



# Management training and national sport organization managers: Examining the impact of training on individual and organizational performances

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## ABSTRACT

Within sport, a tremendous amount of effort is committed to the on-the-field performance of athletes and coaches, neglecting the off-the-field performance and development of sport managers. This study examines the impact of human resource training on the performance of five Canadian national sport organizations (NSO) and their managers ( $N=22$ ). Data were collected on three outcome variables (learning, individual performance, organizational performance) and three mediating variables (motivation to transfer, training design, organizational climate) at three time measures (pretraining, post-training<sup>1</sup>, post-training<sup>2</sup>). Results indicate that training improves the learning and individual performance of sport managers, as well as the organizational performance of NSOs. Varying relationships were found at each of the three time measures, demonstrating that a progression to training-related performance change exists. Implications and future research directions are discussed and highlighted the need for on-going training opportunities for Canadian sport managers.

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past four decades, the Canadian national sport organization (NSO) workforce has become increasingly professionalized due to various federal government initiatives (Kikulis, Slack, & Hinings, 1995; Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1991). Initial efforts to overhaul the Canadian amateur sport system in the 1970s involved targeted financial support to replace volunteers with paid staff in many national sport organizations (Macintosh, Bedeck, & Franks, 1988). However, this early augmentation to change the NSO workforce was not matched with continuous professional development (PD) strategies and as a result, the increase in funding acted simply as an initial as opposed to ongoing professionalization effort (Koegh, 1997). Currently, the imbalance between on-the-field and off-the-field performances means the need for professional development strategies, such as training, for the Canadian NSO workforce remains unmet.

The Canadian NSO sector is comprised of 56 organizations with varying degrees of organizational complexity. NSOs act as a liaison among athletes, provincial and community sport organizations and the federal government, and as a result, serve an integral role in the Canadian amateur sport system. Although the number and qualifications of the staff within each NSO vary according to the membership and national exposure of the sport, each NSO must manage many responsibilities related to domestic and international sport. These areas include but are not limited to managing national teams, developing and

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delivering community-level sport programs, hosting provincial, national, and international competitions and championships, and acquiring financial support from public and corporate funders (Senior Leaders Forum, 2008). The diversity of NSO responsibilities demonstrates a high need for professional skills and capabilities within the NSO workforce.

The need for PD within the NSO sector is reinforced through the impact of three government sport policies and programs, the *Canadian Sport Policy* (CSP), the *Sport Funding and Accountability Framework* (SFAF), and *Own the Podium* (OTP). The *Canadian Sport Policy* (CSP), instituted by the federal government in 2002, outlines four overall goals – enhanced participation, enhanced excellence, enhanced capacity, and enhanced interaction. Although each goal comprises the four pillars of the policy, in reality, ‘enhanced excellence’ is overwhelmingly dominant in the evaluation of organizational performance, and as such plays an integral role in determining the priorities of each NSO (Havaris & Danylchuk, 2007; Sport Canada, 2005a). The SFAF is a tool used to determine which national-level sport organizations are eligible for annual federal government funding (Sport Canada, 2005a). The SFAF includes primarily competition criteria in order to determine funding eligibility and places far less importance upon organizational criteria (Sport Canada, 2005b). Lastly, OTP is a national initiative designed to ensure Canadian athletes excel on the Olympic and Paralympic stages. In 2009, OTP controlled the allocation of over \$22 million in public funding to winter sports in Canada (VANOC, 2009). The goal of OTP was to reach the top of the overall country medal count in the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and top three in the 2010 Paralympic Winter Games (VANOC, 2009). The OTP criteria place extreme pressure on Canadian national sport organizations to focus on athletic output and podium results.

In combination, the CSP, SFAF, and OTP create a perpetual cycle that de-emphasizes the off-the-field performance of managers and emphasizes the on-the-field performance of athletes and coaches. Consequently, the importance of the managerial aspects of NSOs is undermined. Nevertheless, NSO managers are in a state of readiness where they are eager to develop their competencies and seek opportunities to improve their own, and their NSO's effectiveness (Canadian Sport Centres, 2010; D. Bell-Laroche,<sup>1</sup> personal communication, 2010; Senior Leaders Forum, 2008). On and off the field goals must coexist if the Canadian sport system is to be successful, and according to Stuart (2009), NSOs:

Running Canada's high performance sport systems are not provided with an appropriate framework for dynamic organizational capacity development, designed to raise overall administrative skill and ability levels to consistently be the best in the world, the strong possibility exists that when Canadian high performance athletes compete on international and world stages their preparations will not be as complete as they could and should be (p. 1).

Consequently, it is critical to develop ways in which the managerial practices of NSO leaders are recognized. This will only be accomplished if efforts to train and develop the NSO workforce are clearly linked to improvements in NSO performance.

Training and development of managers are critical aspects of strategic human resource management (HRM) (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008). Unfortunately, within the context of sport organizations, HRM training practices have had little practical application and further, minimal support for training and the facilitation of employee development exist within sport organizations in general (Doherty, 1998). NSO managers assume tremendous responsibility and must successfully manage a broad range of areas (Senior Leaders Forum, 2008). Sport leaders require continual training programs in order to effectively administer their respective sport, and therefore it is fair to argue that NSO performance is highly dependent upon the ongoing improvement of the workforce.

The neglect of training practices in Canadian NSOs and the lack of research surrounding training and its evaluation in sport organizations inspired this study. Based on training evaluation research and the growing body of literature surrounding the development of a theory of training transfer, the purpose of this study was twofold. First, this study examined NSO leaders who took part in a training program in order to understand how training influences individual performance and the overall performance of NSOs. Second, this study aimed to contribute to the theory of training transfer by empirically examining how a combination of three intervening factors influence the transfer of training. As such, the following research questions were proposed: (1) Does training influence the individual performance of Canadian NSO leaders and the organizational performance of their relevant national sport organization? and (2) do mediating factors (motivation to transfer, training design, and organizational climate) influence the impact of training on the individual performance of Canadian NSO leaders?

## 2. The theory of training transfer

The training transfer literature demonstrates an evolution of conceptual and empirical research during the past five decades. This section of the paper provides a brief summary of the development of training transfer theoretical work. The components of training transfer are described according to three training outcomes – the primary outcome of learning, the secondary outcome of individual performance, and the tertiary outcome of organizational performance. In addition, three mediating factors – motivation to transfer, training design, and organizational climate – are highlighted.

During the past 40 years, transfer of training research has expanded to include the discussion and evaluation of the relationships between the constructs involved in training evaluation. Kirkpatrick (1959) created the first model of training evaluation that illustrated the causal relationships between the variables. The model included four levels of analysis – reaction, learning, behaviour, results – for determining the effectiveness of a training program. The four levels consisted of

<sup>1</sup> Bell-Laroche is the co-creator and facilitator of the Risk Management Workshop and has been involved with the program for over 3 years.

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