

1986

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Recommended Citation

Mihalik, Brian J. (1986) "Perceived Outcomes of Participation in Synergetic Leisure Programs," *Visions in Leisure and Business*: Vol. 4: No. 4, Article 9.

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PERCEIVED OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION
IN SYNERGETIC LEISURE PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the phenomenon of business sponsorship of leisure or recreational activities. Specifically, it determined the importance of and rank ordered program outcomes as perceived by directors of local municipal park and recreation agencies in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland who have hosted two or more nationwide, business funded, leisure activities. From this pilot study, it appeared that the leisure service director's reported that they participated in these programs in order to expand their departmental leisure offerings with an innovative program that gave participants intrinsic rewards, varied leisure experiences and an opportunity to develop new leisure activities and improve social skills. Concern for the administrative benefits to the host department, while important, were secondary to the provision of creative leisure activities for participants.

PERCEIVED OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPATION IN SYNERGETIC LEISURE PROGRAMS

At the local, regional and national levels, the business sector has been reconfirming their commitment to a public relations phenomenon e.g. the use of leisure or recreational activities as a medium to advertise their products or business (3). At the 1984 Winter Olympic Games, the three leaves of Adidas, the prominent location of ski equipment names resting within the camera's eye during interviews, the Canadian's use of endorsement logos on the hockey uniforms, and Levi's attempt to have all of the buying public in America help pick the U.S. Olympic team's opening ceremony attire attest to the value that business puts on the sponsorship and involvement with leisure activities as a public relations activity.

Not only is business committed to active forms of leisure, but passive uses as well. Apple Computer has given away 10,000 free computer club kits and is sponsoring a computer competition which has as its prizes over \$100,000 in equipment, cash and travel. The Ken-L Ration dog food company for seven years nationally sponsored pet shows

at local park and recreation departments. Thousands of free pet show kits, which included prize ribbons and certificates for all participants were distributed to any agency directing this activity (11).

This type of business sponsorship at the national level could filter down to local activities and cause a continuation and expansion of these public recreation activities sponsored by the private sector. This type of cooperative program is known as synergetic programming. Synergetic programming results when two or more organizations work together on a given issue in a manner beneficial to both. Through a synergetic effort these agencies may expand an activity to an extent which would have been infeasible for each individual agency (5).

Synergetic programs may involve colleges, universities, government organizations, businesses, public schools, volunteer or citizen groups, or private foundations. The level at which synergetic partners cooperate may vary. These levels include, but are not limited to, partial or total funding of a project, offering actual joint programs, providing staff, facilities, or equipment, consulting, providing prizes and awards, or providing a framework for a national program which local agencies may sponsor.

The emphasis of this research paper is business and government-sponsored national recreation programs. A brief history of business-sponsored synergetic programs will help trace the origins of national synergetic recreation programs.

During the 1940's and 1950's businesses helped local communities in a variety of ways including assistance in the health care area, financial assistance to universities and colleges, and cooperation with park and recreation departments in the sponsoring of recreation programs (9). In the 1950's, Charles Vettiner, a leisure services consultant, wrote of the need for continued cooperation in the area of leisure services: "State enabling legislation and a cooperative spirit of communities sound the keynote of all the new trends of modern recreation--cooperation" (13). The most typical early synergetic recreation programming developed on the local level when park and recreation directors solicited assistance from local businessmen to help sponsor a recreation activity. The local gas station's donation of uniforms to a baseball team and the donation of prizes from a local businessman for a holiday program stand out as two examples of synergetic programs (9). However, as of the 1950's a business-sponsored national recreation program was not in existence.

Even though a business-sponsored, nationwide recreation program was non-existent in the 1950's, across the country other synergetic activities were being developed with assistance from the business sector. This assistance in local health care, anti-poverty programs, education, and community leisure programs represented a trend toward acceptance of more community responsibility by business. By the early 1960's business expanded its involvement from small, local activities to larger urban and even national recreation programs. Recreation programs became an important community service function of a business's public or community relations division (8).

The growth and acceptance of national recreation programs occurred primarily because they were funded by business and executed at the local park and recreation level. The Jesse Owens Track Program, funded by the Atlantic Richfield Company, was one of the first to appear in 1964, with a major emphasis on the development of track skills of inner city youth. With additional monies from local companies, the National Hula Hoop Contest started in 1967, followed by the World Junior Frisbee Disc Championship in 1968, the National Tennis Week contest in 1973, and the Ken-L-Ration Kids Dog Show in 1975 (9).

