

# PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER: BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN A MAJOR GAMES ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

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## INTRODUCTION

Capacity is a growing area of importance within the not-for-profit sector (Backer, 2001). The term capacity may be interpreted several different ways but for the purpose of this paper capacity is viewed as both the hard elements, such as finances and human resources, and the soft elements, such as understanding, within a voluntary organization (Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, 1999, p. 14). Recent research within non-profit sport links knowledge to organizational capacity. Marunchak (2006) found capacity can be enhanced when a sport organization has a 'brain-like' structure, which suggests learning and information play a prominent role in capacity. According to Ebrahim (2003) the ability to manage individual knowledge and knowledge transfer is essential for organizational capacity. Hence, research on knowledge transfer processes can provide insight into effective capacity building strategies for a nonprofit sport organization.

Based upon three areas of literature, a conceptual framework for intra-organizational knowledge transfer was developed to guide this inquiry. First, the '4I framework' developed by Bontis, Crossman and Hulland (2002) addresses the "social and psychological processes: intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing" (p. 440) by linking the individual, group, and organizational learning processes. Second, the '4 Nodes of Conversion' as explained by Nonaka (2002) include socialization, combination, internalization, and finally externalization. These four different nodes encompass aspects of both individual and group knowledge, and highlight some of the different methods that can be employed to transfer knowledge. The third area of literature deals with the 'knowledge spiral', which applies the '4 Nodes of Conversion' across the individual, group, and organization levels. The spiral explains how knowledge transfer builds speed as it moves up organizational levels, and as a result, enhances capacity (Nonaka, 2002).

When attempting to implement the transfer of knowledge process as outlined in this conceptual framework it is important that organizations focus upon individuals as well as the organization as a whole. Chourides, Longbottom and Murphy (2003) argue knowledge management strategies must consider individual "... values, skills and abilities" (p. 35), and concurrently emphasize learning with personnel "... selection and recruitment" (p. 37). In addition, Carlile (2004) emphasizes the importance of a 'common knowledge' and identify the challenge of creating an adequate level of common knowledge as people, resources and tasks change within an organization (p. 556).

Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to analyze the knowledge transfer process within a non-profit sport organization. Two guiding questions drove the research –how do individuals influence the knowledge transfer within the host society, and in turn, how does the knowledge transfer impact capacity within the host society? The 2007 Canada Winter Games Host Society (CWGHS) provided the case in which this relationship was investigated. A CWGHS provides a rich context in which to examine capacity and knowledge because, first, the host society involves a very large personnel base (approximately 5,000 volunteers and staff), and second, the short life-span of the organization makes learning an intense and critical aspect of successful event staging.

## METHODS

Data collection involved the triangulation of interviews, direct observations and document analysis. Purposeful and intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) were utilized in order to access informed volunteers

and staff. A total of 28 (n=28) interviews were conducted with senior and middle management planning volunteers and staff during the 2007 Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada. Specifically, 19 middle management volunteers, five executive volunteers, and four senior staff were interviewed in order to capture knowledge management and capacity information across all divisions within the host society. Interviews ranged from 20-30 minute (snapshot) and 45-60 minutes (in-depth). Direct observations were conducted during the two-week event and included informal (n=4) and formal (n=15) forums (Turner, 2002). Finally, documents were gathered from the host society intranet such as minutes, reports, project plans, and charters.

All interviews, direct observations and field notes were transcribed verbatim. An iterative analysis approach was utilized which accounted for the use of both a priori and emergent themes (Huberman & Miles, 1994). As the data analysis progressed interpretive coding was added. Transcripts were uploaded into the Atlas.ti software data management program. Separate cases were created for each participant, levels of participant (executive vs. volunteer), methods of data collection (interviews, observations, document analysis), as well as attributes (gender, age) and sets (timelines). Reports, queries, and models were generated from Atlas.ti to support findings.

## **RESULTS**

Findings indicate that timing of personnel (both volunteers and staff) recruitment was a critical factor for the successful transfer of knowledge within the Host Society. The human resource timing components included the hiring of executive and middle management staff and volunteers. For example, one staff member of the host society mentioned he was hired 18 months prior to the Games and unfortunately missed a critical meeting in which a significant amount of knowledge was transferred.

## **DISCUSSION**

Chu and Lam (2005) state that one of the main failures in the transfer of knowledge process arises from a lack of knowledge sharing. This often occurs when an individual joins an organization after a 'circle of trust' has been formed leading to information hoarding. Furthermore, in a Games Organizing Committee the timing of the transfer of knowledge process is crucial to successful event implementation. When an individual is replaced the trust has to be rebuilt which takes time – a scarce resource within a temporary organization. In addition, the internal dependencies among individuals across divisions may not be re-established in sufficient time to transfer the necessary knowledge and enhance the capacity of the organization. Maintaining personnel consistencies is critical (Donahue, Selden, and Ingraham, 2000) as the time that it takes to reset the transfer of knowledge process can significantly impede the capacity of the organization.

Findings also support the importance of both hard (human resources) and soft (knowledge) elements in generating capacity within a nonprofit organization. Major Games host societies should develop explicit strategies for knowledge transfer within the organization in order to enhance capacity (Appleyard, 2002). Host societies are temporary in nature and acquiring, securing and placing skilled personnel is a critical factor for Games preparation. A great deal of capacity is lost when host committees fail to optimize organizational knowledge through unnecessary duplication, delays and reinvention. Organizing committee volunteers and staff must establish knowledge management processes, such as transfer, across internal divisions and between itself and other Games host societies.

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