Tell Me Why, They Don’t Like Mondays?

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Management - Organizational Change (Community Sport)  
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The importance of hockey to the cultural, social and economic fabric of Canada has been well documented (i.e., Boyd, 1998; Dryden & MacGregor, 1989; Landsberg, 2000; Ovenden, 1999, Robinson, 1998). This importance is not only reflected at the highest level of competition (i.e. Olympics, World Championships, World Junior tournaments), but at the grassroots level as well (Mason & Duquette, 2008). Here, participation in youth hockey is experienced by over 600,000 players annually (Hockey Canada, 2017). For a number of these youth hockey participants, one facet of the hockey-playing experience is involvement in weekend “travel” tournaments. Within Ontario alone, the Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) and the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL) sanction hundreds of tournaments annually (Greater Toronto Hockey League [GTHL], 2017; Ontario Minor Hockey Association [OMHA], 2017). Here, the concept of a tournament is to match teams – often in a round-robin format – to compete against a prescribed set of similarly-skilled opponents; successful teams then move to subsequent rounds of competition to determine an eventual winner (Gupta, 2015; Larson & Johansson, 2014). To be clear, these competitions are ancillary to traditional league play and are useful drivers of sport tourism in local Canadian communities (Mason & Duquette, 2008); indeed, O’Reilly et al. (2015) pegged hockey’s impact – some of which is derived from youth tournaments – on sport tourism at $2.6 Billion.

Of interest, however, the format and delivery of these youth tournaments has been largely unchanged since inception. The traditional delivery model has a community sport organization (CSO) hosting tournament round-robin games beginning on a Friday and continuing through Saturday. Tournament participation on Sunday is typically reserved for elimination games, involving only the successful teams from Friday and Saturday competition. This format necessitates absence from school (players) and work (parents) however, for all tournament participants, even those that do not progress to play on Sunday. Absence from work and school to participate in an ancillary event contributes to the significant issue that absenteeism has become in Canada. Specifically, the issue of absenteeism is significant for Canadian employers costing the Canadian economy over $16 billion annually (Stewart, 2013). From an educational perspective, absenteeism limits students’ learning potential, both through teacher instruction and interaction with peers (Espstein & Sheldon, 2002). Further, absence affects other students’ learning experience and instructors’ delivery (Espstein & Sheldon, 2002). Therefore, considering the significance of the issue of absenteeism, the purpose of the current investigation was to understand the impact, in terms of unnecessary school/work days missed, because of traditional tournament scheduling. A simple solution, to run tournaments from Saturday through Monday, where only the successful round-robin teams play on this final day, thereby removing unnecessary school/work days missed, is offered.

We frame the current investigation using innovation theory; here, innovation has been defined as “any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption” (Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973, p. 10), such as switching tournament start/end days. Specifically, we consider the current study through the lens of “administrative innovations” (Damanpour, 1987) where changes in process(es) are the focus. Indeed, given the lack of attention directed to innovation and CSOs (Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012), and the specific call for sport organizations to be more innovative (Dart, 2004; Newall & Swan, 1995), the current research has great utility. To be sure, insights from the current context could advance knowledge regarding student absenteeism (Espstein & Sheldon, 2002), work/life balance (Cross, 2005; Rojek, 1997), time management and productivity (Macan, 1994), to name a few.

Results for over 150 youth hockey tournaments in 2017, Novice (7 years-old) to Midget (17 years-old), including playing categories ranging from MD to AAA, in Ontario, Canada were gathered and analyzed. Tournament data was captured from online tournament listings from each of the governing bodies of youth hockey in Ontario (under the governance of the Ontario Hockey Federation). Preliminary findings show that approximately 25% of teams entering tournaments do not progress to play on Sunday. This number translates into an actual “school/work-days-
unnecessarily-lost” figure above 80,000, in Ontario alone. Clearly, there are some logistical items to address (i.e., hotel bookings, ice availability), and by no means are we suggesting the cancellation of these valued community initiatives. However, recognizing the importance of history and tradition in sport delivery (Thiel & Mayer, 2009), Hoeber and Hoeber (2012) note that these qualities could serve as a deterrent for innovative thinking; CSOs need to be challenged against this complacency. The world has witnessed myriad disruptive innovations in recent history (i.e., Uber, Sabermetrics); community sport could benefit from similar thinking.