Original Research

Advancing the sport for development field: Perspectives of practitioners on effective organizational management

NaRi Shin[1], Adam Cohen[2], Jon Welty Peachey[3]

[1] Texas Tech University, USA
[2] University of Technology Sydney, Australia
[3] University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

Corresponding author email: nari.shin@ttu.edu

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of SFD practitioners on how SFD organizations can be more effectively managed for sustainability and meaningful impact. With a goal to respond to the call that SFD research should reflect on its effectiveness and the managerial direction in which it is going, we engaged with a variety of SFD practitioners to seek out their voices as well as to illuminate their reflections on and inputs to the field. Thirty practitioners from 29 SFD organizations participated in the study. Practitioners' advice for effectively managing SFD organizations included enhancing sustainability, having a passion for sport and SFD, gaining experience before taking action, engaging in professional training, establishing academic partnerships, developing a professional and entrepreneurial mindset, and utilizing online resources. Practical implications, recommendations, and future research directions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the field of sport-for-development (SFD) has expanded its presence and legitimacy within the context of local and international development (Schulenkorf, 2017). For instance, organizations operating grassroots SFD initiatives are found in more than 120 countries (Svensson & Woods, 2017). A sampling of outcomes examined by scholars include social inclusion, violence prevention, prejudice reduction, and positive life changes (see Schulenkorf et al., 2016 for a comprehensive review of SFD scholarship). Overall, this body of work has shown that SFD interventions and programs have the potential to evince positive outcomes particularly at the microlevel, provided that the programs are managed well and thoughtfully designed based on sound program theory.

Given the importance of management and program design to the SFD field, significant scholarly attention has begun to focus on organizational and managerial aspects, including strategic management and organizational capacity building (Adams et al., 2018; Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Dixon & Svensson, 2019; Harris, 2018; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016), managing tensions between global hegemony and local empowerment (Lindsey et al., 2017; McSweeney et al., 2019), partnerships (Svensson & Loat, 2019; Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018), and leadership (Kang & Svensson, 2019; Nols et al., 2019 Welty Peachey, Burton et al., 2018). Scholars have also taken a critical approach to much of this research, identifying the neocolonial tendencies of many SFD organizations (Darnell et al., 2018; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011) and an evangelical approach whereby sport is championed as solving societal issues without empirical evidence to substantiate these claims (Coalter, 2007, 2013; Harris & Adams, 2016).

Schulenkorf's (2017) recent review of managerial scholarship related to SFD synthesized findings and

suggested areas of future research. He also advocated the critical need to reflect on managerial practices within the SFD field in times of decreased funding opportunities and proliferation of programs and scholarship. Previous scholarship has gathered SFD scholars' views about challenges and issues within SFD, including their views and experiences with program outcomes, partnerships, and organizational capacity issues, among others (Harris, 2018; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016; Welty Peachey, Cohen, & Shin, 2019; Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018).

As scholars have recognized, the rapidly changing culture and surroundings often cause SFD organizations to operate in an environment where they seek to address broad social issues (Kang & Svensson, 2019). This often requires SFD practitioners to engage in multitasking to best deliver both sport and development programs and services (Lindsey & Darby, 2018; Svensson, 2017; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017), which may present unique challenges to SFD practitioners. Responding to these challenges, more studies have recently focused on practitioners' perspectives about the most important elements for successfully managing their organizations and ultimately achieving their goals (Spaaij et al., 2018). For example, a study by Whitley et al. (2019) investigated current issues and challenges from the lived experiences of SFD actors (practitioners, scholars, and students). They found that practitioners had interest in effective monitoring and evaluation methods as well as in improved, accessible training. The current study extends this growing body of literature by focusing more explicitly on what practitioners perceived to be the most important for further improving the management of SFD organizations in the future.

Moreover, as Giulianotti et al. (2019) pointed out, the global SFD landscape is shifting due to the emergence of international issues and challenges such as the declaration of the United Nations' (UN) 2015 Sustainable Development Goals that include sport's role in promoting global peace and development; the closure of the UN's Office of Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP); and the role of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in SFD, as the United Nations handed this remit to the IOC. In addition, the need for advanced and forward-thinking strategies for managing SFD organizations is underscored in a number of recent policy documents such as the Kazan Action Plan (Svensson & Loat, 2019). As such, within this changing SFD landscape and responding to SFD scholars' consensus for the importance of considering managerial aspects of SFD (Giulianotti, 2011; Schulenkorf, 2017; Sherry et al., 2015; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016; Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017), the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of SFD practitioners on how SFD

organizations can be more effectively managed for sustainability and meaningful impact.

Understanding SFD practitioners' forward-thinking perspectives is necessary as they have hands-on experience in the field, particularly regarding ongoing critical issues such as the recent changes in the SFD global landscape (Giulianotti et al., 2019), proliferation of programs despite the fluctuation of funding possibilities (Svensson & Woods, 2017), and organizational failure to deliver desired developmental outcomes (Levermore, 2008; Svensson & Loat, 2019). We engaged with a variety of SFD practitioners to provide an overarching and holistic picture of the field drawn from practitioner insights. The following research question was developed to frame the study: What are practitioners' perspectives on advancing the SFD field through effective management of SFD organizations?

This study is significant, given that SFD has been gaining attention from various sectors ranging from public policy to nongovernmental development initiatives, and practitioners' perspectives can help shape SFD agendas, policy, and management strategies for the future. Moreover, this study is an empirical effort to obtain first-hand perspectives of SFD practitioners. It is important to gain a more holistic understanding about managing SFD organizations from a more robust set of stakeholders, in this study's case, through direct engagement with SFD practitioners to ascertain their perspectives.

CURRENT STATUS AND PRESSING ISSUES IN SFD

Sport has been continuously recognized as having capacity to enact social change and achieve a wide range of global developmental goals (Raw et al., 2019). An increasing number of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, national sport organizations, sport practitioners, and researchers have engaged with sport's potential merit as a development tool, followed by proliferation of development initiatives and programs from multiple sectors using sport as a means of fostering social impacts (Levermore, 2008; Schulenkorf et al., 2016). Navigating such a global development sector that involves complex organizational structures can be challenging for SFD organizations and practitioners (Coalter, 2007; Dixon & Svensson, 2019; Raw et al., 2019). More recently, decreased funding opportunities and change of SFD governance at the global level have posed new challenges for SFD practitioners.