As the 1970's progressed, more synergetic activities sponsored by park and recreation departments and business emerged, providing special events for contestants at local, regional, and national competitions. Through cooperation with major businesses, park and recreation departments were providing leisure opportunities to program participants which financially would have been infeasible for most municipalities (7). Businesses were receiving local and national publicity, generated by the synergetic programs, which enhanced their corporate images (9). While attempting to satisfy a growing consumer demand for corporate programs, businesses did, through some synergetic programs, spur interest in new recreation products, such as the frisbee, or help rekindle interest in products whose sales had peaked in an earlier generation such as the hula hoop (12). Thus, it appeared all parties involved in a synergetic program benefited from the involvement.

A representative of the recreation department in Reading, PA, (14) wrote of using these programs to provide more diversity in community recreation programs:

These programs allow us to expand the scope of our program with little or no cost and with minimal preparation. We love them and are eager to try each new one.

Participants in these programs also may receive intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction, personal pride, promotion of self expression, intellectual or social development, and a sense of accomplishment whether they participate at only the local level or advance to the national level. The importance of these programs to participants was supported by another staff member in the Upper Dublin Township Department of Parks and Recreation, Fort Washington, PA when she wrote (1):

I believe the major importance of participating in "synergetic" programs to be . . . to improve the character of the youth in our community by allowing them the opportunity to compete in what could eventually become a national contest.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Additional businesses desiring to develop and sponsor new

synergetic leisure programs should be very concerned about the perceptions of and motivation behind a local park and recreation director's participation in these regional or national programs. This pilot study may lead to more extensive research in synergetic programs which may help to expand leisure opportunities to community residents without financially burdening the community. As economic conditions threaten to reduce public recreation programs, government park and recreation departments may utilize all business-sponsored programs, encourage new joint offerings, engage in sub-contracting facilities or programs to more cost effective organizations, or solicit alternative funding sources.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Determine the importance of and rank order the outcomes of the synergetic leisure programs as perceived by directors of municipal park and recreation agencies. This examination could prove a valuable planning tool when business or municipal park and recreation directors evaluate new or existing synergetic leisure programs.

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Of the 42 national programs identified by the National Recreation and Parks Association (10), eleven business representative were chosen based upon four criteria. These criteria were that each program should have an emphasis on a leisure activity, be sponsored on a national level, be free to charge to local park and recreation departments, and be sponsored by a business producing a product for profit.

The business representatives were asked to provide a variety of informational items including a list identifying public park and recreation agencies that participated in their business sponsored activity. Of the 11 businesses surveyed, four businesses supplied agency participation lists. Those businesses responding were Lander and Associates which presented and organized Wham-O's National Frisbee and Hula Hoop Contest and Cycle Dog Food's K-9 Frisbee Disc Catch and Fetch Contest, the Duncan Toys Company which sponsored the Yo-Yo Olympics, and the Quaker Oats Company which sponsored the Ken-L-Ration Dog Show. These four companies provided the names from which local government park and recreation departments were to be selected and to be mailed the 18 question Government Survey. Since this pilot study was limited to the Middle Atlantic States, only departments in Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania were included. Also, because the management, administration, and selection of recreational activities may differ in small, medium, and large communities, the agencies were further broken down into three groups according to the latest available U.S. Government census data at the time of this study. The first government group had a population of less than 40,000 people. The next group had a population from 40,001-150,000 people. The final group had populations greater than 150,000. For the purpose of this study, it was decided to survey a minimum of three departments in each state.

Since the purpose of this pilot study was to examine the perceived outcomes of participation in those recreational programs, it was important to survey these park and recreation agencies appearing most frequently on the four program participation lists supplied by the responding businesses. Thus in order to qualify for this study, a department had to participate in three of the four synergetic leisure activities. The park and recreation departments were then classified by the above mentioned population groupings. In population groupings with more than three departments, preference was given to departments appearing on two of the four lists. However, due to the relatively small size of Delaware's communities, Delaware had fewer than three departments in the two larger categories. Thus, a total of 42 surveys were mailed.

