ENHANCEMENT OF ORGANISATIONAL CAPABILITIES FOR SUCCESSFUL SERVICE DELIVERY OF MASS SPORTS PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of investment by governments in Mass Sports Programs depends on the capability of government departments to service the planning, design and delivery of such programs. O*rganisation capability* is the ability of organisations to utilise their resources to produce successful programs. This study determined the capabilities required in departments delivering mass sports programs and how they could be enhanced. This exploratory study used an appreciative interview technique to interview thirteen senior managers of the Malaysian Government's Ministry and department responsible for mass sports programs. The results of the   analysis using NVIVO identified three themes which described organisation capabilities. The capabilities could be enhanced by improving *Policy and Strategies Implementation*, *Strengthening Human Resources* and *Improving Documentation.*

Keywords Organisational Effectiveness, Organisational Capabilities, Governance, Public Organisation

One of the important developments in the public sports domain internationally has been the Sport for All, or Mass Sports movement (Hylton & Totten 2008). The Mass Sports concept is about providing equal opportunity for every individual in a community to participate in sport, physical activity and recreational activities on their own choice (Hartmann-Tews 1999; Hylton & Totten 2008; Thoma & Chalip 1996). This concept sees community participation in sports, physical activity and recreation as interventions to foster community development and community well-being (Diener & Seligman 2004; Guildford Borough Council 2003; Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia 1988; Sparling et al. 2000; Vail 2007). From this perspective, mass sports programs are accepted as a mechanism to increase people participation in physical activity that are not solely focused on sport excellence.

Like other developed countries such as England, Canada, Finland and Germany (Bergsgard et al. 2007; Hartmann-Tews 1999; Stahl et al. 2002; Thoma & Chalip 1996), Malaysia also established a delivery system for implementing sport policy. Despite some research into the evaluation of sporting program outcomes, there appears to be a gap in the literature about the organisational capabilities required to strategically plan and manage such programs. This study fills this gap by answering the research question: How can the capabilities of public sports organisations be enhanced to achieve successful mass sports program delivery?

Organisational Capabilities

There is a lack of agreement on the exact definition of organisational capabilities (Grant 2005; O'Regon & Ghobadian 2004; Spanos & Prastacos 2004). However, organisational capabilities are well documented, especially in the business environment where resources and capabilities are the determinant for competitive advantage, strategic planning and firm performance (Grant 2005; O'Regon & Ghobadian 2004; Ray, Barney & Muhanna 2004; Wernerfelt 1984). Here, the idea that organisational resources and capabilities, focused on the internal environment of an organisation, have a significant impact in improving the organisational performance is well justified. Carpenter and Sanders (2009) identified three classes of capabilities: dynamic capabilities are the capabilities needed to fit the organisation's development; distinctive capabilities are the organisation's unique capabilities that make the organisation different from other organisations; core capabilities, are necessary to run its main operation. In the organisational effectiveness framework, Dressler (2004) has referred to those three capabilities as strategic capabilities - one important dimension for achieving organisational effectiveness. Dressler (p.53) explained that strategic capabilities: should be aligned with purpose, mission and values, reflect the core competencies that are available within the organisation, have a long-term effect and difficult to copy, and be a base for a competitive advantage. Further understanding on organisational capabilities can be learned from Gill and Delaheye's work (2004). They modelled organisational capabilities based on three main domains: the strategic intent (based on the Resource Based Theory of the Firm); organisational structures (represents the traditional human resource strategies and processes; and individual knowledge (related to individual difference attributes in knowledge, skill, and attitude). Another example comes from Winter (2003, p. 277) who explained that organisational capabilities were developed based on organisational routine that guided by the management decision. He further explained that organisational capabilities are multidimensional and dynamic, and they develop through continuous organisational learning processes influenced by the organisational environments. In addition, Garratt (2000) refers to organisational capabilities as the 'ability to make things happen in the way intended by directors and senior managers, and with the

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active co-operation of employees'. According to Garratt (p. 103-104), to increase performance, an organisation has to develop capabilities that focus on both internal and external needs.

