Managing Interorganizational Relationships: A Systematic Analysis of the Challenges Associated with the Efficacy of Delivering a Standardized Nationalized Program in Canada

Jonathon Edwards, University of New Brunswick  
Ross Leadbetter, University of New Brunswick  
Kate Kloos, University of New Brunswick  
Diana Culver, University of Ottawa  
Emilio Landolfi, University of the Fraser Valley

Management - Other (Amateur Sport)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Abstract 2018-050  
Thursday, June 7, 2018  
1:45 PM  
Room: Acadia B

The delivery of a nationally standardized program consistently and effectively is contingent upon various factors that exist within a sport system, which includes: the actors (e.g., national, provincial or state, and municipal sport organizations) within the system having common goals, clear governance from the top down, strong mechanisms for communication between the different actors, transparency between the different actors involved in the system, and continual feedback regarding the implementation of the program between the actors. As such, then, it becomes important to manage the interorganizational relationships that exists within a sport system, with the understanding that a system is defined as a “set of interrelated and interdependent parts arranged in a manner that produces a unified whole” (Robbins, Coulter, & Langton, 2006, p.39). Evan’s (1965) stated that “all formal organizations are embedded in an environment of other organizations as well as a complex norms, values, and collectives of the society at large” (p. 218). Thus, Evan’s (1965) discussion of formal organizations and their environment can be understood with the context of a system and the interorganizational relationship that exists. Furthermore, “the central paradigm [i.e., interorganizational relationships] has tended to view inter-organizational networking [or relationships] as an intentional response to dependencies among organizations that aims at enhancing the power and control of the networking organizations in order to foster their success” (Oliver & Ebers, 1998, p.565). To gain an understanding of the management of interorganizational relationships through the use of a standardized national program where the research specifically explored the implementation of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) within the context of the Canadian Amateur Sport System (CASS) where is determined through the development of athletes and efficacy of delivering coach education.

National standardized sport programs are typically developed at the national level and implemented at the provincial and municipal level by organizations operating at these levels (Edwards & Leadbetter, 2016). This is particularly the case with the NCCP, which is a national program comprised of three streams (i.e., community, competition, and instructional sport), five core competencies, and seven coaching outcomes in order to train and certify coaches at all levels in all sports. In order to administer the NCCP, there are multiple actors attempting to work together (i.e., interorganizational relationships), making the system design one that is complex in nature as it pertains to communication, coordination, and delivery. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the challenges that exist within coach education by examining the training that is provided to coaches in the sports of Soccer, Baseball, and Hockey.

Based on this purpose statement, the first research question posed was: What challenges exist in the delivery of coach education in Canada in the sports of hockey, baseball, and soccer? By identifying these challenges, an understanding is gained into the management of the interorganizational relationships that exist with the CASS. Interorganizational relationships have been discussed extensively within the sport management literature (e.g., Babiak, 2007; Babiak & Thibault, 2009; Misner & Doherty, 2013; Shaw & Allen, 2006; Thibault & Harvey, 1997). However, absent from this discussion is an examination of interorganizational relationship within the context of a system and the delivery of a national standardized program such as the NCCP. Drawing on the work of Marchington and Vincent (2004), the operationalization of interorganizational relationships can be understood through three levels: institutional, organizational, and interpersonal. In the context of this study, the institutional level is understood to be the Coaching Association of Canada (the organization that oversees the partnership that make up the NCCP) and the NSOs (i.e., Hockey Canada, Soccer Canada, and Baseball Canada). At the organizational level, the
relationship that exists becomes influential in decision making, while establishing boundaries between these organizations. Based on the research context, the relationship between the Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) and Community Sport Organizations (CSOs) are understood to be discussed at the organizational level. Interpersonal relationships, are understood to be boundary-spanning agents who formally and informally establish a link between the institutional and organizational level. In the Canadian coaching system, we find these links to be Learning Facilitators (LFs) and Master Coach Developer (MCDs). MLFs deliver NCCP content to LFs on how to train coaches; while, LF’s provide coach education specifically to the coaches. Marchington and Vincent (2004) work is used as the conceptual framework for which this study was understood and there becomes an understanding of the different actors (i.e., organizations, institutions, LFs, and MCDs) involved in the coach education system and the relationship that exists between the different actors. This leads to the second research question: How has the challenges had an impact on the management of interorganizational relationships as it pertains to the delivery of national standardized program?

Data collection consisted of using a qualitative through a multi-case study approach (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Yin, 2003). Case study research is defined as “a qualitative approach that explores real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded system (cases) over time, through a detailed, in-depth data collection using multiple sources of information” (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p.96). Data were collected in four ways: 1) 33 semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions with PSO representatives associated with the delivery of NCCP programming from across Canada; 2) 19 semi-structure interviews with open-ended questions with MCDs in the sports of hockey, baseball, and soccer from across Canada; 3) 21 observations of the delivery of the NCCP courses in hockey, baseball, and soccer across Canada; 4) 18 post module interviews of the LFs observed delivering NCCP courses in hockey, baseball, and soccer across Canada; and, 5) reviewed over 600 pages of NCCP manuals (e.g., LF manuals for each sport, and coaching manuals) for content analysis. Interviews were transcribed; while the data analysis consisted of a modified version of the qualitative data analysis steps as found in Edwards and Skinner (2009), which was originally discussed by Miles and Huberman (1994): 1) Familiarization 2) Thematic Framework, Indexing, and Charting; and 3) Interpreting. As an inductive approach was used, themes emerged and identified in the form of challenges.

The results indicated that management are faced with challenges that include: 1) Communication; 2) Educational Delivery; 3) Flexibility of Content; 4) Systemic Consistency; 5) Governing Body Support; and, 6) Feedback. Drawing on the work of Brinkerhoff (2002), “the inability of to articulate features of a partnership and its contribution to performance has heretofore discouraged its effectiveness and the investments necessary to attain its value-added” (p. 229). In the case of this research, the challenges that were identified from the data analysis uncovered specific places within the coach education system were management within the institutions and organizations need to focus their attention. Within a systems context the interorganizational relationships within the CASS are ones that are formalized through membership fees, but in often cases lack the structure and governance model to ensure effectiveness in the delivery of a national standardized program, which Edwards and Leadbetter (2016) found in their study of the delivery of a standardized program in a small province. Thus, this interorganizational relationships in the case further advances the understanding that a coach education system and the actors involved in that system are faced with challenges in consistency in its delivery, which ultimately can affect the effectiveness of the value-added in the standardized program.