Corporate – Sport for Development Partnerships for Social Change: Understanding Strategic Value Creation for Cross-Sector Partners

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Management - Strategic Management (Other)
20-minute oral presentation (including questions) Thursday, June 1, 2017 11:15 AM
Abstract 2017-023 Room: Torrey's Peak

Introduction/Background/Significance of the Topic
Interorganizational relationships (IORs) of various forms have become integral to the delivery of socially oriented efforts by businesses and nonprofit organizations (Seitanidi, 2009). The sport for development (SFD) context is one which offers a unique setting in which to examine issues related to IORs. SFD organizations are typically nonprofit (non-governmental) in form, and undertake missions related to leveraging sport as a tool for personal, local, national and even international development initiatives (Banda & Gultresa, 2015). Within the context of implementing SFD programs, partnerships play a crucial role in program design, implementation, and achieving outcomes (MacIntosh & Spence, 2012). Through partnerships, SFD organizations are able to access valuable partner resources (e.g., money, managerial skills, human resources, etc.) that allow greater capability to achieve objectives (Jamali & Keshishian, 2009). However, despite the prominent role that corporate sector organizations are beginning to play in sport, there has been negligible exploration on the interorganizational dynamics between SFD organizations and private companies. Scholars claim that there is a gap in the literature in understanding efforts and approaches to partnership implementation and evaluation – particularly in cross-sector relationships (Esteves & Barclay, 2011; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009). Differences in organizational cultures, goal orientation, geographic scope, and sector contexts may introduce unique challenges and opportunities in collaborative cross-sector ventures. Furthermore, from an evaluative perspective, scant research has considered performance from both a corporate and social cause point of view (Esteves & Barclay, 2011). Taken together, this suggests a lack of understanding of collaborative strategies engaged in by corporate-nonprofit partnerships.

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of our study is to examine the strategic collaborative milieu by examining the environment under which cross-sector IORs emerge and develop as well how they are positioned to affect broader social objectives. We address the aforementioned gaps by focusing on examining the collaborative process including implementation, management interactions and outcome evaluation. Our specific research questions are: 1. What contextual, content, and processual factors are critical in determining the success of a cross-sector IOR in the SFD context? 2. What are the expected benefits emerging from such collaboration?

Methods
An exploratory case study methodology was adopted to allow us to gain an in-depth understanding of the interorganizational dynamics within this setting. We examine 5 cases of collaboration between SFD organizations and their corporate partners. The cases selected represent different SFD causes as well as geographic focus, and different corporate-level involvement. The organizations investigated include: PeacePlayers International, Grassroot Soccer, Right to Play, Street Football World, and Soccer Without Borders. Our data was collected from multiple sources to allow for richer and more robust findings: 1. Websites / published online materials from each of the partners (i.e., press releases, stories, social media, and blogs); 2. News reports, article clippings, and other publically available sources; 3. Semi-structured interviews with executives in each partner organization responsible for designing and implementing partnership assessment (10 totals). Data are still being analyzed, and will be thematically categorized using Nvivo to distill common themes across cases. This approach will allow us to also uncover distinctive patterns that appear in different cases and forms of partnership. For content oriented analysis of the data, we adapt the framework proposed by AL-Tabbaa, Leach, and March (2014) who determined the central attributes of collaborative strategy. Specifically, the foundational element for strategic collaborative exchange is underpinned by the context (i.e., internal (organizational policies, structure, culture) and external (societal, economic, and competitive) conditions and environment in which partners engage), content (i.e., the “strategic options, directions,
and practices an organization aims to adopt to achieve its planned objectives.” (AL-Tabbaa, et al., 2014, p. 660)), and process of interaction (i.e., partnership building and maintenance, governance mechanisms implemented, and perceived managerial requirements for success, and methods concerned with how a strategy (content element) is formulated and implemented in a given context) (Pettigrew, 1987). Together, these dimensions help to inform our knowledge about cross-sector IORs beyond the motives for their formation (Babiak, 2007), but also for explaining the impact of exchange dynamics as well as for understanding evaluation criteria.

Findings/Discussions/Contributions
While our investigation is currently in progress, our findings will highlight how the unique context in which organizations exist shapes their collaborative approaches and will link contextual issues to critical partnership processes and outcomes. This will provide a deeper understanding of how partners coordinate to maximize social and strategic impact through SFD partnerships. The framework will also illuminate the power imbalances and tensions that emerge. We will present a model of collaborative process for cross-sector partners identifying the integration of strategic partnership dimensions for organizations from each sector. This research contributes to the literature by underscoring the strategic value of IORs to partners from both sectors, and shedding light on how these relationships can create valuable and significant social change. In regard to practice, the insights generated from this research can serve as a template for practitioners to promote better communication and to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of their partnerships.