



Evaluation of a cross-sector community initiative partnership: Delivering a local sport program



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ABSTRACT

Corporate community initiatives (CCI) are often established via cross-sector partnerships with nonprofit agencies to address critical social problems. While there is a growing body of literature exploring the effectiveness and social impact of these partnerships, there is a limited evaluative research on the implementation and execution processes of CCIs. In this paper, we examined the implementation and operational processes in the delivery of a professional sport organization's CCI initiative using program theory evaluation. The findings showed discrepancies between the associate organization and the implementers regarding understanding and fulfilling responsibilities with performing certain aspects (maintaining accurate records and program marketing) of the service delivery protocol. Despite program stakeholders being satisfied overall with the program delivery, contradictions between program stakeholders' satisfaction in the quality of program delivery was found in critical components (marketing and communications) of the service delivery. We conclude that ongoing evaluations are necessary to pinpoint the catalyst of the discrepancies along with all partners valuing process evaluation in addition to outcome evaluation.

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1. Introduction

Organizations that strategically engage in corporate community initiatives (CCI) to address a social problem often utilize cross-sector partnerships with non-profit agencies to implement their initiatives (Babiak, 2009; Seitanidi & Ryan, 2007). For example, in the professional sport context, several Major League Baseball (MLB) teams have partnered with non-profit organizations (e.g., Boys and Girls Clubs and local Parks and Recreation Departments) to assist in implementing their Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities (RBI) initiative, which aims to increase baseball and softball participation and teach life skills to underserved youth (Major League Baseball, 2012). Implementing these types of CCI partnerships however can be challenging due to the range of activities in program delivery and differences in power between the partners (Loza, 2004; Muthuri, 2008; Nijhof, de Bruijn, & Honders, 2008; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009) as well as different sector norms, practices, and expectations. Partners are required to perform their

due diligence to ensure that each aspect of program implementation is planned and assessed appropriately. These activities may include developing a partnership agreement, providing sufficient human resources, ensuring sufficient delivery and communication structures, allocating sufficient resources, and evaluating both initiative outcomes and implementation processes.

Evaluating the implementation and management of the collaborative processes is critical to meeting CCI partnership needs and to ensure that the beneficiaries of the programs are being effectively served (McCann, 1983; Seitanidi & Crane, 2009; Zappala & Arli, 2010). Evaluation of these processes is an aspect that is often overlooked in both practice and in the literature (Aldama, Amar, & Trostianki, 2009; Burke & Logsdon, 1996; Donaldson & Gooler, 2003; Gyves & O'Higgins, 2008; Margolis & Walsh, 2003).

Program theory evaluation (Chen, 2005) is one framework that is helpful in determining the quality of implementation structures and operations (Zappala & Arli, 2010) between partners. Theory-driven evaluation equips program implementers and managers with the understanding of different implementation processes, gauging the extent processes were implemented as intended, and assists in identifying suitable actions to address delivery difficulties (Chen, 2005; Donaldson & Gooler, 2003). Conducting regular

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assessments of implementation and management processes is important to ascertain the extent the program is strategically leveraging the respective partners' resources, to ensure the program is operating as planned, or determining if the program plan requires adjustments (Chen, 2005), as well as allowing for the continued development and improvement of the partnership (James, 1999).

This paper reports findings from the second phase of an evaluation that assessed the implementation processes in the delivery of a professional sport organization's CCI (i.e., RBI). This particular RBI program was in the mature implementation stage as it had been routinely carried out for over 10 years. The professional team's President invited the lead author to evaluate the quality of implementation and to determine areas requiring improvement. In phase one, we used Chen's (2005) program theory evaluation to systematically assess the congruency between the intended implementation of the program plan and the actual program implementation. As depicted in Fig. 1, the quality and effectiveness of the implementing organizations (i.e., MLB team's Community Fund (the team's charitable arm) and Parks and Recreation centers), implementers (i.e., program staff), partnership components (e.g., structures, partnership plans) ecological context (e.g., parents, coaches, volunteers, transportation), and service delivery protocols (e.g., marketing and branding, communication, and registration of target population) were assessed.