Based on a distillation of the various views on organisational capabilities the following is the succinct and useful definition used in the present study: **The term organisational capabilities in the present study refers to the ability of public sports organisations to utilise their resources for producing successful services in line with their organisational mission and targeted goals.**

Various approaches for analysing organisational capabilities have found that organisational resources tangible (financial and physical), intangible (technology, reputation and culture), and human (skills, capacity for communication and collaboration, and motivation) are an important element in analysing organisational capabilities. Based on Grant (2005), a value chain analysis approach is utilised in the present study because the focus is on the delivery process of an organisational activities or services which involve the transformation of organisational inputs to outputs. Here, the organisational capabilities factors are attributes of the organisational process of program execution, that is, the way in which the mass sports programs are planned, developed, managed and carried out.

Organisational Capabilities of the Public Sports Organisations

Existing literature on organisational capabilities, like Gill and Delahaye (2004), O'Regon and Ghobadian (2004) and others, is largely confined to private companies and profit-making organisations. Limited research has been found on the organisational capabilities for public sports organisations and even less attention has been paid to the relationships between how public sports organisations have utilised their resources to achieve successful outcomes of public participation. This research aims to fill this gap.

Although all three resource dimensions, people, strategy and processes, are associated with organisational effectiveness in public organisation settings (Rainey 2003), public sports organisations mostly rely on their people to achieve success (Garratt 2000; Watt 1998). Along the lines of Watt (1998), Stier (1999, p. 245) in his book *Managing Sport, Fitness, and Recreation Programs: Concepts*

and Practices, also noted that 'the success of individual programs or activities is also dependent on the individuals who have responsibility for implementing the programs and carrying out the activities associated with such programs'. Here, Stier suggested that every sports manager has to have high motivation to perform his or her tasks, practise good leadership skills and be competent in 'communication, decision-making, evaluating, budgeting, directing, staffing, planning, organising, problem-solving, prioritizing, coordinating, reporting, recording, facilitating...' (Stier 1999, p. 53). Another study (Doyle,2009) of the use of human resources designed to enhance public participation in physical activity found that the service provider: needs to be able to integrate their effort with other relevant agencies for promoting an active life style and encouraging the community to get involved in physical activities; has to have an ability to coordinate and collaborate with other agencies at national, state and local level; make more resources, including human resources, available for performing services; develop and enhance delivery systems; has to have an ability to advocate, to undertake relevant research, to conduct promotion and publicity continuously; and has to enhance a suitable environment to suit the community to organise physical activity including providing more infrastructures and facilities.

Interesting lessons can also be drawn from research organised by Lewis, Lock and Sexton (2009), who studied the contributions of capability and efficiency to effectiveness for Major League Baseball teams from 1901 through 2002. Even though they measured performance based on the team's winning percentage, they emphasised that 'to be effective, organisations need capabilities relevant to their missions and they must manage those capabilities efficiently' (Lewis, Lock & Sexton 2009, p. 731). They concluded that in the sports domain, capability is a more important contributor to effectiveness compared to efficiency.

Governance

Governance is about how organisations are directed and controlled. Every process and activity in an organisation involves decision making. Decision making in a sports domain has to take into account social, legal, economic, ethical, political and education' issues (Hums & MacLean 2009, p. 36). A

combination of good decision making and planning is crucial for good strategic management and helps the organisation to drive its roles and function towards its targeted goals (Hums & MacLean 2009). Hums and MacLean's point of view supports Turner and Keegan (1999, p. 302) who found in their study that '...decentralization of decision-making on operational issues, with empowering governance...' is practiced by successful project-based organisations. In this situation, good governance is needed to make sure the roles and functions of an organisation are compliant with its strategy and in line with the organisational policy. Therefore, the organisational capabilities of public sports organisations should include governance. In addition, Klakegg and Haavaldsen (2011) investigated governance functions in supporting decision making, planning and execution of the major public project in Norway. Their finding supports Hums and MacLean (2009) that information and good documentation are important for establishing good governance. Good documentation introduces and establishes authorities, roles and functions that provide a baseline for decision making.