With a goal to advance SFD management, scholars have suggested there is a distinct need to conduct rigorous research on the following prominent trends and issues: the

formation of sustainable partnerships with various entities, including research partnerships (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018), ways to enhance organizational capacity management, including human resource management, monitoring and evaluation, and social entrepreneurship (Cohen et al., 2019; Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2015; Harris, 2018; Hayhurst, 2014; Kang & Svensson, 2019; McSweeney, 2018; Svensson & Seifried, 2017; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2017), bridging the theory and practice divide (Coalter, 2010; Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011; Schulenkorf, 2012; Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Spaaij, 2019), and innovation in SFD (Chawansky et al., 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2019). Among these important topics, we now turn our attention to three critical areas identified by scholars as salient for effective management of SFD organizations: debates of evidence, partnerships, and organizational capacity.

Debates of Evidence

SFD has developed in its academic discourse over the last two decades largely due to its social justice focus, exploration of potential program outcomes, and opportunities to investigate how management of these organizations may be different from that of other sport-related organizations (see Darnell et al., 2018; Schulenkorf et al., 2016; Seal & Sherry, 2018; Svensson & Woods, 2017). However, the field is certainly not without its critics within the areas of mainstream development and critical sociology of sport (Coalter, 2013; Darnell, 2012; Giulianotti et al., 2019). This criticism has largely been in response to the debate on evidence, which is necessary to counter evangelical rhetoric espoused by some policy makers and practitioners (Schulenkorf, 2017). The debates on evangelical rhetoric and evidence is critical to the current study as rigorous monitoring and evaluation of SFD programs are an important part of effective management of SFD organizations.

Scholars have been debating the way that evidence has been produced and utilized to demonstrate the possible effectiveness and success of SFD programs, which is necessary for SFD organizations to attract potential funders. In fact, evidence is influenced by the pedagogy guiding SFD programs (Nols et al., 2019). Coalter (2013) found that many SFD studies examined microlevel impact while claiming that impact had occurred at the mesolevel, without evidence to necessarily support this claim. Schulenkorf (2017) argued that there should be a clear distinction between short-term evaluation and longitudinal work, in that results of short-term evaluation are often provided as if they were obtained by a longer process of evaluation. More recently Giulianotti et al. (2019) argued that SFD research

should engage with wider literatures and theories to advance the discussion on evidence, mainly by applying diverse epistemologies and methodologies that will create a more diverse, pluralistic, and innovative community of research practice in the SFD field.

These debates on evidence are closely related to strategies for managing SFD organizations in two ways. First, SFD organizations acknowledge the importance of evidence in demonstrating their program's efficacy. Second, many SFD organizations still lack sufficient capacity to monitor and evaluate their programs, consequently making it difficult to deliver and sustain evidence-based programs that could attract future collaborators (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016; Svensson & Loat, 2019). Essentially, more robust evidence can contribute to stronger planning and management of programs, which will improve SFD policy and practice and advance knowledge (The Barça Foundation & UNICEF, 2019).

Partnerships in SFD: Advantages and Challenges

Building and sustaining quality partnerships is characterized by effective management of engaged, dependable, and balanced relationships (Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019), and is one of the most important managerial strategies of sport organizations (Babiak & Thibault, 2008; Misener & Doherty, 2012). SFD organizations are not an exception in that effective interorganizational linkages are essential to be forward thinking (Welty Peachey, Cohen, & Shin, 2019). Literature has evidenced that most SFD organizations rely on partnerships with multiple public and private entities—governments (Sherry & Schulenkorf, 2016), global corporations (Holmes et al., 2016), and high-performance sport organizations (Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010)—to sustain and accomplish their missions (MacIntosh et al., 2016; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016; Welty Peachey, Cohen, & Shin, 2019). The advantages SFD organizations gain from partnerships may include building organizational capacity, assuring positive program outcomes, developing sustainability, and conducting effective monitoring and evaluation (Casey et al., 2009).

Recognizing the challenges of building partnerships, Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, and Fusaro (2018) suggested that engaging in multiple partnerships could create a complicated environment that organizations struggle to navigate. Lindsey and Banda (2011) pointed out that SFD practitioners have had a lack of understanding of the public policy sector, which is necessary to initiate and develop partnerships. Growing competition is another concern. Many SFD organizations end up partnering with a few large international funders and rely heavily on them. As the

number of large funders is limited, SFD organizations have to compete for limited resources provided by these funders (Coalter, 2013; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010). This competition has continuously been a challenge for both general nonprofit organizations and for those operating in the SFD field, where competition has increased for resources, while participants in programs have decreased (Nagabhushanam & Sridhar, 2010; Welty Peachey, Cohen, & Shin, 2019). Recent studies of SFD organizations linked partnerships between multiple entities to the concept of organizational hybridity (explained in detail in the next section) that may better enable SFD organizations to navigate the competitive partnership landscape (Raw et al., 2019; Svensson, 2017).

Power issues, particularly power imbalance between partners, is one of the major challenges within SFD partnerships (Darnell, 2012; Hayhurst & Frisby, 2010). Scholars in SFD have identified that power and control, often derived from financial resources, are distributed inequitably (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). A power imbalance may also emerge in partnerships between SFD organizations and researchers. Nicholls et al. (2010) argued that local SFD practitioners' knowledge is often subjugated by academics involved in research. In other cases, power imbalance in SFD partnerships involves "a high versus low-to-middle income dichotomy in which local organizations from the latter largely depend on agencies in high income countries for various resources." (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018, p. 163). This power imbalance is a significant issue since it can negatively impact the development and implementation of programs.

