Original Research

Preparing for long-term success: Sport for Development's strategies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Every individual across the globe has been, and continues to be, impacted by the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Sport for Development (SfD) is a field of work that relies predominantly on in-person, face-to-face, high contact programming. SfD's work, therefore, was significantly strained due to social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders. This study compiled interviews with administrators in 10 South African based SfD organizations, assessing how they innovated and adjusted to the pandemic, as well as which strategies best helped them successfully manage change. Major findings include a need for collaboration among SfD organizations, a strong focus on creativity and innovation in the field, and a need for organizations to balance structure and flexibility to allow responsiveness to changing needs. These strategies should be integrated as a focus within SfD beyond the pandemic, as they are long-term success strategies that will allow SfD organizations to be prepared for future pivotal decision points in their lifespans.

PREPARING FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS: SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT'S STRATEGIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission issued a statement about several cases of 'viral pneumonia' in China. By January 9, 2020, the disease had been identified as the novel coronavirus and by March 7, 2020, the number of reported cases globally surpassed 100,000 (World Health Organization, 2021a). What originally seemed a viral outbreak in China quickly spread to become a life-altering worldwide pandemic that forced countries to close their borders, institute stay-at-home orders for citizens, bring business and educational systems to a standstill, and fundamentally change the way individuals went about their daily lives. In late 2020 and late 2021, the Delta and Omicron variants were first detected in India and South Africa, respectively (World Health Organization, 2021b). Although many felt the coronavirus would be well under control by this point, the variants of the disease demonstrate the ways it is continuing to impact lives.

Every individual across the globe has been, and continues to be, effected by the coronavirus pandemic. Although many successfully adjusted to new ways of working and learning, some have faced more challenges than others. Sport for Development (SfD) is "the use of sport to exert a positive influence on public health, the socialization of children, youths and adults, the social inclusion of the disadvantaged, the economic development of regions and states, and on fostering intercultural exchange and conflict resolution" (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011, p. 311), and is a field of work that relies predominantly on in-person, face-to-face, high contact programming (McSweeney et al., 2021). Many recipients of SfD programs are youth and/or those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Kidd, 2008), making access to

alternate versions of virtual programming problematic or in-accessible. Although 80% of the developed world has access to the Internet, this is only true for 35% of individuals in developing nations (United Nations, 2017). Though SfD programs are occurring across the globe, many reside in developing nations (the continent of Africa having the highest concentration of SfD programs; Svensson & Woods, 2017). Therefore, although many businesses and organizations were able to shift to virtual work and programming environments, this was unrealistic for many involved in SfD.

So how were SfD organizations, specifically those working in disadvantaged communities where access to virtual programming was limited, able to adjust to social distancing and stay-at-home orders in a way that continued to serve their participants? Various scholars and practitioners have outlined the changes SfD organizations made due to the impact of COVID-19. For example, many shifted programming to online or at-home models, added new health education topics to their curriculum, supported participants through feeding programs, adopted more user-led approaches, and overall found creative ways of continuing to support their community members (Borkowski et al., 2020; Dixon et al., 2020; Donnelly et al., 2020; Lansley, 2020). More specifically, the importance of being flexible, creative, and innovative has emerged as critical to SfD organizations' survival during this time (Donnelly et al., 2020; Lansley, 2020; McSweeney et al., 2021). The current study builds on these findings by attempting to assess how organizations shifted programming and practices as a result of the pandemic and, more importantly, what strategies most helped them adjust successfully (not only what they did, but how they did that successfully). In short, the purpose of this study was to explore how SfD organizations innovated to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The organizations interviewed for this study continued to serve their participants in a different way during the strictest stay-at-home orders and resumed more traditional forms of SfD programming when restrictions were lifted. Given their location in South Africa, however, they have experienced fluctuations in strict protocols and lighter versions of COVID-19 safety regulations, so continue to adjust accordingly. The data that emerged from this analysis can be useful to SfD practitioners who are currently working through pandemic restrictions, but more importantly, are valuable to all SfD organizations who may face hardships or challenges in the future that require them to fundamentally shift how they operate. Although we may not be faced with a pandemic in the future, there will surely be other times of unexpected change and uncertainty, so better

understanding strategies and innovations that can help SfD organizations remain salient during pivotal decision points is critical. Therefore, although COVID-19 contextualized this study, its applicability extends far beyond the pandemic into managerial and leadership strategies for all SfD organizations who hope to remain effective and relevant to their constituents.