GOVERNMENT SURVEY PROCEDURES

Perceived outcomes identified by a review of the literature and telephone conversations with five park and recreation directors, were the basis for the development of a pilot survey of the instrument. Based upon the preliminary testing of the pilot survey, the final instrument was redesigned to improve item clarity. The revised survey, a cover letter and a self-addressed, stamped envelope were mailed to 42 of the identified park and recreation agencies by regular mail. Two weeks after the initial mailing, a follow-up mailing was sent by regular mail. This mailing, identical to the first with the exception of a modified cover letter, was distributed to only those respondents who did not return their surveys. Because 95.23% (40) of the surveys were returned by the follow-up mailing, a second follow-up mailing procedure was deemed unnecessary.

GOVERNMENT SURVEY ANALYSIS

Table 1 Government Survey: Perceived Program Outcomes is a tabulation of the weighted responses by question with corresponding percentages in parentheses. In order to examine each question's level of significance to each director and to accommodate a response ranging from High Significance to Low Significance, a three point weighted system was devised.

When weighting each high response with three points, each moderate response with two points, and each low response with one point, the outcomes were ranked and compared by relative importance to the government sector. It can be seen when weighting all responses, that the outcome most agreed upon by the responding municipal parks and recreation directors was shared by two questions. The outcomes involving intrinsic awards for program participants (Question 13) and the provision of more varied leisure experiences for program participants (Question 12) both received a weighted score of 106. The third most important outcome identified was Question 16, (102) the provision of varied program offerings. Question 3, (94) the provision

of new leisure skills through an exciting unique, and innovative program was followed closely by Question 14 (91) the improvement of social skills through meeting other participants.

The outcomes reflecting the five lowest weighted responses were Question 18, (11) generating revenue for the department by charging registration fees to program participants, Question 6, (57) providing a training opportunity for staff whereby new staff can be observed and judged on their training leadership, Question 7, (57) receiving company sponsored and paid awards for various levels of achievement, Question 1, (72) saving the community tax dollars because these programs are free, and Question 10, (73) enhancing the image for the sponsoring department via the associated press and television coverage. Although the Not Applicable responses were not weighted, Question 18, received Not Applicable responses from 72.5% of those surveyed. Twenty nine directors noted they did not use these programs to generate revenue for their departments by charging registration fees to program participants.

Finally, when utilizing Chi Squares with four degrees of freedom to compare responses for directors in the three previously identified population categories, no significant relationships were recorded at the .05 level. Even when combining population sizes for directors in communities of more and less than 150,000 people, no significant relationships emerged at the .05 level. Thus, the size of the host community did not effect the directors perceived outcomes of providing more leisure experiences, receiving intrinsic rewards, providing varied program offerings, providing exciting, unique, and innovative programs for children, providing settings to improve social skills, expecting high levels of participation, and providing new opportunities for regional and national competition. Identifying with the program, acting as a catalyst for other cooperative efforts, providing motivational tools to continue contest skills, using program equipment, gaining intrinsic rewards for staff, providing recognition for the department and community, enhancing the image of the sponsoring department, saving tax dollars, and generating revenue for their departments also were not effected by the size of the agencies host community. Consequently, this reinforced the importance of a frequency percentage analysis of each survey question.

CONCLUSION

Although the population size is small and makes generalizations difficult for this pilot study, the park and recreation director's surveyed did represent only extensive users of this type of synergetic program. Therefore, it appears that municipal park and recreation directors in the middle Atlantic region of the United States who frequently utilized these corporate sponsored recreation programs, did so for truly altruistic purposes. The survey analysis indicated perceived outcomes in the areas of intrinsic rewards and varied, innovative, and exciting programs for local children. Of the 18 outcomes listed in the survey of government park and recreation directors, only four outcomes (Q. 13, 12, 16, 3) received responses of High Significance from over 50% of the repondents. It appears a

majority of municipal park and recreation directors in the five states surveyed participated in these nationally sponsored, synergetic recreation programs because they primarily were concerned with expanding their departmental leisure offerings with an innovative program that gave participants intrinsic rewards, varied leisure experiences, and an opportunity to develop new leisure activities and improve social skills. Such potential departmental benefits are raising revenue via fees, providing a training opportunity for departmental staff, saving the community tax dollars, and enhancing the department's image via the associated press and television coverage were ranked far from the top when examining the motivation behind participating in these corporate sponsored programs.