In summary, the previous research suggests that in an effective sports organisation mission, strategy and capabilities must be aligned, and that the capabilities include high levels of human resource skills and good decision making.

The aim of this research is to improve capability in Malaysian government sports organisations. This paper addresses the research question: "How can the capabilities of public sports organisations in Malaysia be enhanced to achieve successful mass sports program delivery?"

METHOD

This was an exploratory case study involving interviews with a selected sample of 13 respondents attached to the public sports organisations of Malaysia. All respondents were selected because they were the key internal stakeholders of the public sports organisations: two Executives and four Senior Directors from the public sports organisation at the federal level; and seven Senior Directors from the state level. The respondents were interviewed for approximately 90 minutes. All respondents, except one from the Executive group, worked with their organisation for more than 20 years. In order to protect the identity of respondents, pseudo names have been used throughout this study. Information

was gathered using semi-structured interviews and the application of an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach. An AI approach was chosen because it is a culturally sensitive approach which provides depth of understanding about the subject of the study (Bryman & Bell 2007; Patton 2002; Yaeger, Sorensen Jr & Bengtsson 2005). Here, respondents have an opportunity to share their views that focus on the positive aspects of human experiences and not simply on finding faults or gaps (Catsambas & Webb 2003). As Catsambas and Webb considered this approach as a community development tool that is more about discovering and revealing; thus, this approach was appropriate for this study. This study used thematic analysis to interpret meaning and discuss the results. The main aim of the analysis was to examine the common elements and then focus on key themes that lead to organizational capabilities enhancement for successful service delivery of mass sports programs. All interviews were then transcribed and reviewed for accuracy and content. Each transcript was analysed to identify common themes and to code it appropriately. These raw data themes consisted of quotes or paraphrased quotes that captured the major idea conveyed by the respondents. Nvivo 8 was used to assist with the analysis. Here, an inductive coding approach was utilized because themes were developed from the raw data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). Sometimes, the same lines of text from the same transcription have more than one code attached to them. In this process, 'emerging themes become the categories for analysis' (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006, p. 4). As suggested by Gratton and Jones (2004, p. 220), this study employed the following steps for coding the interviews:

1. The data was carefully read, all statements relating to the research questions are identified, and each is assigned a code, or category. These codes were noted, and each relevant statement organised under its appropriate code.

2. Using the codes developed in stage 1, the researcher reread the qualitative data, and searched for statements that fitted into any of the categories.

3. Once the first two stages of coding were completed, the researcher looked for patterns and explanation in the codes.

4. The fourth stage was that of selective coding. This involved reading through the raw data for cases that illustrate the analysis, or explain the concepts. The researcher also looked for data that was contradictory, as well as confirmatory.

The themes that emerged from the interviews were ranked based on the proportion of time respondents' spent upon them.

RESULTS

The NVIVO analysis of the responses identified three themes which represented organisational capabilities enhancement of the public sports organisations for delivering more successful services. Ranked in descending order they were: Policy and Strategy Implementation; Strengthen Human Resources; and Documentations.

Policy and Strategy Implementation

'Policy and Strategy Implementation' the first and most discussed theme emerging from the interviews. All 13 respondents (100%) who were interviewed acknowledged the importance for public sports organisations to establish good policy on sports. They put forward the need to improve ways of policy and strategy implementation related to mass sports programs. For example, Husna, a State Senior Director said:

> *...for me, our policy is very important. We have to show or to prove that we ourselves follow our policy. If we are firm with our policy, then the public will respect us, they will accept our suggestion...Our organisations roles, our mission and vision are very important. These elements guide us, in everything. We have to look back, why we exist and what are our roles. We should be capable to suit our organisational mission and vision to the local need, local environment, because we are dealing with the public, dealing with people not goods, in certain circumstances, we cannot directly follow the policy, we have to adjust certain things but at the same time not lose its originality (Husna, State Senior Director).*

Public sports organisations' need to be firm with their policy as a way to increase organisational credibility in developing sports. In this case, respondents believe that other organisations will recognise the roles and functions of the public sports organisations and it would be easier to gain more support from other agencies in administering and implementing the strategy for developing sports.