COVID-19 and Sport

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on sport has been well documented. Monumental financial losses due to cancelled and postponed sporting events, job loss resulting from suspended seasons and events, athlete short- and long-term health, and an overall threat to a sense of normalcy that sport brings to people's lives are just a few of the negative impacts (Pearl, 2020; Warner & Martin, 2020). Social distancing guidelines and stay-at-home orders forced most sports into hibernation, and recovery has come sporadically. The 2020 Olympic and Paralympic Games, postponed to 2021 and held without fans in attendance, were an obvious depiction of the lasting limitations of sport during a pandemic (Gale, 2021).

Just as importantly as sport at the most elite levels, youth and community-based sport have been fundamentally changed by COVID-19. City, state, and country-wide safety protocols have led to a decrease in physical activity due to the postponement of youth sport activities, in- and out-of-school sport programming, and even informal play (Bates et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2020; Pearl, 2020). According to Borkowski et al. (2020), "Social distancing measures have meant that organizations have had to stop their regular programming taking away these safe physical spaces and adapt both delivery modalities and content to respond to the crisis" (para. 5). This is not just a short-term issue. In a survey of 290 youth sport organizations in the United States, 46% reported worrying about permanently shutting down due to the pandemic (Silverman, 2020).

The issue greatly effects youth who are the recipients of sport and its benefits. The loss of physical activity results in a myriad of health-related concerns including rising obesity rates, higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases, and a delay or loss in skill acquisition (Kelly et al., 2020; Pearl, 2020; United Nations, 2020a). Add to that the loss of the socializing effects of sport and we are seeing increased rates of various mental health challenges, socio-emotional impacts, isolation, increases in gender and child-based violence, and a regression in sense of community (Dixon et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2020; Pearl, 2020; Pons et al., 2020; United Nations, 2020a; Warner & Martin, 2020). Early evidence has also suggested that some of these

negative impacts are being felt more acutely by persons of color and those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds (Bates et al., 2021; Ettekal & Agans, 2020; United Nations, 2020a). Collectively, sport greatly felt the effects of COVID-19 in many ways, from health to economics. Sport for development, a sub-sector of the sport industry, has similarly recognized its impacts.

Sport for Development's Role

Sport for development organizations, many of which are youth focused, have tried to combat the issues mentioned above while simultaneously navigating the challenges created by the pandemic and its subsequent restrictions on programming. For some, this has meant reframing their primary purpose, either temporarily or permanently. Borkowski et al. (2020), in interviewing SfD organizations, found that adaptations to the pandemic have resulted in three primary goals: (a) continuing to support youth remotely, (b) providing accurate COVID-19 health related information, and (c) supporting other necessary non-sport programs such as feeding programs. A case-study approach to investigating how SfD programs have responded to the needs of participants similarly found three primary foci: (a) love, safety, and support, (b) educational advancement, and (c) provision of essential supplies such as food (Dixon et al., 2020). Other SfD organizations have tried to continue with their central strategic initiatives in different formats, such as virtual programming. Although some have found this strategy successful, it may limit the reach of programming to more affluent youth (Bates et al., 2021). The use of online tools and programming is still developing, so its overall successfulness is yet to be determined (Bates et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2020).

Close to the start of the pandemic, In May of 2020, the United Nations released a policy brief titled The impact of COVID-19 on sport, physical activity and well-being and its effects on social development. In addition to outlining some of the short-term changes that resulted from the pandemic, the brief also suggested strategies for successfully re-opening sporting events and supporting youth during the pandemic. Among those recommendations were a collaborative approach to serving youth (governments, intergovernmental organizations, sports federations, and clubs), and an eye toward innovation, recommending "new and innovative solutions to mitigate the negative effects of COVID-19 on the world of sport" (United Nations, 2020b, p. 3). In short, SfD organizations should focus on collaboration and innovation.

