Trust, Communication, and Differing Acknowledgement of Competition: Analysis of Coopetition For Stakeholders in a Non-Profit Sport Program

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Collaboration among a variety of stakeholders is common in non-profit sport programs. These relationships can leverage resources better and increase overall capacity (Proulx, Hager, & Klein, 2014). However, the stakeholders also often compete for resources, such as grants, volunteers, space, marketing, and even participants (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2017), and in many cases, have uneven levels of reciprocity (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2018).

Coopetition is the simultaneous collaboration and competition between organizations or stakeholders. Organizations that engage in coopetition can create new value, decrease transaction cost, reduced risk in a joint venture and increased knowledge (Zindelin, 2004). In literature related to sport management, the focus has been on professional sport, where coopetition mechanisms have been found to increase firm value and provide more interest to consumers (Fulconis, Nollet, & Paché, 2018). The focus in sport non-profit has been much more on increasing collaborations, as these collaborations have proved useful for providing increased capacities or success (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014; Svensson, Hancock, & Hums, 2017; Jang, Valero, Kim, & Cramb, 2015). Wemmer, Emrich, & Koenigstorfer (2016) did find open coopetition increased organizational performance through knowledge sharing and open innovation. However, previous research into non-profits and coopetitive relationships indicate non-profits still remain hesitant to engage in actual coopetitive relationships (Proulx et al., 2014). Therefore, an examination of non-profit sport programs through the lens of coopetition addresses both aspects simultaneously and creates a better understanding of how competition and collaboration operate in a non-profit sport program. This also answers the calls for greater examination of non-profit sport through the lens of coopetition and from a network perspective (Babiak, Thibault, & Willem, 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Wemmer et al., 2016).

The researchers used social network analysis to analyze the coopetitive relationships within a non-profit sport program currently being created. The network was bounded by those identified as stakeholders in the non-profit sport program, this resulted in a broad range of business stakeholders, task force members, city officials, non-profit organizations, and individuals actively involved in the program’s creation. Direct questions related to collaboration and competition with other stakeholders were asked, as well as levels of trust and communication. Identifying goals from the program was also asked, as disparate goals could also impact future program success. This is part of a longitudinal study that will measure organizational success of this non-profit sport program over time.

The preliminary results indicate the diverse group of stakeholders have a disparate view of program’s goals, as well as levels of collaboration versus competition. Many stakeholders refused any acknowledgement of competitive elements in “helping the children,” even as other stakeholders fully acknowledge competition among the stakeholders, both within and external to the program itself. A full social network analysis will be conducted to examine network density, identify connectors and levels of trust, as well as levels of communication, to examine how coopetition is understood and how it relates to communication and trust, in a non-profit sport setting. Implications for sport managers will also be discussed.