The first phase findings showed issues in two main areas of program implementation and management: (1) a lack of a detailed partnership agreement and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the respective partners in fulfilling the agreement; and (2) a failure to effectively carry out delivery protocols including appropriate marketing, branding, communication, and registration activities (Authors, in press). Recommendations included first revising the partnership plan and delineating each partners' expectations regarding their roles and responsibilities. Our second set of recommendations included improvements in service delivery protocols, that is, program marketing and branding, appropriately completing and communicating program schedules, and training and assigning staff to assist with suitably

completing participant registration and record keeping. This second phase evaluation aimed to assess stakeholder perceptions of program improvements in partnership planning and service delivery protocols. Our paper builds on Donaldson and Gooler's (2003) call for explicit examples of program theory evaluation and sharing practical insights in performing evaluations in particular contexts. Below, we discuss the particular type of cross-sector community initiative under consideration and frame our investigation using program evaluation theory. We then describe the methods and present our key findings.

2. Literature review and program theory

2.1. Cross sector community oriented initiatives in sport

Sport is increasingly being used as a vehicle for social development and community involvement (Bailey, 2005; Burnett, 2006; Coalter, 2005; Iso-Ahola, 1996; Matsudo, Matsudo, Andrade, Araujo, & Pratt, 2006). Increasingly, organizations and businesses from different sectors (i.e., public, nonprofit and private) are partnering to design and deliver programs to address pressing social issues such as illiteracy, obesity and other health problems, diversity and equality, and the environment. Each partner brings different skills, resources, expertise and knowledge to the partnership with goals ranging from enhancing the community in which the businesses operate to building stakeholder loyalty, to improving image and identity, to improving the financial position of the organization.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a vehicle for organizations to be engaged in the community has become institutionalized in North American professional sport (Babiak & Wolfe, 2009). Although the question of whether or not to engage in CSR has already been answered for many sport organizations, the strategic questions of which projects to engage in as well as how those projects should be managed are critical ones facing sport managers. Within organizations, the management of CSR tends to be organized according to three modes – outsourcing, internally through projects, or via collaborations (Husted, 2003). Sport

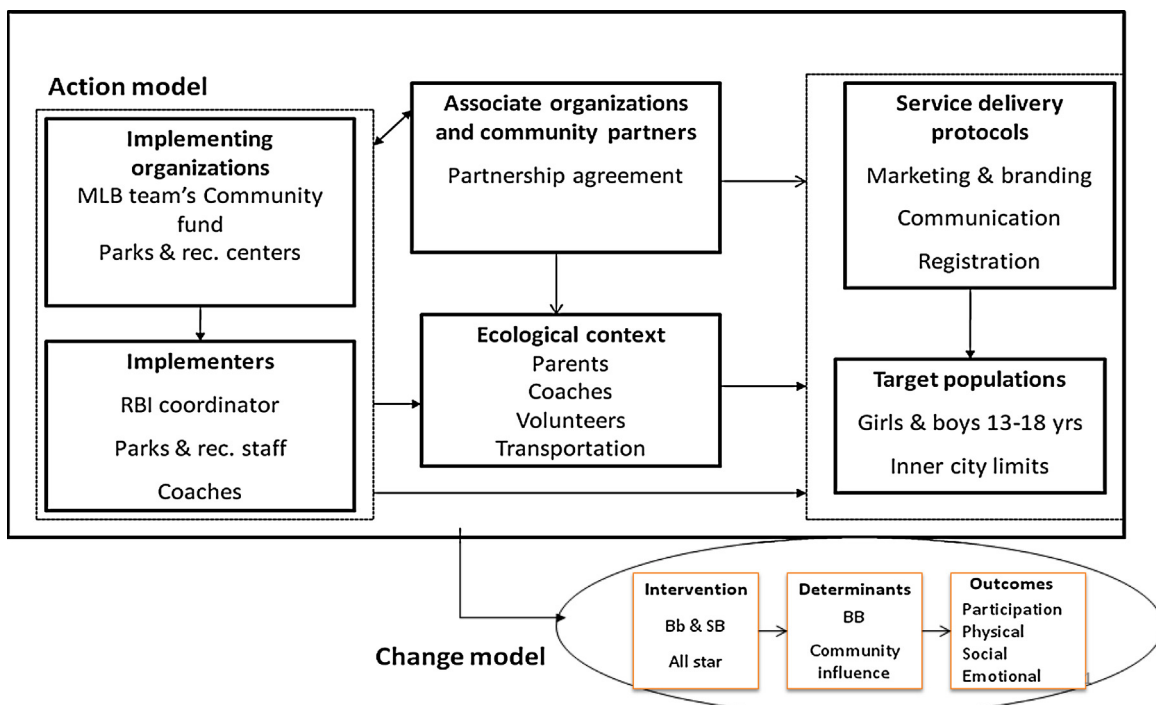


Fig. 1. Evaluation program theory (Chen, 2005, p. 29).

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