The work that has been done related to innovation in SfD is emerging and has been primarily led by Svensson and

colleagues (Svensson et al., 2020; Svensson & Hambrick, 2019; Svensson & Mahoney, 2020). Svensson and Hambrick (2019), interviewing 48 SfD organizations across six continents found, among other things, that innovative organizations intentionally create spaces for a shared learning process and engage regularly with outside stakeholders. They specifically highlight the importance of external stakeholders in the process. Svensson and Mahoney (2020) focused their work more internally, identifying internal conditions that lead to social innovation in SfD organizations. They cited a need for a strong organizational culture, an entrepreneurial leader, paid staff who embrace change, unrestricted funding, and a flat organizational structure. Specifically related to COVID-19, much of the data emerging suggests that innovation and creative thinking has been critical to SfD organizations who have successfully adapted (Donnelly et al., 2020; Lansley, 2020).

Related to innovation, Ratten (2020) suggested that sport entrepreneurship may play a central role in recovering from the crisis of COVID-19. Ratten (2020) sees crises as opportunities to shift priorities and implement new actions, and the value creation lens through which sport entrepreneurs view their roles may better lend itself to technological innovations, creativity, and more positive end-games. What Ratten (2020) refers to as a crisis may reflect similarities to what Dixon and Svensson (2019) term "pivotal decision points" in the life of SfD organizations (p. 464). Studying one nascent SfD organization, the authors tracked several decision points in the developmental stages of the organization, discussing the logics and tensions at each stage. They note that for SfD organizations to remain sustainable, they must be able to adapt to changing environments and responsd to input from stakeholders (Dixon & Svensson, 2019).

Though Dixon and Svensson's (2019) work was conducted and published pre-pandemic and referred more broadly to a myriad of decision points, the COVID-19 pandemic has no doubt created a worldwide pivotal decision point in the field of SfD. Exploring this further, Dixon et al. (2020) gathered data from youth and program leadership within a Kenya-based SfD organization on how they responded to the pandemic. Among other findings, the pandemic has resulted in three primary impacts on the future of the organization: (a) a refocus on the organization's core values as drivers of mission, (b) internal tensions that need to be processed, and (c) adaptations to program delivery. The authors noted particularly that the flexible nature of the organization was key in continuing to meet the needs of the youth (Dixon et al., 2020). In general, innovation and change seem to be key elements for SfD organizations in general, but even more so

during a major time of change such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Global Theory of Change

Considering the pivotal decision point created by the pandemic, and noting a need for innovation and change, the Global Theory of Change was utilized in framing the current study. The Global Theory of Change was created by Internews, a consulting agency that supports over 100 independent news agencies across the globe, with a goal of empowering trustworthy news and reporting (Internews, 2020a). The Global Theory of Change focuses on four community outcomes: access, inclusion, content, and engagement (Figure1).

The Global Theory of Change is not an academically tested and validated theory, but rather a theory used in practice when working with non-profit organizations across the globe. Internews has over 40 years of experience and is active in 100 languages, 150 countries in 5 regions, and with 750 active partners, all working toward the creation of stable, inclusive societies (Internews, 2020b). It is an organization that is well utilized in academia as not only a source of reliable news outlets, but also as a participant recruitment site and/or case study for academic research (Carlson et al., 2018; Geertsema-Sligh, 2019a; 2019b; Kent & Taylor, 2011).

Internews has been highly involved in the global media response to COVID-19, launching their Strategic Approach to COVID-19 report in April of 2020, helping debunk myths in the media related to disease and outbreaks (Thomas & Senkpeni, 2020), and aiding the Pacific Media Centre in their research and training related to pandemic related disin-

