

Sport Diplomacy: A Program Evaluation

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This session will present a case study of a sport diplomacy program evaluation. The diplomatic use of sport stems from its universality and structural power (Wolf, 1990). Sport, as a valuable contributor to the global economy and a significant component of the United States' GDP, consistently ranks in the top ten segments of the U.S. economy (Fort 2003; Pitts and Stotlar 2002; Sports Business Journal 2008). At an estimated \$425 billion dollar industry in America, sport is a major economic force (Plunkett Research Ltd, 2010). It is also a major social force, a social institution that can influence society on a large scale (Coakley, 2007). Yet, on a local level, sport is an arena for individual engagement and exchange. Sport is a universal language. As such, it is a valuable vehicle for nations and societies to build relationships, and for individuals within diverse cultures to engage with one another. Sport's economic, social, and political implications can support diplomatic, cultural exchange, development, and peace-building efforts. Using sport for diplomatic goals has been a long-employed strategy, from the founding of the modern Olympics to 'ping pong diplomacy' and beyond, the enhancement of diplomatic initiatives can be bolstered through sport.

While top-down diplomatic initiatives are common and receive both resources and attention, the bottom-up approaches are essential in humanizing the stakeholders, building mutual understanding, and uniting past enemies. Beer and Nohria (2000) suggest that top down change might have a more immediate economic upside, but may not have sustainability; whereas bottom up change may be more costly but yield longer term results. Forced contact through sport could lessen hostility, break down stereotypes, and foster more tolerant attitudes between segregated groups. Sport interaction can bring new knowledge, and remove the fear associated with the lack of personal experience with another group (Allport 1954). The very nature of team sports and competition creates close physical proximity among teammates and opponents, promotes common objectives and understanding, and requires joint contributions for success. Sport can, as a universal language, be a valuable mechanism in building cultural relationships and supporting diplomatic aims. But, how can the effectiveness of sport in achieving these goals be measured?

Senge (1990) noted that "Every program is perfectly designed to yield the results you see." Therefore, one must accurately identify the results, and how they relate to the program's goals and objectives, in order to evaluate the program's effectiveness. The key to effectively evaluating any program, including sport diplomacy programming, is to ensure at the proper measurement of the intended programmatic outcomes. Program goals must be identified and appropriate measures must be determined. Both qualitative and quantitative measures, tied to program goals, can be employed in assessing the outcomes. Yet, in the end, if properly measured, the 'results you see,' or outcomes, reflect exactly what the program is 'perfectly designed' to produce. Putting the results to

use can inform the future course of the program and guide the program managers' decisions.

This session presents a case study of an existing sport diplomacy program. This grant-funded sport diplomacy initiative has had abundant anecdotally-noted success, but evidence of the program's effectiveness was sought through a newly designed evaluation plan. The development of the evaluation plan, including the program objectives, measures employed, and selected results will be discussed in this session.

The sport diplomacy evaluation plan provided essential assessments to close the loop and feedback into future program planning. Its results influence opportunities for foreign visitors to participate in intensive sport exchanges in the United States. The assessments were based upon these overarching programmatic goals to assist foreign participants and their American counterparts to: (a) develop a broad worldview that incorporates diverse perspectives; (b) apply their skills toward productive and positive outlets in their local communities, and (c) build upon their professional skills and knowledge while developing a deeper understanding of U.S. society and culture. Toward these goals, the program attempts to enable participants to: (a) foster understanding and build relationships with others from different ethnic, religious, and national groups; (b) promote mutual understanding between the people of the partner countries and the U. S.; (c) learn more about U.S. society and culture, thereby countering negative stereotypes; and (d) become part of a network of leaders who will share their knowledge and skills with their peers and the broader community.

The objectives, in alignment with the stated programmatic goals, were to: (a) foster opportunities to develop cross-cultural understanding; (b) facilitate interactive exchanges to build relationships; (c) impart information about the United States; (d) provide opportunities for skill development; and (e) develop strategies for dissemination of participants' experiential learning outcomes. The related measurable outcomes were for participants to be able to: (a) Recognize the value of selected cultural experiences; (b) Acknowledge the development of intercultural relationships; (c) Document knowledge of U.S. culture; (d) Reflect on general and sport-related skill development; and (e) Select from a menu of options and undertake a means for sharing the exchange experiences upon return. These objectives served as the foundation for the evaluation of program effectiveness. The evaluations were conducted through multiple means: (a) Question and Answer Sessions with On-Site Program Host; (b) On-site Likert-scaled Survey; (c) On-site open-ended questionnaire; (d) Opportunities for electronic and hardcopy feedback upon return to home country; (e) Required Plan for staying in touch (follow-on options); and (f) Required Plan for sharing information within their home country.

Sport diplomacy, sport for development and peace-building, CSR initiatives, and many 'double bottom line' programming must still provide evidence of their effectiveness. While specific data from this case study are shared, the larger purpose of this session is to enhance the awareness of the use of program evaluation and evidence in all sport enterprises. When properly designed and implemented, program evaluation yields

insights upon which sport managers' data-driven decision-making can produce improved sport programming.