Often, external financial partnerships encompass a dependent relationship in which SFD organizations from low- or middle-income regions partner with large funding agencies from high-income regions, and these have favored relatively narrow program evaluations that provide limited evidence—not holistically including micro-, meso-, and macro-levels—of individual or community impact (Jones et al., 2017; Lindsey & Banda, 2011; Nicholls & Giles, 2007). Recognizing these criticisms, academic partnerships have been an emerging focus of research, shedding light on the challenges perceived by evaluators and program implementers and strategies to overcome them (Burnett, 2008; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016). As such, the importance of partnerships in SFD has been evidenced by many preceding studies, however, there is still a lack of awareness of this importance by nascent SFD organizations in great need of multilevel collaborations (Dixon & Svensson, 2019). Thus, building and sustaining advantageous partnerships is critical to being forward thinking and for the effective management of organizations in the SFD space.

Organizational Capacity of SFD Organizations

Developing organizational capacity has also recently emerged as a challenge in the area of SFD management. As available resources for SFD organizations are limited and competition among organizations has increased, enhancing organizational capacity is now more important for SFD practitioners in order to effectively manage their organizations by aligning organizational resources with outcomes the organization targets. However, while the capacity of SFD organizations has been a growing area of research, scholars have noted that SFD practitioners, similar to some practitioners in the broader nonprofit sector, often lack professional training and managerial skillsets necessary to effectively guide and sustain their organizations (Welty Peachey, Cohen, & Shin, 2019; Welty Peachey et al., 2017). Still, perspectives of practitioners are needed to accurately examine their current understandings and potential strategies for enhancing organizational capacity.

Organizational capacity refers to the organization's ability to reach its planned objective or social mission through the use of its internal and external resources (Svensson, 2017; Svensson et al., 2018). Beyond a broad perspective on an organization's ability, organizational capacity highlights the dimensions of human resources, external relationships, financial capacity, organization and planning, and internal operations, all of which are critical to effective organizational management (Hall et al., 2003). Svensson and Hambrick (2016) emphasized the importance of understanding the context and environment in which SFD organizations operate, in that the uniqueness of nonprofit organizations may often produce organizational challenges. Svensson (2017) pointed out that "Today, a multitude of stakeholders are involved in SDP [SFD] efforts, including nonprofits, corporations, intergovernmental agencies, governments, and high-performance sport organizations, which has created increasingly complex realities" (p. 444).

Within these complex realities, SFD organizations have competed against each other for resources that will sustain them, including human resources and external funding. As such, many SFD organizations face challenges in building organizational capacity because they remain highly resource dependent, which is similar to other voluntary sport organizations (Dowling & Washington, 2017; MacIntosh et al., 2016; Svensson et al., 2017). Welty Peachey et al. (2017) linked these organizational challenges to the lack of business acumen of many SFD practitioners, who often possess a strong interest in social justice or passion for sport but have fewer skills in nonprofit management.

As the SFD field has been receiving more attention from

both academic and nonacademic communities, so too have the organizational processes and managerial dynamics of SFD organizations (Giulianotti, 2011; Schulenkorf, 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Dixon and Svensson's (2019) recent study recognized the increasing complexity of institutional demands for SFD organizations, which can be managed through a process of organizational hybridity. Emergence of symbolic and/or assimilated SFD hybrid organizations was found to be important in Svensson's (2017) earlier study, in which these hybrids effectively advanced the organizations' purposes and helped them move forward as healthy organizations.

While there have been numerous calls for monitor and evaluation efforts in the SFD field (Coalter, 2007; 2010; Edwards, 2015), there is still a need to evaluate key reasons behind an organization's successes and failures. Organizational capacity research aims to assess an initiative's ability to achieve its goals and mission along with determining key factors that inhibit those potential successes (Cohen et al., 2019; Svensson et al., 2019). As human resources is one of the crucial dimensions of organizational capacity, SFD researchers have studied different aspects of this dimension including volunteers, managers, and leaders. Swierzy et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of volunteers and how "each organizational capacity dimension significantly impacts the decision to volunteer and the extent of volunteering" (p. 318). Svensson and Hambrick (2016) suggested that the influence of a knowledgeable and passionate volunteer base can be a key to organizational success. At the upper level, the capacity of SFD managers to leverage a set of capacities for SFD programs and organizations has been found to be crucial (Svensson, 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Another study by Kang and Svensson (2019) introduced the concept of shared leadership, which they found to be particularly important for SFD organizations where practitioners need to play multiple roles as a sport manager, a social worker, a project manager, an educator, and a mediator in order to be effective (Thorpe & Chawansky, 2017). According to Svensson et al. (2017), "the manner in which organizations implement SDP (SFD) programs can positively or negatively impact learning outcomes" (p. 10). As such, understanding organizational capacity contributes to the effectiveness of broader SFD management in that it informs what works, how it works, and how to improve SFD practices at an organizational level.

As evidenced above in the literature that is illustrative but not exhaustive of the current trends and issues in SFD, much of the earlier thinking on managerial strategies within SFD revolved around scholarship and research emanating from the academic perspective. Yet more recently, there

have been continuing attempts to recognize practitioners' perceptions. Our study contributes to the growing body of literature on SFD practitioners' perceptions by providing opportunity for practitioners to further contribute to this dialogue and help shape future thinking and practice within the SFD space.

METHOD

In an effort to assess the perspectives of SFD practitioners, we engaged in an exploratory qualitative study that involved criterion based purposive sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Considering the nature of this data collection and its analysis, it is important to include the positionality of the authors to provide background on their perspectives. Each author is a full-time academic and has extensive experience in SFD research efforts and qualitative data collection. The second and third authors have both worked with the NGO industry as practitioners and academic collaborators (24 years and 14 years respectively), including several recent projects. Considering the prior experience and knowledge of the authors, the study was approached from a constructivist paradigm (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007) recognizing our background would influence our interpretation of the data. Specifically, our criterion-based purposeful sampling (Duan et al., 2015) aimed to collect data that could represent the global SFD field. Through SFD field recognized online platforms (Beyond Sport and SportandDev), we developed a short list of 60 diverse organizations based on three criteria: (a) the organization is currently active and viable, (b) the organizations represent diverse locations (e.g., low- to middle- and high-income nations) across all six continents, and (c) the organizations have variety in programming (e.g., type of sport employed, mission, targeted demographic). Emails were sent by the first author to key stakeholders at the 60 organizations (e.g., CEOs, top-level managers, and directors) inviting them to participate in a personal interview about their perspectives on advancing the field through effective management of their organizations. After two weeks, follow-up emails were sent to nonresponders. In total, 29 individuals representing 28 organizations volunteered to take part in this study, which entailed conducting semistructured Skype or phone interviews with the second and third authors in order to gather in-depth, robust data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Two interviewees were working for the same organization as we had initially contacted one individual from that organization who did not respond, so we contacted another. However, the individual who did not respond later agreed to participate. Interviewees represented six continents and a wide range of organizations employing different sports and with varied missions. Table 1 details the 30 individuals.

