

## LEADERSHIP THEORIES AND LARGE-SCALE SPORTING EVENTS

**Milena M. Parent**, University of Ottawa, Canada, milena.parent@uottawa.ca

**Benoit Séguin**, University of Ottawa, Canada

**Denise Olver**, University of Ottawa, Canada

Northouse (2007, p. 3) defined leadership as “a process whereby an individual – or group – influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.” The leadership literature has evolved from the trait approach (e.g., Stogdill, 1948), to the leadership style or behavioural approach (e.g., Hersey & Blanchard, 1984; House, 1971), to the transactional, transformational and charismatic leadership approaches (e.g., Bass & Avolio, 1990; Yukl, 1998). Yet, leadership research in sport management has been limited in scope, typically focusing on coaches, athletic directors, and boards of directors in universities and national sport organizations (e.g., Chelladurai & Carron, 1983; Chelladurai & Quek, 1995; Inglis, 1997). These studies have not focused on sporting events, they have been done without full attention to all the stakeholders (see Clarkson, 1995; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997 for more on stakeholder theory), which are invaluable to an organizing committee (OC) in its preparation and hosting of a given event, and these studies have typically not examined the theories associated with leadership in sporting events.

As such, this study seeks to take a first step in theorizing leadership by determining the most effective leadership style for managing large-scale sport events using stakeholder theory as the theoretical framework. This study considers both “traditional” and lesser-used leadership theories, thereby highlighting missing links between leadership theories and large-scale sporting events from a stakeholder’s perspective to explain why leadership is important for the success of large-scale sporting events. Knowledge gained from this study will be of interest to all involved in sporting events, including existing and future OCs, national and regional sport organizations, and policy makers at all government levels.

### METHODS

Case studies have been shown to be especially valuable for providing in-depth knowledge of complex events as they unfold over time, events over which the researchers have little or no control (Yin, 2003). In order to develop the case study, multiple sources of information were used (archival material and interviews) from all major stakeholders of the 2005 FINA (Fédération Internationale de Natation) World Aquatics Championships OC, where stakeholders were identified as OC and bid team members, the sport federations, the governments, the media, the delegations, and sponsors (Yin, 2003). This is a unique setting in that there were, in effect 2 OCs with 2 distinct leadership groups (see <http://www.geocities.com/mondiauxaquatiques2005/> for more information).

The archival material consisted: OC internal documents (e.g., meeting minutes, memos, letters, final reports), stakeholder documents (e.g., annual reports, newspaper articles), and commemorative material (e.g., commemorative books). Over 123 documents totalling more than 745 pages were analyzed. In turn, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted (12 by phone and 13 in person) with representatives of all stakeholder groups to understand the perspective of all stakeholders involved with the event.

All data collected were converted—if necessary—into electronic format for subsequent analysis. Interviews were professionally transcribed before analysis. The analysis was a combination of inductive content analysis and pattern matching in order to iterate and integrate between theory development and theory testing (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). The analysis was done with the help of the data analysis software ATLAS.ti.

### RESULTS

As expected, findings highlighted both charismatic and transformational aspects as being important for the leadership of large-scale sporting events (e.g., ability to motivate followers, creating an attractive vision to

follow, and fostering commitment and teamwork). However, neither theory fully reflected the view of the various stakeholders in terms of what the leadership of a large-scale sporting event should be. The theory which showcased the varied qualities was the multiple-linkage leadership theory (see Yukl, 1998), where leadership includes intervening variables such as task commitment, ability and role clarity, organization of the work, cooperation and mutual trust, resources and support, and external coordination.

## **DISCUSSION**

While the multiple-linkages leadership theory is not widely used in the literature, this study highlighted its usefulness in theorizing leadership for large-scale sporting events as the theory includes situational variables, which constrain managerial behaviour and moderate its effects. This leadership theory also takes into account motivation, human resource management systems and processes, task structure, and external coordination as key variables. This last variable is an essential feature for large-scale sporting events as it recognizes the importance of the OC's relationship with (and need of) the various stakeholders involved with the event. Thus, the multiple-linkages theory of leadership is a theory where the complexities of leading an OC of a large-scale sporting event are acknowledged.

The use of the multiple-linkages theory implies certain implications for managers and researchers. Notably, managers must evaluate the reasons for their and their leaders' involvement, and ensure involvement for "the right reasons." While intricate, researchers should examine the multiple-linkages theory in greater depth and in different settings.

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