games websites, intranet, e-mails, etc., were included in the analysis. In total, 560 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
Of the four events, only the CSG and CWG had a formal KM program in place. For the OSG and PAG, KM implementation was left up to the discretion of the organizing committee. For the CSG and CWG, not all stakeholders were aware that a KM program existed. Additionally, some stakeholders either did not have access to the program or did not see the need to access it, even though our findings indicate that they were indeed part of an overall KM/KT process. In terms of the OSG and PAG, interviewees discussed formal (e.g., formal committees) and informal (e.g., ad hoc meetings) KT mechanisms. Interviewees emphasized the importance of the individual in all KM stages. Findings in the CSG and CWG support the importance of individuals for KM and KT. These results are in line Parent et al.’s (2013). One problem highlighted was the challenge of rendering explicit individuals’ internal knowledge. The difficulty lies in organizers being aware of the value of the individuals’ experiences and transforming this tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Difficulties with this can result in unused or lost knowledge. Finally, it seems that inter-stakeholder communication regarding knowledge is weaker in these four events as compared to the findings at the Olympic Games from Parent et al. (2013). For both the CSG and CWG, the inter-stakeholder communication was weak. Even with a formal KM program in place, few stakeholders refer to it when looking for specific information from past events. Another key finding was the importance of previous experience and learnings. The CSG and CWG had representatives from previous Games sit on several committees and would have regular exchanges during event planning to determine what worked well and what did not, and to avoid “reinventing the wheel”. For the OSG and PAG, 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/KT processes within each of these events will be presented and compared to the Parent et al. (2013) model.

Discussion/Implications
It is clear that, at all four events, the individual is the key to KM and KT processes. Although technology has become increasingly innovative and helpful, the significance of people seems to prevail and outweigh the use of technology. That is, although technology aids in the KT process, the consensus was the individual communicating tacit knowledge was more important/useful than a final report. If an individual leaves an organization or hoards knowledge, KT is disrupted or lost. Thus, it becomes important for event stakeholders (e.g., rights holders) to capture that knowledge to make it available for future organizers and their associated stakeholders. This study therefore highlights the importance of and need for storage mechanisms to assist in effective KM/KT, and also to ensure stakeholders are aware of these mechanisms. If KM programs are in place, but not used, they become a wasted resource. Organizers and rights holders should explain their KM program and emphasize its benefit for all stakeholders involved. Findings also suggest there is potential for greater inter-stakeholder communication. Perhaps organizing committees need to better engage the stakeholders to foster communication, sharing and learning. This can help improve the quality and delivery of events of all levels.