Figure 1. Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020)
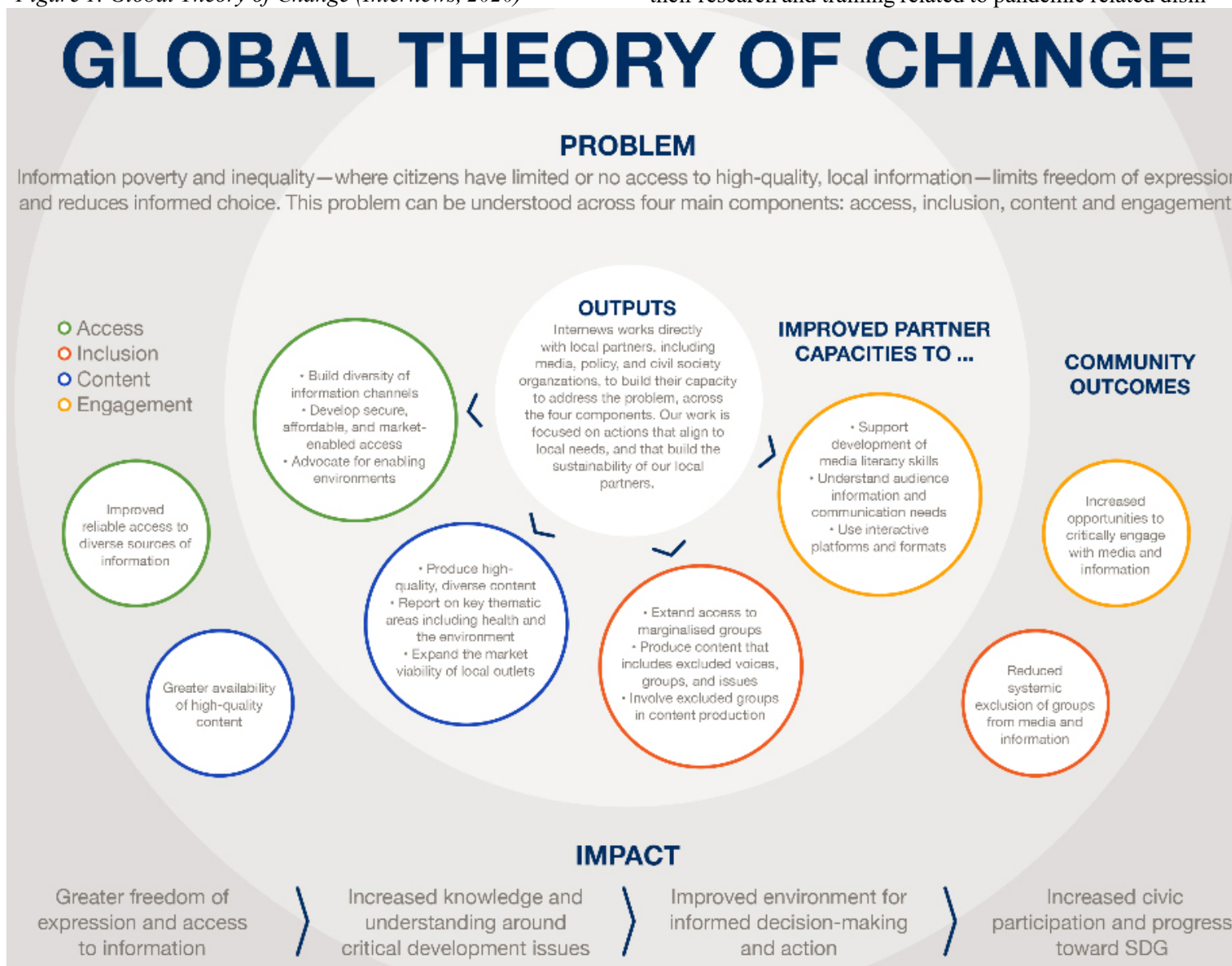
formation (Robie & Krishnamurthi, 2020). More specifically, the Pacific Media Centre leaned on the Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020a) in considering their 'disinfodemic' project (Robie & Krishnamurthi, 2020, p. 179). The theory was also cited as a guiding source of Njuguna's (2020) work on children in development in East Africa. Given Internews' history of work related to international development across the globe (e.g., gender equity, poverty, disease, children, and youth), coupled with the work they are doing specifically related to COVID-19, as well as the linkages to the academic world outlined above, the authors deemed the Global Theory of Change an appropriate, very applicable baseline for the current study.

Through a lens of the Global Theory of Change and viewing the COVID-19 pandemic as a pivotal decision point in the life of SfD organizations, this study was concerned with how SfD organizations have innovated in a way that continued to serve their participants, as well as what strategies best aided the organization in remaining strong during the pandemic. The hope is that, in uncovering strategies that worked well during the pandemic, SfD organizations can become stronger, more flexible programs when faced with future challenges. With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to explore how SfD organizations were impacted by and forced to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How have SfD organizations been impacted by and adjusted to COVID-19 restrictions, specifically related to the areas of access, inclusion, content, and engagement?

RQ2: What innovative strategies were most successful in navigating the pandemic?

METHOD

This study utilized a narrative approach to qualitative research in which researchers collected accounts from participants and attempted to draw conclusions from those accounts (Creswell, 2007). That is, this study aimed to unpack how SfD programs were able to adapt to the pandemic and how lessons learned from the pandemic can be used moving forward from the perspective of those who experienced it. Additionally, a pragmatic epistemological approach was used in this study as researchers were concerned with the practical implications of the research (i.e., how can SfD practitioners use the information when facing any form of challenges or change). Details about participants, procedures, data analysis, and research positionality are presented in this section.