Table 1. Names (Pseudonyms) of Study Participants, Job Role, Region, Years in SFD, and Mission of Organization

Pseudonym	Job Role	Region	Years in SFD	Mission of Organization
Andrea	International program manager	Colombia, South America	12	Offering programs in education and sports training for displaced children
Andrew	Director of cross cultures	Balkan region	20	Promoting social cohesion between people of different cultures
Annie	Vice president	North America	3	Inspiring girls using a fun, experience-based curriculum integrated with running
Chris	Founder	UK	6	Promoting emotional and behavioral change through football (soccer)
Cindy	Associate director	North America	6	Fusing sport and therapy to heal and strengthen at-risk youth
David	International director	South Africa	6	Utilizing sport for holistic community transformation and development of young leaders
Derrick	Executive director	Kenya	16	Using sports for positive social change through a community development organization
Jesus	Regional coordinator	Colombia, South America	3	Offering programs in education and sports training for displaced children
Jill	Executive director	International	17	Focusing on health, social, and soccer skills within an integrated educational curriculum
Jim	Cofounder	Thailand	3	Building community cohesion among the different refugee communities through soccer
Karen	Program manager	UK	2	Fostering physical activity and building skills through volunteering
Larry	President	International	10	Empowering young people to build a strong self-respect using basketball
Linda	Institutional relations manager	International	7	Helping disadvantaged youth through martial arts combined with education
Maribel	Director	Colombia	6	Enabling social transformation through sport for the construction of peace in the region
Marilyn	Program officer	Zambia, Africa	13	Empowering underserved communities through their active participation in sport
Mark	Managing director	Asia, Europe	10	Using soccer to help save the lives of children living at daily risk
Nate	Director & cofounder	South America, Africa, Thailand	13	Helping disadvantaged communities reach their full potential in sport, education, and health
Nina	Executive director	Kenya	3	Using football (soccer) to develop essential life skills of vulnerable young women
Paul	Executive director	Asia	4	Using football (soccer) to tackle the poor nutritional practices in Asia
Prima	Regional director—East	India	19	Developing local community cohesion through a curriculum of sporting activities
Randy	Executive director	US	18	Developing youth and community for a positive community culture
Sally	Director	China, India, Jordan, Nigeria, Zambia	7	Equipping adolescent girls to exercise their rights through sport
Sam	Director of operations	Sudan	5	Operating an all-refugee soccer club and youth soccer academy for displaced people in Darfur.
Sandra	Operations manager	Asia	3	Promoting global equal opportunity for disadvantaged and marginalized children
Sergio	Founder	Africa, South America, Caribbean	20	Building communities by constructing community sports facilities
Steven	Deputy department director	Israel	5	Developing and implementing innovative peacebuilding programs
Sven	Founder & executive director	Liberia	10	Using sports as a tool to reach at-risk youth through sustainable community development
Timothy	Executive director	Ecuador	7	Building self-reliance and a sense of community among at-risk youth in Ecuador
Tom	Executive director	International	9	Mobilizing activism of the outdoor sports community for positive climate action

An interview guide was developed to elicit interviewees' in-depth perspectives on advancing the field through effective management, which was drawn from the aforementioned literature on current trends (Schulenkorf, 2017; Schulenkorf et al., 2016), partnerships (Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018), organizational capacity (Cohen et al., 2019; Svensson, 2017; Dixon & Svensson, 2019), and evidence issues (Giulianotti et al., 2019; Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Spaaij, 2019). Sample questions included: "Can you reflect on your overall experience managing your respective initiative?", "What is your reflection on advancing the sport for development field and how does this relate to your perspective on the field for the next five to 10 years?", "What advice in terms of better managing sport for development organizations would you give to other individuals interested in engaging in sport for development work?" The sample size was deemed sufficient with the occurrence of data saturation when respondents began to repeat common themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

All interviews were conducted over the phone or Skype,

audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim by a professional transcription company, conducted in English, and lasted between 30 and 75 minutes. We employed an inductive, open coding process to allow for themes and ideas to emerge from the data (Merriam, 2002; Miles et al., 2014). Initially, the authors coded the same three transcripts individually. After debating their individual coding, the authors agreed on general themes to guide the remainder of the coding process that was conducted by the first author (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The initial themes were then collapsed into the broader categories that are represented in the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a final step, representative quotations were selected that best depicted the themes (Sandelowski, 1994). Dependability and credibility were enhanced by conducting member checks with interviewees (Schwandt, 2015). Multiple conversations took place among the authors to draw forth the results of the analysis and interpretations, with the discussion continuing until no discrepancies emerged. Interviewees reviewed their transcripts and the authors' interpretations through email invitations to do so, and they generally agreed with our interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

FINDINGS

Data were organized around the central research question focusing on practitioners' perspectives on advancing the SFD field through effective management of their organizations. Findings revealed that interviewees had various suggestions drawn from their work experiences: enhance sustainability, have passion, gain experience before action, engage in professional development, establish academic partnerships, develop an entrepreneurial mindset, and optimize the use of online resources.

