THE DELEGATION OF RESPONSIBILITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF STUDENT SPORT LEADERS IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES: THE CASE OF SPORT CAPTAINS

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ABSTRACT

Delegation of responsibility and power within the realm of sport management has long been recognised as one of the most effective ways of ensuring efficient delivery of sport services. Arising from colonial legacy, the use of students as sport captains has been a long established procedure within Kenyan universities. The present and future need of this sport delivery system will continue to increase given the prevailing small ratio of sport administrators against the huge population of students. This paper analyses the general role of student sport leaders at the universities, the system used in their appointment, orientation, inservicing and evaluation. Focus is also directed at delegation of responsibilities and empowerment of sport captains as depicted within democratic style of leadership. Given the arising shortcomings in the use of student sport leadership delivery system, the paper makes recommendations related to improving the appointment, inservicing and evaluation procedures of sport captains within Kenyan universities.

Key Words: Delegation, Responsibility, Empowerment, Sport delivery system, Democratic leadership model.

INTRODUCTION

Sport programmes within universities in Kenya are meant for and geared to benefit all students who form the majority of members in these institutions. However, in their attempt to perform the myriad functions of planning organizing, staffing, directing and evaluating the sport programmes, sport administrators have often found themselves overwhelmed with their assigned roles and responsibilities to an extent that they frequently lose sight of the relevance of students' input into the programmes. This should not be the case. Regardless of the form and direction each university has set up for implementation of its sport programmes, exclusion of student leadership in decision-making process is unjustified. Some form and degree of student leadership in the management of institutional sport programmes is definitely desirable, advantageous and recommended for the success of the sport programmes. Indeed, the inclusion of student leadership within sport management is a global practice that has been widely institutionalised and accepted.
Sport leadership in the universities requires that sport administrators strive to influence and motivate individual and various groups of students towards maximum participation in sports and involvement in the achievement of set objectives. Successful sport administrators and programmes within each of the universities in Kenya are those that are able to delegate responsibility and concomitant power to the various student sport leaders using a democratic style of leadership.

Since sport administration is a human and behavioural science, the endeavour to involve students in the sport leadership process calls for the appreciation, understanding and practice of human skills (Cascio 1991, Chellandurai 1985). This in turn requires recognition of motivation, creation of a healthy, co-operative effort, conducive working environment and positive interpersonal relationships between sport administrators and students (Cascio 1991, Chellandurai 1985).

STUDENTS’ LEADERSHIP IN SPORTS

Student leadership is a valuable factor in strengthening the administration of sport programmes at the universities. It assists in the development of student leadership qualities, fosters students’ identification and support for the sport programmes, enables students to identify with the institutions they are attending by participating in various activities, increases communication between students and administrators, creates self-reliance, independence and positive attitude of students towards the goals of the sports programme and helps to attract more student participants (Bucher and Krotee 1993, Daughtrey and Woods 1971, Farrel and Ludegren 1983, Peterson 1976, Pestolesi and Sinclair 1978, Wade and Baker 1995).

The practice of utilizing students as sport captains in Kenya is a colonial legacy as well as a mandatory requirement for all competitive sports. Due to its inherent advantages and its easy application in the delegation of responsibilities, the practice is now rooted in the administration of sport programmes in primary, secondary schools, colleges and universities. While this practice is extensively used during sport competitions and tournaments, it is however rarely activated to its maximum utility in the planning, organising, directing and evaluation phases of sport programme management in the universities. Given the small ratio of sport administrators to students and the fact that sport programmes at institutional level are actually meant to benefit majority of the students, there is need to critically examine the procedures used in the selection, orientation, in-servicing and evaluation of sports captains.

While most universities in Kenya use sport captains as a form of student leadership and involvement in sport management, the procedures used in their selection, orientation, in-servicing and evaluation and the absence of other forms of student sport leadership programmes calls for inclusion and further improvement. Students can be influenced and motivated to assume a variety of leadership roles within the democratic style of sport management. They can be sport captains, members of sport advisory...
council/committee, sport scheduling committee, sport disciplinary committee, hostel sport based committee, first aiders, officials and be made to assume other roles deemed necessary by specific universities.

The democratic style of sport leadership involves individual and group participation in decision-making process (Wade and Baker 1993). Since what the leader does is a function of what the leader is, it is necessary that sport administrators avoid paying lip service to the active participation of students in the decisions pertaining to administration of sport programmes (Bucher and Krotee 1993, Chelladurai 1985). Although no single approach to problem solving is effective in all situations, modern prescriptions for sport management emphasize, of course, the need for increased participation by affected members in decision making. This leads to greater acceptance by members, better implementation, increased rationality, self-esteem, motivation, generation of more information, avoidance of conflicts and misunderstanding (Bucher and Krotee 1993, Chelladurai 1985).