Organizations and Participants

In total, ten participants representing ten different SfD organizations took part in this study. A combination of convenience and purposeful sampling was used to recruit the SfD organizations. Specifically, each of the organizations operates in SfD in South Africa and is part of a community of practice group that meets once a month to discuss challenges, innovations, and funding within the field. The community of practice is open to SfD organizations operating across South Africa and is coordinated by a central organization that works to support and fund SfD organizations throughout the country. The monthly virtual meetings are open to any SfD organization or affiliate working in the country and are typically a combination of a presentation on a certain topic, followed by an open discussion forum. The members of the community of practice dictate the content of the meetings, and its intention is to be a collaborative group that makes all of SfD in South Africa better. This specific sample (convenience) seemed appropriate in studying this topic in that over 40% of SfD organizations operate on the African continent (Svensson & Woods, 2017), and South Africa specifically is a country with a high concentration of SfD organizations. The research team was also strategic in limiting the study to SfD organizations in one country, knowing that the pandemic resulted in differing country-wide restrictions and safety orders that might not have applied across borders.

The leaders of the community of practice group were informed of the study and then helped to identify organizations that may have interest in participating, opening it up to any involved in the monthly community of practice calls. In order to participate in this study, organizations had to be South African-based SfD programs that were active prior to the start of the pandemic and remained active in some capacity during the pandemic. Information about each of the organizations is presented in Table 1. Once the organizations were identified, purposeful selection was used to determine which individual within each organization would be best suited to help answer the research questions (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). Selection criteria dictated that the individual must work for the organization full-time, have been with the organization for at least one year prior to the start of the pandemic, and must have direct interaction with participants through programming.

Procedures

Once participants agreed to participate in the study, a one-on-one semi-structured interview was scheduled with one of

Table 1. Sample Demographics

Organization Pseudonym	Location	Sport/Activity	Participant Age Range	Gender Breakdown	Annual # Served
Amahle	Johannesburg	Multi-sport	6-18	60% m/40% f	450
Thabisa	Johannesburg	Boxing +	7-25	80% m/20% f	220
Mpho	Johannesburg, Cape Town	Soccer	5-25	60% m/40% f	500
Friedrich	All provinces	Multi-sport	5-25	68% m/32% f	15,000
Elna	Durban	Multi-sport (adaptive)	5-65	66% m/34% f	342
Lerato	Stellenbosch	Soccer, Futsal	8-18	58% m/42% f	48
Oratile	Port Elizabeth	Multi-sport	5-35	50% m/50% f	12,000
Kaya	Cape Town, Port Elizabeth	Surfing	10-25	60% m/ 40% f	1,500
Jabulani	Stellenbosch	Soccer	5-19	90% m/10% f	200
Imka	Cape Town	Circus	5-19	90% m/10% f	2,000

the members of the research team. Each member of the research team conducted five interviews via Zoom or telephone. All interviews were conducted between October and December 2020 when parts of South Africa were experiencing some form of lockdown due to the pandemic. An interview protocol was developed as an initial guide. The protocol was designed based on the Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020a) and consisted of a total of 19 questions divided into four sections that correspond with the four elements of the theory (Access, Inclusion, Content, and Engagement). Through consultation with a panel of three SfD practitioners, we operationalized the terms as follows:

– Access: Improved reliable access to diverse sources of programming
– Inclusion: Reduced systemic exclusion of groups
– Content: Greater availability of high-quality programming
– Engagement: Increased opportunities to critically engage with participants

As outlined in Figure 1, the definitions were only slightly altered from the wording in the original theory. The changes broadened the definitions beyond media applicability, to fit an inclusive programmatic-based audience. Three SfD practitioners were consulted on the wording to ensure it remained true to the Global Theory of Change's original definition, yet fully encapsulated primary priorities of SfD organizations. The interview questions that were created in the areas of access, inclusion, content and engagement, similarly adhered to the corresponding prompts outlined in the Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020a), and were refined through the three-member SfD practitioner panel.

