

Managers' Discourses Through The Evolution And Development Of The Brazilian School Games.

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Background and purpose

The structure of sport programs, which give support to the development of athletes, is a relevant theme for understanding the process of sport development in most countries. In Brazil, this issue has been addressed largely by the enactment of public policies that have spawn a number of sport initiatives. Most notably is the Brazilian School Games (BSG), which is an annual national sport festival that involves the participation of children and adolescents who compete in a number of sport disciplines. The BSG have been organized since 1969 under the sponsor and patronage of different government agencies as well as the Brazilian Olympic Committee.

Managers from different levels of hierarchy in charge of planning, organizing and evaluating the BSG not only play critical roles in implementing strategies to achieve the Games' goal but also provide direction and leadership throughout the entire decision-making process (Gentry, Harris, Baker, & Brittain Leslie, 2008; Mintzberg, 1990). Drawn from Mintzberg's (1990) study on the roles of managers, this study reviews key functions and roles played by Brazilian managers involved in the BSG from 1969 to 2010; specifically this study examines managers' views, discourses, and beliefs regarding the evolution and development of these games.

Methodology

This study used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to examine managers' involvement with the BSG. IPA is a form of qualitative research that aims to interpret; give voice and meaning to a phenomenon experienced by individuals directly involved with the issue under study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). According to Arantes et al. (2012) the BSG can be subdivided into four phases directly linked to the country's political events and governments that ruled from 1969 to 2010 (1969 to 1984; 1985 to 1989; 1990 to 2004; and 2005 to 2010). Considering that each of the four phases of the BSG represented a unique political and ideological time frame in the country's history, it is expected that managers involved with the BSG during each of these phases could have developed unique perspectives of the meaning, relevance and priorities these games had for Brazil. In this study, eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with key decision makers who were involved with the BSG, including one Sport Minister, three National Sport Secretaries, and four General Coordinators of the School Games. Considering that IPA is a form of qualitative methodology that aims for probing as opposed to generalizability, is that sample size is small (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 20005). Moreover, four pre-determined thematic categories guided the interviews, including (a) structuring principles that guided the Games, (b) the role of agents, (c) financing, and (d) future perspectives of the Games.

Results and discussion

Analysis of data included content analysis with an emphasis on themes related to the role of the decision-making manager (Mintzberg, 1990). Analysis and interpretation of data revealed that one structuring principle that guided the Games during the first phase was the need to use the Games for talent selection and identification of athletes. However, managers involved in the third phase noted that during that time there was a big push to not submit the BSG to the demands of high performance sport. These findings reveal that managers exercised their informational and decision-making roles, acting as liaisons with other agencies and acting as entrepreneurs in their attempt to adapt to new demands from the environment. Regarding the *role of agents*, managers from the second phase noted the conflict of ownership between the Ministry of Sport and the Ministry of Education concerning the responsibility of the Games. In terms of *financing*, managers from the four phases noted that public resources from the Ministry's budget, state enterprises, and federal laws have all contributed to fund these Games. In terms of the *future perspectives* of the Games, managers from the first and third phases noted that the governance of the Games should rest in the Ministries of Sports and Education, leaving the role of the Brazilian Olympic Committee as an organizer or producer of the Games. Thus, expansion and growth of the BSG was seen as directly linked to the capacity of the public sector to engage other agencies (public and private) and supply the means to do

so. Finally, data collected from the semi-structured interviews was related with each of the managerial roles and functions proposed by Mintzberg and managerial implications were drawn.

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