Enhance Sustainability

In order to engage in effective management, interviewees suggested that more organizations in the field need to strive to build and develop sustainability. They emphasized that maintaining and enhancing sustainability of the SFD field is important as they foresee the field continuing to expand. Being optimistic about the future of the field, interviewees recognized that as the field expands, it will be vitally important to make the field sustainable; that is, a focus on quantity and quality should go hand in hand. As interviewees believed that the SFD field will grow and increase in size and quantity of programs, they underscored that SFD practitioners should endeavor to sustain quality, which could translate into maintaining sustainable organizations and programs. For example, Chris, founder of a UK-based organization who has been working in the field for six years, argued, "I think it will only get bigger. I think it will get bigger as long as people maintain the quality."

Along these lines, interviewees mentioned that their initiatives as well as other SFD organizations have already begun to recognize the significance of building sustainability, with a collective aim to advance the field by focusing on program longevity and quality of programs and management. For instance, Marilyn, a program officer with 13 years of experience working for a Zambian organization serving local communities through sport, saw the emerging significance of maintaining sustainability among SFD organizations: "I'm seeing organizations really focusing on sustainability. How, for example, is our organization going to sustain its programs in the communities?" Sergio, founder of a multicontinent organization that has been building communities by constructing community sport facilities for 20 years, echoed this comment, particularly with regards to persistence in programing: "Sustainability is very important. Otherwise, you are giving something else for one day, but maybe for the next one it will be nothing." The need for sustainability was also mentioned by Andrea, an international program manager with 12 years of field experience with an organization based in Colombia: "Try to

make it sustainable, something that is going to last a while." Finally, Jill, who has been working as an executive director for an international SFD organization for 17 years, perceived that obtaining financial independence or self-sufficiency is critical for managers to ensure the long-term sustainability of organizations: "If you can find out ways to sustain an organization that is what you need to do. Because that is really a challenge to maintain an organization based on philanthropy." In sum, sustainability was found to be closely related to managerial effectiveness, as evidenced by the interviewees' experiences.

Have Passion

To effectively manage organizations, study interviewees spoke about the importance of having passion for sport itself as well as for the field of SFD because the field is rife with challenging situations and pressure. Cindy, a six-year associate director of an organization based in North America, commented that SFD practitioners should expect to replace financial rewards with passion: "I would suggest to find a mission that you really believe in . . . make sure that you truly have a passion about your work because it is not all that financially rewarding." Jim, cofounder of an SFD organization in Thailand working with refugee communities, echoed Cindy's point to have strong passion, mentioning an extensive requirement of time and energy: "If you start something like this, you must have passion . . . because it takes a lot of time and energy." Nate, a director and a cofounder who has been working for an SFD organization in South America, Africa, and Thailand for 17 years, affirmed the need for passion: "Passion and energy definitely you need to have because if you are not passionate and you don't have energy or enthusiasm, I don't think you will make any business work." Reinforcing this call for passion, Jesus, a regional coordinator of a Colombia-based SFD organization, shared poignant advice he learned by working in South America with people in severe poverty:

This requires passion . . . and that poverty that you have to see, you have to impregnate yourself with it, you have to live it, see it, smell it. Because it doesn't smell good, it doesn't look good, and it's not pleasant to feel it.

As shared by multiple interviewees, having passion was revealed to be a necessary baseline in SFD for effective management and working in communities, especially in communities facing difficulties. While passion alone was recognized as an insufficient pathway toward effective management and sustainability, it was emphasized as a crucial aspect of being an effective organization.

Gain Experience Before Action

Regardless of context, study interviewees perceived that being involved in SFD before starting an initiative or organization was critical to provide new practitioners a strong sense of how the field operates, which would allow them to be more effective in their management. Paul, an executive director of an organization using soccer to prevent health problems in Asia, recommended new practitioners obtain actual field experience through volunteering:

Get practically involved . . . and start volunteering and actually get hands on experience or go into an NGO and spend two, three months in a program on a voluntary basis, just to start to really get a good feel for it.

This advice was reiterated by Sven, who founded an organization in Liberia and has been working with at-risk youth for 10 years: "Go learn from them [practitioners] first, don't try to reinvent the wheel . . . if someone is doing it already, go learn from them or join them." Linda, an institutional relations manager of an international organization working with disadvantaged youth, further pointed to the need to communicate and build networks with other practitioners who are already working in the field:

Help make the movements that already exist stronger. There is a huge effort from organizations that are already consolidated to try to place sport for development as something important in the national agenda . . . not to try to reinvent the wheel, do not isolate from people and organizations that have already done work.

Engage in Professional Development

Interviewees suggested that SFD practitioners need to focus on leadership and human resource training for new and continuing staff and volunteers in order to manage their organizations effectively. Derrick, who has 16 years of field experience as an executive director of a Kenyan organization pursuing community development, shared how his organization contributes to the SFD field through training new leaders: "We do find ourselves [as a leader] because we have helped start several organizations . . . getting all these consultations, people calling in . . . that's happening and that's why we have the academy, the training."

Further, Steven, a deputy department director of an Israeli organization that develops and implements peacebuilding programs through sport, specified that SFD should target young leaders to make the field more sustainable: "We should focus more on the young leadership. Try to maintain this age group but do better and expand this layer throughout the different communities." Interviewees believed that expanding the field both vertically (younger and newer leadership) and horizontally (network among new leaders) could start with leadership and human resource training. Marilyn identified another group of potential new leaders within the field: "I'm looking to see more women empowered and more work empowering women, women getting into leadership positions, women able to bring out positive impact in their communities, being role models."

With regards to human resource training, Steven stressed the importance of in-house education of trainers (program managers/leaders) through continuous communication and development. He believed that quality training should be provided to achieve the goal of an organization as well as a specific program, which he described as "success," meaning a sustainable program and organization led by well-trained and committed staff:

The key is in training the trainers. Put a lot of energy in the trainers and you will see the impact. . . . Once you have the trainer with you and you all talk the same language and share the goals, understand the methodology the same, work together on a regular basis, that's the key for success.

