Sport Event Management: An Analysis of the Management of Multiple Delivery Partners

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Facilities/Events - Operations (International Sport)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
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Sport event management is a central and evolving area of study within the sport management field. This developing body of knowledge (Emery, 2010) includes the focus of this research - event delivery models as a core operational aspect of managing events. However, to date the literature reveals little on the internal operations of local organising committees (LOCs) (Parent, 2008) or delivery methods adopted by second-tier, mass participation sport events. The 2017 World Masters Games (WMG2017), held in Auckland, New Zealand, hosted over 25,000 athletes competing in 30 sport disciplines. This study explores the use of multiple delivery partners (MDPs) to deliver the WMG2017 sport programme and provides analysis of their perspectives on best practice management beneficial to other sport event organisers considering this method of delivery.

WMG2017 is the first of nine Masters Games editions in which MDPs have been exclusively utilised. The sole purpose of a MDP is the operational delivery of their respective sports. Through this type of delivery the WMG LOC was seeking efficiency, consistency and quality in delivery, enabling and facilitating capability and skill development, while avoiding replicating available skills and expertise (J. Wootten, WMG2017 Chief Executive, personal communication, July 17, 2017).

First-tier multi-sport events like the Olympic/Paralympic Games are generally organised by a local organising committee which amalgamates paid, volunteer, seconded and contracted staff to deliver the event. As a second-tier event, the WMG2017 Board of Directors chose to manage the event through a central entity (a LOC), but outsourced delivery of the 30 sports to external partners via contract service agreements. Using multiple delivery partners is novel to the literature, although some authors (see Burden & Li, 2009; Greenwell, Danzey-Bussell & Shonk, 2014; Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013) have advocated outsourcing. Outsourcing, defined as “a means of providing the organization access to highly skilled and knowledgeable personnel often not available in-house” (Burden & Li, 2009, p. 139), allows opportunity to utilise internal core competencies of the LOC while outsourcing other necessary functions (Burden & Li, 2009). This was the intention of the WMG2017 LOC concerning the use of multiple delivery partners.

WMG2017 was used as a case study in this research to identify and understand the unique facets of the arrangement with the MDPs. Semi-structured qualitative face-to-face interviews, conducted post-Games with WMG2017 upper management (3) and delivery partners for the 30 sports, plus document analysis of partnership agreements and contracts, WMG Reports, webpages, informative and technical documents, provided rich data analysed by NVivo 11. The epistemology of this research, guided by constructionism and the theoretical perspective of interpretivism, enabled the examination and interpretation of the data to create meaning and understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Results focus on the LOC’s management of relationships with the multiple delivery partners, the tools and practices used to ensure consistency across MDPs and the MDPs’ perceptions of the experience. Watt (2003) predicted that partnerships would become critical to event management. Supported by Allen, O’Toole, Harris and McDonnell (2011) and Frost and Laing (2011), Watt recommended that partnerships should be considered as a potential delivery model, as happened with WMG2017. Consequently, this research adds to the theoretical and practical conversation on contemporary event management theory. Emery (2010) expressed the need for a “more informed [event] knowledge base” (p. 159) and supported research such as this on sport event management practice.

Future research to substantiate the use of multiple delivery partners could consider action research pre-, during- and post-events to obtain a deeper understanding of the operational delivery methods employed. The perspectives of the LOC and their delivery partners on partnership management is beneficial to maturing the academic and practical contribution of this method of event delivery.