Intra-Organizational Factors Associated With Innovation In Sport For Development And Peace

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Aim of abstract

Nonprofit organizations are required to become more innovative in order to survive within today's resource scarce environments. This includes those engaged in the use of sport for social change, or what is known as Sport for Development and Peace (SDP). The purpose of this study was to explore internal factors associated with innovation in SDP through a qualitative study of a global sample of SDP stakeholders. Findings from this study help address a gap in the sport management literature regarding innovation in the nonprofit sport context (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, & Zintz, 2016). The identified internal factors of organizational innovation can also funders and policymakers develop meaningful capacity-building initiatives and policies that better enable practitioners to develop and sustain creative solutions for contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Theoretical background

For the purpose of this study, innovation is defined as the implementation of new or alternative ways of addressing a problem to promote social change (Shier & Handy, 2016). This includes program, process, and socially transformative innovations. Previous research identified leadership, organizational culture, board involvement, internal power structures, organizational design, financial resources, staff engagement and development, as well as internal systems and processes as factors that may influence innovation. However, findings remain relatively inconclusive in terms of how these elements enable or inhibit innovative behavior. Sport management researchers have begun to explore innovation among sport clubs and sport federations (Hoeber, Doherty, Hoeber, & Wolfe, 2015; Winand et al., 2016). Yet, findings from these studies may not necessarily apply to SDP organizations operating in diverse contexts across low-, middle-, and high-income countries (Schulenkorf, 2017).

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A qualitative research design was used to address the purpose of this study. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted with 53 SDP leaders representing organizations from across all six continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania, and South America). Participants were identified through purposive sampling to ensure a broad representative of the different geographical locations and program foci found in the diverse SDP field. Sample organizations were award-winning entities recognized as innovators by their work in SDP. These innovations included program, process, and/or socially transformative innovations (Shier & Handy, 2016). Conversations were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were independently coded by the authors. Detailed qualitative coding techniques were used to inductively code the qualitative data (Crotty, 1998), within broader a priori categories from existing literature on innovation. First, the researchers employed initial coding strategies to identify emergent concepts. Second, the researchers compared their data interpretations before completing a more focused and second-cycle coding where emergent conceptual themes and relationships were identified. Publically available documents and information were further reviewed to strengthen the quality of findings through triangulation across data sources.

Results, discussion and implications

Our qualitative study indicates the critical role of five internal factors for organizational innovation in SDP. These themes emerged across geographical locations and program foci, with only minor nuances. This may be due to the sampling focused on only award-winning organizations and those recognized as innovators by their SDP peers. First, many participants discussed an internal atmosphere built around shared learning as imperative for organizational innovation. Second, executive leaders of innovative SDP organizations appear to share an entrepreneurial-orientation or mind-set, which enables increased organizational innovation. These individuals are characterized by a high-level of open-mindedness with a key focus on seeing opportunities and solutions. In many cases, the founder's vision and passion for the organization to drive change had shaped the culture of the entire organization. Third, staffing emerged as critical for promoting innovation through 'functional' or healthy conflict within an organization by drawing on diverse skillsets and backgrounds. Fourth, organizational infrastructure including organizational structure and processes also emerged as critical factors for organizational innovation in SDP. This included human-centered design

thinking to maintain a clear focus on program participants and decentralized management built around shared accountability. Last, unrestricted funding and self-generated revenues are also associated with increased innovation. Nuances across locations and program foci will also be discussed.

Findings from this study highlight the nuances of innovation in SDP and contribute to both the sport management and broader nonprofit management literatures. It is also important to recognize the emergence of aspects related to both social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship among sample SDP organizations. This allows for future empirical work to build on our findings. Doing so will help develop a more nuanced understanding of organizational innovation among SDP entities, which operate within complex political, social, and economic environments.

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