In the Access section of the protocol, participants were asked about their communication and contact strategies pre- and during-pandemic (i.e., How have your communication strategies, both within your organization and with your program participants changed as a result of COVID-19?). Regarding Inclusion, program leaders were asked about their organization's inclusion criteria, and the impact the pandemic had on their beneficiaries (i.e., Have you expanded or reduced your population served in any way as a result of COVID-19?). Participants were asked about their organization's ability to deliver content during and after the stay-at-home orders in the Content section (i.e., What new or innovative content have you initiated as a result of the pandemic?). Finally, participants were asked about platforms and other strategies used to interact with beneficiaries before and during the pandemic in the Engagement section (i.e., What type of platforms have worked the best for you in engaging your population during the pandemic?). An additional section was added to encapsulate participants' overall thoughts on the pandemic and their organization's response and plans moving forward. Although the interview protocol was followed to ensure consistency across interviews, researchers also allowed room for additional questions to emerge based on participants' answers (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). The average length of the interviews was 40 minutes. All interviews were audio recorded through Zoom software or through a portable recording device. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and uploaded into ATLAS.ti for data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a three-step systematic deductive approach (Gilgun, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Through this process, theory is used to make sense of the data. In the first step, a list of a priori codes were developed to reflect components of the Global Theory of Change and the interview protocol to guide the coding process (Saldaña, 2016). Both members of the research team worked together to come up with the a priori codes prior to the start of data analysis. For example, the a priori code Communication was developed based on the Global Theory of Change component Access and was related to interview questions regarding communication strategies before the pandemic and during the pandemic. Other examples of a priori codes included, *Reach/Recruitment* (related to *Inclusion*), and *Changes to Programming* (related to *Content*).

In the second step, researchers independently reviewed the interview transcripts line by line, assigning the a priori codes to chunks of data (Gilgun, 2005). Although the a priori codes were used, researchers allowed additional

codes to emerge by paying close attention to patterned regularities and crossover within data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). These additional codes were named and assigned based on the theoretical framework and relevance to the research questions.

For example, some of the codes that emerged during this step were *Sharing Ideas Between Organizations* and *Holistic Development.* This is also the point at which researchers met to assess whether saturation had been reached. As there was great consistency across interviews, the research team deemed 10 interviews sufficient and did not interview anyone further.

In the final stage, the research team met to compare codes. At this time, codes were combined and narrowed into final categories or themes (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Connections between codes were determined based on the theoretical framework and research questions. This process resulted in two broad umbrellas (*Impact/Adjustment* and *Keys to Long-term Success*) and seven themes resulting from the data. Once themes were solidified by researchers, quotes were pulled to illustrate each coding category. Pseudonyms were used in the findings to protect the organizations' anonymity (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Researcher Reflexivity

In qualitative research, there is a potential for the data to be shaped by the prior assumptions and experiences of the researchers (Maxwell, 2013). The two researchers involved in this study both had previous experience working with SfD organizations, particularly in South Africa, and with some of the organizations involved in the current study. These previous relationships may have impacted participants' trust of the researchers and their willingness to talk openly about their organizations. Furthermore, the researchers' previous experiences may have led to assumptions about how the organizations operate.

The researchers were intentional throughout the process to minimize the effect of their prior assumptions and experiences. First, the interview protocol was developed paying close attention to the elements of the Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020a), rather than the thoughts and opinions of the researchers. Secondly, while an interview protocol was used, researchers were keen on allowing participants to guide the conversations in the way that they saw fit. Finally, during the data analysis process, the research team met regularly to ensure that the voices of participants were reflected through the codes and resultant themes. Based on these techniques, the researchers are

confident that their own biases had little impact on the findings.

RESULTS

Results of this study indicated that the SfD organizations in this study were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and were able to adjust in the areas of Access, Inclusion, Content, and Engagement. Furthermore, the results revealed that there were keys to long-term success that came out of the pandemic such as a new focus on partnerships, creativity and innovation, and the development of new content. These themes are detailed in the following sections.

Impact and Adjustment

Research question one was concerned with how SfD organizations were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and how they were able to adjust to pandemic restrictions. Organizations were impacted in each of the four areas of the Global Theory of Change (Internews, 2020a): access, inclusion, content, and engagement. Table 2 depicts the findings related to each of these, direct quotes from participants to support the findings, and related discussion points.

