Developing Leadership Character in Sport Organizations

Corey Crossan, Western University
Cassandra Ellis, Western University
Karen Danylchuk (Advisor), Western University

Management - Leadership (Other)
60-minute symposium, roundtable, or workshop

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Character is fundamental to effective leadership and decision-making, yet it is an overlooked area in organizations (Seijts, Gandz, Crossan, & Reno, 2018; Strum, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). Furthermore, consistent with Seijts et al. (2018), leadership is about the disposition to lead rather than a position to lead; therefore, leadership is applicable to all individuals within an organization. According to Seijts et al. (2018), “when we think about leadership we focus too much on what leaders do…and we don’t spend enough time on who leaders are – the character of leaders” (p. 65). Together, leadership character not only fosters well-being (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), but also sustained excellence for individuals and organizations (Sturm, Vera, & Crossan, 2017). Sport organizations are no exception, and therefore, the purpose of this workshop will be to focus on the development of leadership character in the context of sport management. Specifically, the aims of this workshop will be to define leadership character, discuss why developing and exercising leadership character is crucial to sport organizations, and help participants understand how they can develop leadership character and embed it into their organizational contexts.

Background: Character is a set of virtuous behaviors that have formed into a habit (Crossan, Byrne, Seijts, Reno, Monzani, & Gandz, 2017) and, contrary to popular belief, character can be developed (Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013). The Leadership Character Framework (Crossan et al., 2017), which forms the basis for this workshop, includes 11 character dimensions presented as behaviors in their virtuous state: judgment, transcendence, drive, collaboration, humanity, humility, integrity, temperance, justice, accountability and courage. A character dimension can become a vice when deficient or unsupported by the other character dimensions (Seijts, Gandz, Crossan & Reno, 2015). For example, drive unsupported by temperance risks revealing itself in its vice state, and may result in tunnel-vision thinking, and obsessive, dictatorial, and perfectionist behavior. While there is little research on how to activate, develop, and embed character in organizations, we speculate that character development may draw many parallels to physical development habits through exercise, that is, exercising character. Similar to the exercise science specificity principle that outlines the importance of exercising a specific body part that is intended to develop, requiring exercise to be intentional, focused, frequent, and consistent, character is predicted to have similar developmental protocols.

Workshop Format

We will begin the workshop by highlighting the common misconceptions of character and how leadership character can operate and benefit sport organizations to foster well-being and sustained excellence. Second, we will help the participants identify and understand what character looks like in practice through the use of various aids, demonstrations, and interactive exercises. Third, we will run three group exercises, focusing on the character dimensions of drive, humility, and courage, in order to assist the participants in understanding how character can be developed. To conclude the workshop, we will discuss how leadership character can be applied to the participants’ personal lives and embedded into their sport organizations.