Establish Academic Partnerships

From a broad perspective, all study interviewees agreed on the importance of general partnerships to better achieve their organizational missions and optimize managerial effectiveness. For example, David, an international director of a South African SFD organization with six years of field experience, said more opportunity would lead to better partnerships: "There will be much better understanding and much more authenticity about what can be done and what is happening. And much greater partnership between practitioners, academics, and other entities." We focus here on the intriguing aspect of academic partnerships. Half of the study interviewees specifically emphasized the need to develop and maintain academic partnerships to facilitate effectiveness. Derrick shared:

I think all is good to invite academics. They can be critical of course . . . but it is good that we are open to such views and such questioning because it helps you reflect on your own work. And helps you ask yourself, what am I doing or what are we doing. It's something that builds the organization.

Likewise, Marilyn reported that academic partnerships can provide practitioners an opportunity to fully reflect on their work objectively: "Bring in research people to do research and to have a second look at the project. It's very important that you have an independent view." Another strategy suggested was to expand academic partnerships by involving funders, as illustrated by Mark, a managing director with 10 years of experience working for an organization using soccer to help at-risk children in Asia and Europe:

There should be greater alignment between academics, practitioners, and funders about why research is important. . . . When donors go to these organizations, they should always involve research partners, because that's the only way you're going to see if the program is effective.

Paul suggested to engage with graduate students who are willing to do research with SFD organizations: "Welcome research opportunities, and especially for students, like doctorate students or master's students." Finally, Sandra, an operations manager of an Asian-based SFD organization, recognized the positive contribution that research partnerships can make to the field: "There are a lot of researchers out there that if brought together, could make a more cohesive global case."

Develop a Professional and Entrepreneurial Mindset

Interviewees also expressed a belief that it was important to develop a business mindset and hone in on social entrepreneurship to enhance managerial effectiveness. Jill indicated that organizational leaders and managers have to think from a managerial perspective, which may not align completely with an altruistic mindset: "There are nonaltruistic reasons here. We are looking for resources and money and that is always a driver of why you are looking."

Interviewees also advised SFD practitioners to develop social entrepreneurship and business skillsets that can help them manage their organizations more effectively. Nate commented: "A certain level of entrepreneurial spirit, I think, is important." Jill's perception echoed Nate's opinion and she further suggested a way of shifting challenges to an opportunity to build entrepreneurship: "Turn that [financing challenges] into a self-help development creative kind of entrepreneurship." Similarly, Mark strongly argued that SFD organizations should be operated and managed with a professional managerial mindset: "I just mean about running it as a business and having to accept professional standards and the opportunity to run a business and do good." Further, interviewees recognized the challenges and difficulties nonprofit organizations usually encounter in

differentiating themselves. Tom, an executive director who has been working with an international organization to mobilize climate action to sustain outdoor sport, shared how his organization differentiates itself and discussed the business mindset which is needed:

We are more of a marketing agency than we are a nonprofit. We take people's money and create social movement with it. If I had been a real hardcore nonprofit guy at the beginning, we may have fallen into some of the typical habits of a non-profit.

Optimize Usage of Online Resources

Finally, in this era of technological advances, about two-thirds of interviewees emphasized the importance of using online platforms and resources to excel in the field and for effective management of organizations. Interviewees shared that online tools are beneficial to connect with other practitioners and organizations, especially those who are geographically distant. Sandra provided detailed advice on utilizing online platforms, including online communities:

It's very beneficial to know about these types of [online] connector organizations that exist in the world where you can really learn more about sport for development, because there are so many different sports being used. There are so many different countries and continents where it's being done, and in so many different ways.

Sally, a director of a multination organization working with adolescent girls to enhance their right to exercise, emphasized the benefits of using social media: "People want to share our social media, they will catalyze around energy, movement, enthusiasm to help the ideas evolve, and the field evolve, through transformational thinking, engaging stakeholders." Tom pointed out the importance of social media to connect with potential supporters of his organization: "We [practitioners] have to be really good at social media. . . . It is all about understanding your target—'how do these kids consume media and how do we connect with them on a really emotional level?'"

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of SFD practitioners on how SFD organizations can be more effectively managed for sustainability and meaningful impact. As highlighted in the introduction and literature review, the SFD field has rapidly advanced both in terms of practice and research. This study aimed to advance previous findings via capturing the perspectives of SFD practitioners to drive future investigations in this field. Considering the

majority of empirical case studies regarding SFD have focused on specific outcomes and impacts, the current effort allowing practitioners to reflect, provide feedback, and recommendations on advancing the field through effective management provides a new and important viewpoint on the field. The diverse characteristics of interviewees and their organizations allowed us to draw forth a holistic picture about SFD from practitioner insights.

It is interesting to note that there still exists a scholar-practitioner gap with regards to perceptions on the ways to advance the field through effective management. Scholars have generally taken a more critical lens and advocate for continued caution about claims made as to long-term impacts (Coalter, 2007; Darnell, 2010; Welty Peachey et al., 2016; Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Hill, 2019). In our study, however, practitioners were relatively positive about the continuing impact of both the field of SFD in general and programs in specific, with very few voices providing critical discourse and cautions. As such, many practitioners still espoused an evangelical approach about using sport as a developmental apparatus. This rhetoric has implications for the management of SFD, as potential funders and partners could be reluctant to fund or partner with SFD organizations who already assume impact will occur (Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018). Thus, practitioners and policy makers need to be very cautious in their assumptions about sport's power to achieve outcomes when developing, planning, and implementing policy and programs. However, we acknowledge that our interviewees may have shaped their dialogue as more positive because they thought it was what we, as researchers, wanted to hear.