IMPLICATIONS

Most business sponsored national recreation programs were developed in the mid 1970's. However, the number of programs initiated in the late 1970's and early 1980's has decreased, possibly indicating that this phenomenon has crested and may start to decline in the coming years. Increased fiscal pressures on businesses may cause the remaining programs and any new ones to face far more corporate scrutiny than in the past. Consequently, when a business decides to enter this area of corporate philanthropy, it should be aware of the requirements of hosting park and recreation agency leaders who deliver the business's program to participants. Businesses should be aware that:

- * The recreation activity should primarily benefit the participant by providing the participant with an exciting, unique and innovative approach to a program or activity while at the same time satisfying the corporate needs of the sponsoring business.

- * The sponsoring business must project a community service motive rather than a product sale motive for the recreation activity. Neither the sale nor purchase of a product should be asked of a program participant.

- * The sponsoring business need not concentrate on departmental benefits such as the ability to generate revenue from the activity, enhancing the host department's image, or providing a training opportunity for the host department's staff. By the department's admission, concern for host park and recreation department's benefits is judged to be secondary to the provision of a creative leisure activity for program participants.

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TABLE 1

GOVERNMENT SURVEY: PERCEIVED PROGRAM OUTCOMES
(Listed by Weighted Response)++

QUESTIONS	HIGH	SIGNIFICANCE MODERATE	LOW	NOT AP- PLICABLE	WEIGHTED RESPONSES*
13. By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect program participants to receive intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction, enhancement of personal pride, promotion of self-expression, intellectual development and sense of accomplishment through participation.	29 (72.5%)	9 (22.5%)	1 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	106
12. By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide one more varied leisure experience.	28 (70.0%)	11 (27.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	106
16. By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide varied program offerings which add variety without competing with existing departmental activities.	26 (65.0%)	11 (27.5%)	3 (5.0%)	1 (2.5%)	102
3. By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide an exciting, unique, and innovative program for local children which is an opportunity to develop	21 (52.5%)	14 (35.0%)	3 (7.5%)	1 (2.5%)	94

new leisure skills or broaden or reestablish old leisure activities.

14.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect the program to provide the setting whereby participants can improve social skills through meeting other participants.	19 (47.5%)	14 (35.0%)	6 (15.0%)	0 (0.0%)	91
2.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect a high level of participation by local children.	14 (35.0%)	23 (57.5%)	1 (2.5%)	2 (5.0%)	89
4.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide an opportunity for local children to engage in regional and national competition.	19 (47.5%)	11 (27.5%)	9 (22.5%)	1 (2.5%)	88
15.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect the youth to personally identify with the program and share a sense of departmental involvement through their participation in this special program.	16 (40.0%)	15 (37.5%)	8 (20.0%)	0 (0.0%)	86
5.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide the motivational tool whereby youth can continue to practice the skills associated with the contest.	14 (35.0%)	17 (42.5%)	9 (22.5%)	0 (0.0%)	85

17.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect that the department's participation in the contest would act as a catalyst for other cooperative efforts between the sponsoring company and supervising agency.	13 (32.5%)	18 (45.0%)	8 (20.0%)	1 (2.5%)	83
11.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect the local department to keep, use, and lend the contest's equipment as a departmental resource.	14 (35.0%)	14 (35.0%)	11 (27.5%)	0 (0.0%)	81
8.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect our staff to gain intrinsic rewards such as personal satisfaction and sense of accomplishment for their involvement in the activity.	11 (27.5%)	19 (47.5%)	8 (20.0%)	1 (2.0%)	79
9.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect the contest to provide local and national recognition for the participants, department, and community via press and television coverage of our community's participants.	9 (22.5%)	21 (52.5%)	7 (17.5%)	2 (5.0%)	76
10.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect that our department's	10 (25.0%)	18 (45.0%)	7 (17.5%)	4 (10.0%)	73

participation and associated press and television coverage would enhance the image for the sponsoring department.

1.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to save the community tax dollars because these programs are free.	12 (30.0%)	10 (25.0%)	16 (40.0%)	2 (5.0%)	72
6.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to provide a training opportunity for staff whereby new staff can be observed and judged on their program leadership.	7 (17.5%)	6 (15.0%)	18 (45.0%)	9 (22.5%)	57
7.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect to receive company sponsored and paid awards for various levels of achievement.	8 (20.0%)	8 (20.0%)	17 (42.5%)	7 (17.5%)	57
18.	By participating in the nationally sponsored cooperative program, we expect the program to generate revenue for the department by charging registration fees to program participants.	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	11 (27.5%)	29 (72.5%)	11

++(#High x 3):(#Moderate x 2):(#Low x 1)

Surveys mailed = 42; returned = 40; % returned = 95.23%