Respondents suggested that organisations had to enhance the ability of the top management of the public sports organisation to align policy and strategy implementation. Musa a Senior Director at the State level said:

> *. The Ministry is responsible to drive the community to be active... It all comes or starts from the top... There must be planning from the top which is dissipated to the lower level. We can then drive the programs at that level. The organisation itself [the top management of the organisation] must set the direction (Musa, State Senior Director).*

Clearly, the ability to understand the policy and to give direction for implementing strategy accordingly are the most valuable managerial skills among the top management as decision makers.

Human Resources

The need to strengthen human resources was the second most discussed theme emerging from the interviews for enhancing organisational capabilities of the public sports organisations. Of the 13 respondents who were interviewed, 12 respondents (92.3%) indicated that the capabilities of the organisation can be enhanced by strengthening human resources. Here, respondents claimed that the public sports organisations either at federal and state levels have limited human resources and there was a need to increase the number of officers responsible for sports development. For example, Husna, a Senior Director attached to the state level expounded her views:

> *...we lack officers...one officer is responsible not only to administer and monitor sports programs but also other programs...we should look into the numbers of officers that we already have. I don't think we have enough manpower; we lack officers for sports. Since the concept of empowerment is not working in our environment, our officers have no choice but to handle everything. Here, multitasking is very important but they are human, we need to accept that they are not capable of handling everything; we need more officers, especially at the grass root level (Husna. State Senior Director).*

As opposed to Husna's suggestion, Azam suggested that the public sports organisations can increase the number of human resources for developing sports among the community.

> *...we don't have enough staff or officers to do all the work, there are multitasking people but they might not be able to do everything...We have to train and develop more instructors, conduct more courses and develop more facilities, and then we will successfully deliver our programs to our society and public participation will be increased... (Azam, State Senior Director).*

In the same way, Kasim indicated:

> *...In our own organisation, numbers of people that are responsible for mass sports are limited, so you cannot expect them to handle everything. You have to do it with others, with NGOs and so forth...We do have limited officers but if we manage to train them to become a good leader then we will be able to overcome this constraint (Kasim, Executive).*

From Kasim's, Razak's and Azam's point of view, organisational capabilities of the public sports organisations can be enhanced if they can integrate human resources from various agencies including the community to administer sports development programs.

Respondents like Norman and Rahman believe that wrong selection of new officers has made the public sports organisations lose their credibility. They emphasised that besides looking at the applicant's academic qualifications, their personality and background have to become a requisite for entry into the profession. Organisations need to develop and provide training that is appropriate to the purpose of the profession. Kasim is supported by Razak and Suboh:

> *...from my observation, among our officers, they lack proper training especially in terms of that related to our work, work on sports for all... (Razak, State Senior Director).*

> *...we have to increase our professionalism. Now, we don't have any specific training...There must be an appropriate training that can increase our professionalism... (Suboh, State Senior Director).*

Like Husna and Norman, Musa believes in developing the cutting edge of officers' professionalism as an important way to enhance the capabilities of the public sports organisation:

> *Sports are our authority. How do we accomplish this? This needs a lot of involvement in the programs, not just to manage the program but being an expert in the program...we need to be skilful in our field. We need to be skilful in sports (Musa, State Senior Director).*

It was apparent from the interviews that at times training has to be improved as a way to strengthen human resources.

Documentation

The need to enhance documentation was notified by almost all respondents (12 respondents, 92.3%), by establishing documents as a reference, not only for them to better their planning but for the community to refer to.