Despite the positive perspective, interviewees clearly recognized the necessity to make the field more sustainable, which echoes previous scholarly discussion on organizational capacity and sustainability of SFD organizations (Schulenkorf, 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016. Scholars have noted that SFD organizations have had difficulties in building and sustaining organizational capacity, which is critical for organizational growth and expansion (Cohen et al., 2019; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016). Though, more recently, studies have found that diverse strategies of organizational capacity management have been utilized by SFD organizations, including but not limited to organizational hybridity based on multiorganizational collaboration, alternative organizational design, and organizational innovation (Adams et al., 2018; Clutterbuck & Doherty, 2019; Dixon & Svensson, 2019; Raw et al., 2019; Svensson & Loat, 2019). But still, another recent study by Welty Peachey, Cohen, and Shin (2019) found that SFD practitioners had challenges in "scaling up" (i.e., expanding in quantity and quality of programs), which

included funding difficulties and a general lack of business acumen among key leaders. An overly positive view on the power of sport and the necessity of expansion could be a result of practitioners' social justice and sport background lending itself to overly optimistic perspectives not necessarily grounded in the realities of nonprofit management and practice. Another interesting point is that while scholars have explored multiple aspects of organizational capacity and its potential positive influence on sustainability, such as human resources or organizational structure (Dixon & Svensson, 2019; Kang & Svensson, 2019; Svensson & Hambrick, 2016), interviewees in the present study mostly focused on financial capacity as a way to build sustainability within their organizations. Our findings show that practitioners perceived the concept of sustainability in a less complex way, compared to the more multifaceted conceptualization employed by academics. As many SFD organizations are still nascent and small in scale compared to mainstream development institutions that have been around decades longer, practitioners placed strong emphasis on sustaining financial capacity in order to facilitate longevity of their organizations and programs.

Interviewees highlighted that passion is an important asset to work in the field and manage SFD organizations; scholars, however, have cautioned that passion is not enough to effectively sustain these organizations (Welty Peachey et al., 2016; Welty Peachey et al., 2017). As a gap appears to exist between academic and practical spaces (LeCrom et al., 2019; Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Spaaij, 2019), it may be helpful to reflect on lived experiences. Practitioners are immersed in the field, and their lived experiences are constructed by talking to program participants and witnessing changed lives, which could lead to anecdotal claims about sport's power and role. Therefore, when practitioners discuss the success of SFD organizations, emphasis was put on the training of passionate and committed staff, while the term success is fluid in that it can mean sustainable programs, financially viable organizations, and/or both the organization's and the funder's goals being achieved. That said, SFD scholars have argued for a need to embrace diversified epistemological and methodological approaches to engage better with the lived experiences of SFD practitioners (Giulianotti et al., 2019; Hills et al., 2019). As stressed by Schaillée et al. (2019), being able to translate and convey knowledge from academia to practice should be an important consideration for future SFD research.

Importantly, and related to the above, practitioners realized the importance of, and advocated for, building and developing academic partnerships, which reinforces previous scholarship (Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016;

Welty Peachey, Cohen, Shin, & Fusaro, 2018; Whitley et al., 2019). Specifically, our findings suggest practitioners are calling for more academic/research partnerships in order to measure and demonstrate the impact of programs to secure funding through involving critical, independent, and objective researchers in the evaluation process. These points echo Sanders and Keim's (2017) argument that the academic sector is well positioned to enhance objectivity and rigor. Related to the point discussed above on the theory-practice divide still existing in the SFD field, it is interesting to note that none of the interviewees in the current study discussed the need for basing their programming on robust logic models and theories of change in order to enhance effectiveness and sustainability. This is concerning and reinforces the need for better engaged and relevant theory-building in the SFD space where academics and practitioners work together in bottom-up approaches to designing logic models and theories of change (Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Hill, 2019). Building and maintaining academic partnerships may enable SFD practitioners to be more conversant with, and understand the need for, incorporating logic models and theories of change to manage their organizations more effectively toward sustainability. A more engaged collaboration between SFD academics and practitioners, and "more concerted efforts in establishing meaningful opportunities for engagement" (Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Hill, 2019, p. 10) will contribute to the initiation and development of mutually beneficial relationships bridging the academic-practitioner divide. However, it should also be noted that scholars involved in research collaborations with SFD organizations found difficulty in developing partnerships due to these organizations' limited funds (Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016) along with simply a lack of awareness or knowledge of the academic process and forming partnerships. From the practitioners' side, academic partnerships can help provide outcome data needed to achieve funding. However, scholars looking to partner with SFD organizations may expect these organizations to have already secured funding for evaluation purposes before being willing to engage with them due to the pressure scholars experience for obtaining grants and contracts in higher education.

Interviewees envisioned a professional and entrepreneurial mindset becoming more prominent within SFD and encouraged other practitioners to engage in these activities, highlighting SFD scholarship pointing toward the emergence of social entrepreneurship as an important skill set for practitioners (Cohen & Welty Peachey, 2015; Hayhurst, 2014; McSweeney, 2018). Moving focus beyond passion, a prominent motivator for SFD practitioners, to a more entrepreneurial mindset highlights necessary skills

practitioners need to design and sustain successful SFD initiatives. Reflecting the emergence of social entrepreneurship as a trait for organizational innovation in the broader field of general development practice and research (Peredo & McLean, 2006), we found that the concept of social entrepreneurship was viewed as a requisite for SFD practitioners, due to increasing pressure from interorganizational relationships that has been placed on SFD organizations (Svensson & Seifried, 2017). Practitioners have felt a need to respond to a plurality of institutional demands, which might be addressed with development of a professional entrepreneurial mindset in the SFD managerial settings. This finding aligns with Ratten's (2012) earlier argument on the potential of sport entrepreneurs more generally: "Sports entrepreneurship often occurs due to contextual factors such as whether a business venture is located domestically or internationally. Sports entrepreneurs often operate in an environment with no predictability and risk cannot be easily calculated" (p. 8). With this being recognized, Cohen and Welty Peachey (2015) insisted, "The marriage of social entrepreneurship and sport has strong potential if harnessed by philanthropists driven to solve an existing problem" (p. 114).

However, we argue that there should be caution, as SFD practitioners' indiscriminate acceptance of social entrepreneurship might perpetuate neoliberal ideologies. According to Rivera-Santos et al. (2015), social entrepreneurship itself is a contemporary concept established on the optimism for organizational survival and sustainability in a neoliberal time in which we see blurred lines between for-profit, nonprofit, and public sectors. Within SFD, these blurring lines are evidenced with Johann Koss, founder of Right to Play, who was awarded the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Special Citation award for social entrepreneurship in 2012, and Jürgen Griesbeck, CEO of Streetfootballworld, who was named Social Entrepreneur of the Year in 2011 by the World Economic Forum (McSweeney, 2018). Reid (2017) explained that the "positive description of social entrepreneurs as 'change agents' deflects from their position within neoliberal governance regimes which sees responsibility for social problems shift from the state to the 'power within.'" (p. 598). Thus, social entrepreneurship in SFD should be differentiated from commercial and public entrepreneurship. This could be done through placing greater emphasis on the "social" of social entrepreneurship and distinguishing the concept from economic entrepreneurship.