To increase student participation in the decision making process, sport administrators need to delegate responsibility in such a way that the necessary authority is distributed downward within each sport programme (Bucher and Krotee 1993). Such delegation not only motivates the participants and lessens the administrators workload but also provides opportunities for students leadership training (Pestolesi and Sinclair 1978, Hjete and Shivers 1978).

Wise delegation of responsibilities and power recognises several vital principles. There should be mutual trust and confidence between the concerned parties. The duties, and attitude of authority and span of control must be clearly spelt out. There is need to sparingly apply guidance, checks and controls to eliminate any possible misuse of power. The student leaders should be knowledgeable, have relevant skills, leadership qualities, positive attitude, interest and the will to carry out the assigned tasks (Chelladurai 1985, Jensen 1979).

There is a need to emphasize that delegation of authority to students does not in any way remove the overall responsibility and accountability from the sport administrator. All the programme successes and failures arising from result of delegation of authority to students are attributable to the sport administrator. The system of sport captaincy helps us understand all these principles better.

Depending on each university campus, sport administrators' philosophy, the specific sport activity, and the willingness of students, one can observe situations where the procedures used in the selection of sport captains can be categorised to fall between laissez faire, democratic and autocratic styles. This of course results into non-standardized procedures and inherent limitations that hinder maximum student involvement in the decision making process (Bucher 1973, Daughtrey and Woods 1971). The laissez faire situation can be observed in instances where both sport administrations and students concerned depict "don't care" attitude by not bothering to evaluate the mechanism used to select the captain and the individual's effectiveness in
the sport delivery system.

Some sport captains are selected democratically through election by all team members, continuous performance evaluation is done, and the position is allowed to rotate annually among efficient and prospective candidates. While this approach is recommended, the major limitation is that the elected captains may be the most popular candidates but who lack the necessary skills, qualities, attitude and knowledge that a good captain should possess. Education of members through workshops and seminars can help curb this problem of election through "ignorance of the majority" (Daughtrey and Woods 1971, Wade and Baker 1993).

Through acts of omission, sport administrators occasionally allow the sport captains to be elected by a few members, while some are selected or elected and remain in those positions for many years regardless of their performance record. There are cases where sport captains are directly appointed by sport administrators based on the criteria of volunteer, personality characteristics, or personal subjective considerations. All these are autocratic procedures.

While each of the procedures used has its own limitations and advantages, it is desirable that a wide and cross section of concerned students be involved in selecting sport captains. Of course, the elected captains should in turn have relevant interest, willpower, knowledge, leadership skills, sport skill, positive attitude, personality characteristics, group dynamics and the desire to lead and be led (Bucher 1979, Hjelte and Shivers 1978, Jensen 1979). Leadership qualities such as dependability, reliability, loyalty, responsibility, integrity, courtesy, perseverance and intelligence are desirable for the sport captains (Jensen 1979).

Since the continued success of sport programmes depends on the identification and subsequent selection of responsible students to serve as captains, a wide range of measures need to be instituted to help in this endeavour. Diverse sources of publicity within each campus must be used to attract potential and interested applicants. Specific criteria should be set to aid in the selection process, if the selected captains are to be representatives of most members concerned. The sport administrators should honestly explain and interpret the roles and responsibilities to all prospective applicants. (Bucher and Krotee 1993, Peterson 1976).

Apart from the selection process, the orientation, pre-training and in-service training are equally important in the development of student leadership programmes. These programmes should be geared towards acquainting and enabling the sport captains understand their responsibilities and how responsibilities should be carried out (Bucher 1979, Pestolesi and Sinclair 1978); helps in explaining organizational structure, philosophical background, programme policies, procedures, protocol, building of cooperative team work, improves communication and guidance (Bucher and Krotee 1993, Daughtrey and Woods 1971, Keller and Forsythe 1984).

The orientation, pre-training and in-service training can take several forms that include;

The evaluation phase involves on-going and terminal assessment of the sport captains' ability to successfully perform the outlined responsibilities in relation to the set objectives (Chellandurai 1982, Bucher and Krotee 1993). Management by objectives forms a good basis upon which an establishment of performance standards and measurement of results could be established (Jensen 1979). Various forms of evaluation such as self-assessment, group evaluation, programme progress and achievement of objectives could be used to assess the progress of student leaders (Jensen 1979).

CONCLUSION

Sport leadership at the universities is not an easy task especially now that the universities are living in a democratic environment that demands sport administrators to be more responsible, accountable and transparent in fulfilling the sport needs of the student population. Delegation of responsibility and empowerment of students leadership within sport programmes will go a long way to ensure that sport administrators establish an efficient sport delivery system within the universities. It will be futile for sport administrators to swim against the current democratic wave that demands more students to be involved in sport decision making process. After all, the sport programmes are actually meant for them and it is only themselves who know what they need. Let the universities give them a chance by setting up mechanisms for them to express what they need, why they need it, when they need it, who should help to deliver, and how it should be delivered.

REFERENCES


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