Norman suggested:

> *We as a government agency that has always being a reference point should have all relevant documents that can guide mass sports development, guide other agencies to help us (Norman, State Senior Director).*

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Similarly, Kasim, an Executive at the Federal level highlighted the importance of publishing documents and using them to guide the organisation to better their performance:

> *...we need to document whatever we did; this will help the learning process. Documentation is very important for the learning process. It can be a reference...we have to update our documents continuously. Besides training, our officers can learn through these documents (Kasim, Executive).*

Norman focuses on the need to utilise modern facilities for producing and establishing information relating to mass sports development.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study successfully identified three key factors which drive organisation capability. In keeping with previous research on organisation capabilities the interviews revealed that at the organisational level, enhancement of policy and strategy implementation, strengthening human resources and improving documentation resulted in greater capabilities and improved service delivery of mass sports programs to the community. The most critical element that needs to be enhanced as a way to improve organisational capabilities was policy and strategy implementation.

Enhancement of policy and strategy implementation

It was apparent that management decisions on the process of policy and strategy implementation were influenced by social and political demand. This is common in the public sporting organisations domain (Lynn Jr, Heinrich & Hill 2000; McNamee & Fleming 2007) as they are not only charged to meet public need but also to satisfy the central government expectation. This finding is in line with Hums and MacLean (2009) in that a combination of good decision making and planning is crucial for good strategic management and helps the organisation to drive its roles and function towards its targeted goals. This internal organisational process should become a base for organisational capabilities enhancement that will enable public sports organisations to successfully deliver mass sports programs to the community (Dressler 2004; Garratt 2000; Winter 2003).

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Strengthen human resources

Sports development officers need to be competent, i.e. officers who have sports related knowledge and experiences, to perform their roles and develop monitoring systems and program evaluation. This provides evidence that public sports organisations are relying on their competent people to achieve success (Doyle 2009; Garrat 2000; Hums & MacLean 2009; Stier 1999; Watt 1998).

Improve documentation

Standardised documentation systems appeared to be a fairly blunt and not consistent across federal and state levels agency. It is evident that clear information and good documentation are needed to support decision making process (Hums & MacLean 2009; Klakegg & Haavaldsen 2011). This suggested that centrally governed documentation, including need assessment and program evaluation will enhance capabilities of the public sports organisation over the program development and delivery process of the mass sports programs.

Organisational Capabilities, Good Governance and Service Delivery

The results of this study provided evidence that people at the managerial level have big influence on policy and strategy implementation of the organisation and they also influence direction of the program development of the organisation. This is supported by Lynn Jr, Heinrich and Hill (2000) who claimed that 'managerial behaviour is almost always a factor in government performance' and consistent with the research finding of Forbes, Hill and Lynn Jr. (2007) that managerial values influence decision making and the way services were delivered. Thus good governance is believed to enhancing service delivery arrangement of the mass sports programs because this approaches focusing to align the service delivery process with the policy priorities. It provides the framework for managing service delivery of the mass sports programs by integrating all aspect of process, policy, standards and practices.

There is still little knowledge about governance contribution to organisational capabilities for delivering successful services pertaining to mass sports programs as it involved interrelated themes of organisational systems, processes and procedures, including: managerial power, values and practices;

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distribution of resources and responsibility between agencies; involvement of various stakeholders in policy, strategy and program implementation; and political influences (Lynn Jr, Heinrich & Hill 2000). However, Lockhart (2010, p. 231) suggested:

> If good governance is to be achieved, when governance is defined as effective decision-making that results in good performance, directors must be selected on the basis of their contextual knowledge and skills; how their competencies and behavioural characteristics complement each other; and, how they enhance the strategies an organisation selects through which to achieve its goals. It will be nothing more than a matter of chance if these attributes conform to the easy-to-measure norms and characteristics currently being pursued by the promoters of best practice governance.

By blending policy and strategy implementation with human resources and documentation processes, this paper argued strongly for the need of good governance as a way to enhance capabilities of the public sports organisations for delivering more successful mass sports programs in the Malaysian context. Through the application of good governance, public sports organisations can develop effective management practices that are appropriate to attain the organisational strategic intent.

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