Consistent with recent work on SFD and technology (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015; Schulenkorf & Siefken,

2019; Svensson et al., 2015; Thorpe & Rinehart, 2013), strategic use of online tools and resources was suggested as a useful strategy for effective organizational management. Our findings particularly highlight the benefits of building networks in and outside of the SFD field. As technology allows multidirectional communication, online networking creates and increases offline networking and support (Hambrick & Svensson, 2015). One of our significant findings was that SFD practitioners and organizations use online tools and resources to supersede the boundaries of space. While this is not a unique finding within the field of sport management as many areas have highlighted the value of technology (e.g., marketing, event management, and sales), this has seemingly been a gap in the SFD literature. This field has a unique characteristic of going beyond the spatial and geographical boundaries as SFD as a movement was global in nature from its initiation. Effective use of technology, as suggested by our findings, will enable SFD organizations and practitioners to interact without being limited themselves within geographical limits and establish newer and effective interorganizational relationships. That is, use of technology can excel and enhance the process of organizational hybridity and/or alternative forms of organizational management. Considering the previously highlighted financial and human capacity issues (Kang & Svensson, 2019; Svensson et al. 2017), being able to utilize new technology and online mediums is crucial for many initiatives to address a wide range of needs ranging from participant and volunteer recruitment, to fundraising, and promoting one's initiative. The need to be connected to others in the field stimulated practitioners to optimize the use of online tools and resources. With limited resources to work on organizational promotion or networking, practitioners recognized social media as a useful strategy, as it is a tool that is already designed, structured, and built for users. Another interesting point on the use of technology is that interviewees advised new practitioners to use online platforms to educate themselves about SFD. Utilizing online tools for education was also suggested in Hambrick and Svensson's (2015) study, explaining that SFD organizations use social media to educate stakeholders. In the present study, SFD practitioners recommended diversifying the usage of technology, extending the linkage between education and online tools.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

We recognize the following limitations that may have impacted the results of this study. First, most of our interviewees were practitioners from high-income countries, although some of them were operating their programs in low- or middle-income countries. There was the potential of bias from the interviewees and researchers who are also

from high-income countries. Future research should strive to garner perspectives on advancing the field through effective management from practitioners indigenous to low- or middle-income countries. Second, our interviews were conducted before the closure of the UNOSDP in May 2017. The IOC now has more oversight of SFD efforts internationally (United Nations, 2017). Thus, we were not able to reflect practitioners' concerns and expectations about broader institutional governance issues and global legitimacy of the field that may have changed as a result of this closure. Future research can focus on the changing landscape of SFD after the UN office closure and how the IOC and existing and new SFD organizations network and collaborate. Specifically, future research should examine how the changing landscape of SFD will impact policy and the viability of funding going forward. Last, studies could be conducted with policy makers and funders/donors as to sustainability and effectiveness in the SFD space. This will further diversify the perspectives about SFD, as these important stakeholders may have different perspectives of, and priorities for, the SFD field from those of practitioners.

CONCLUSION

From a practical perspective, this study provides perspectives of SFD practitioners on how SFD organizations can be more effectively managed for sustainability and meaningful impact. We still see that many practitioners believe sport will ultimately do good. To mitigate evangelical rhetoric, practitioners should always be critical and reflexive about the ways in which SFD programs are designed, operated, monitored, and evaluated. Creating awareness, reaching out to SFD initiatives, and developing academic partnerships are vital for providing an objective, critical evaluation of programming, and to also engage in bottom-up design of logic models and theories of change, which are currently missing in SFD practitioners' perspectives on effective management (Welty Peachey, Schulenkorf, & Hill, 2019). Sanders and Keim (2017) elucidated that academic partnerships are not limited to research partnerships but can be wider in scope to involve university teaching and learning. SFD organizations can benefit from developing comprehensive partnering relationships with academic institutions as well as individual researchers. In the main, practitioners and policy makers still need to be very cautious in setting policy and management strategies and be careful about assumptions that sport will cure all of society's ills.

Development of research partnerships should evolve simultaneously with leveraging funding sources. Practitioners can initiate a triad partnering structure of funder, researcher, and SFD organization. This is not a

mixture of unidirectional relationships but rather should be circulatory and connect all three stakeholder groups in a coherent and mutually beneficial manner that is sensitive to power issues. Nonprofit management and leadership training should be sought after by SFD practitioners and leadership development opportunities provided for staff and volunteers. Practitioners should be cautious about their motives and policies regarding social entrepreneurship, for as we outlined above, unselective or uncritical undertaking of social entrepreneurship strategies may reinforce a neoliberal ideology (McSweeney, 2018).

Our findings respond to Schulenkorf's (2017) call for reflection and criticality when addressing SFD management by adding the perspectives of SFD practitioners who provided us with their first-hand experiences. This study provides a holistic overview of SFD practitioners' suggestions on the effective management of SFD organizations. The current study also helps to bridge the theory-practice divide, which has always been an issue within SFD (Coalter, 2007). A recommendation for SFD scholars is to pay more attention to practitioners' voices and lived experiences, as well as to continue working with them in monitoring and evaluation and program design. These continued and prolonged engagements may help the SFD field move past the evangelical rhetoric that is still prevalent. Welty Peachey and Cohen (2016) noted that under the neoliberal influence in higher education, SFD scholars might have pursued high productivity by focusing on top-tier publications and obtaining major grants recognized only in academia, not necessarily on yielding value to practitioners. Therefore, it is incumbent on scholars to critically examine how the knowledge they produce is disseminated to the wider public. Active knowledge sharing between practitioners and academics will help the field be more reflexive, open to criticism, and synergistically and organically engage in knowledge sharing, all of which will enable SFD organizations to be managed more effectively toward sustainability.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors had no conflict of interests.

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