Keys to Long-term Success

Research question two elicited findings related to some of the more positive and potentially unexpected outcomes of having to adjust to the pandemic due to stay-at-home orders and social distancing guidelines, which dramatically changed the way SfD organizations meet the needs of their participants. It attempted to dig into what strategies the program administrators thought most helped the organizations adjust successfully to the pandemic's restrictions, and ways in which the organizations innovated. Although programming was significantly interrupted, organizations were able to identify some positive consequences that resulted from the need to pivot in many ways. The three main themes that emerged as positive strategies for these organizations that will serve them well into the future include: the importance of partnerships, a focus on creativity and innovation, and an addition/renewal of mental health curriculum as part of their programming. Although these were all necessary survival strategies at the time of the interviews, in the heart of the pandemic, interviewees were also able to see how they helped to create stronger organizations that can lean on these ideas in the future to better serve their constituents.

Table 2. Impact and Adjustment Needs and Strategies (RQ1)

		Quote	Discussion Points and Related Literature
Access	No direct, in-person access	In hard lockdown, when COVID first hit, everyone was at home. Now, all of a sudden, you don't have any way of reaching the kids because your only line of communication contact is with the teachers (Elna).	Communication and programmatic access have been challenged during COVID (Borkowski et al., 2020; Silverman, 2020).
	Communication challenges	A small percentage of our people have internet access or disposable income to buy data for messaging or downloading content or whatever. So with the coaches and the staff, we have what we did immediately shift to remote working...So, shifting to Zoom and WhatsApp and video calls, but then that's not at all practical for the majority of the participants (Lerato).	
	Utilizing virtual communication	Obviously with COVID we had to find some way to stay in touch with our beneficiaries, so we set up WhatsApp groups with all the parents of children who's in our program, and we communicated with parents and shared with them the weekly activities we would have done on the beach, and have encouraged parents to share it with the children (Thabisa).	Fully virtual programming limits the reach due to financial, technological, and cultural barriers for some participants (Bates et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2020).
	Utilizing virtual platforms and social media	We started communicating a lot more, and mostly via online, social media, WhatsApp basically, because it's something that all the kids had access to and we were able to get funding to provide data to our kids (Mpho).	Others have found success adjusting to COVID challenges by shifting to virtual programming (Bates et al., 2021; Borkowski et al., 2020; Donnelly et al.. 2020)
	Programming offered weekly through local access TV channel	With the TV show, like a big part of that was about trying to find a way to access the kids at home, in a free platform, because I think a lot of organizations, the natural thing was to want to revert to using social media and Internet. But the reality is most of the kids that we work with don't have access to internet or data reliably. Whereas most of them do have access to a television set and free TV channels. So that seemed to be the most effective way to reach them in their homes (Oratile).	
Inclusion	Drop in participant numbers due to new methods of programming	We also feel like because of some of the strategies that we used, we lost some kids and some members, because the teens particularly, what we realized is that the teens are not just about the food. We actually thought that because we go to communities where a lot of people are underprivileged, we'd think that the numbers would remain the same to some degree because of the food that we offer. But we found that with teens, the pride, I don't know, just they get so prideful to the point that they won't even come through for the food only, or the educational packs themselves (Kaya).	Several scholars have noted the negative impact pandemic would have on participation in sport programs (Bates et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2021; Silverman, 2020).
	Drop in participant numbers as a trickle-down effect of other COVID-related issues	We did the survey to find that most parents who lost their jobs then had to move because the place we're in, is a place in transition. People come here to be closer to town, closer to their jobs, so they come here when they're working and they bring their kids with them. So the minute they lose their jobs, it means then they move with their kids (Amahle).	Silverman (2020) suggests many community-based sport organizations at risk of shutting down completely
	Increase in participant numbers due to new supports offered (e.g., food parcels)	I think during COVID, our kids saw kids coming and they told kids where they were going, so we just increased. They saw kids getting food to take home, so they also wanted to take food home. We've gone up from about 80 regulars to about 220 this past weekend (Thabisa).	Little existing research noting increased participation resulting from COVID.
	Increase in participant numbers due to new supports offered (e.g., food parcels)	We are also providing the incentives in the form of like in the food parcel to give to the participants after completing the programs or the sessions in our programs. I think that is also a way of trying to attract them or bring them into our programs. But also because we know that during this COVID-19, a lot of families or kids are struggling with food (Mpho).	Several others have found that supplementing food services during COVID has been a focus of SFD organizations (Borkowski et al., 2020; Dixon et al., 2020); however, neither scholars note this resulting in an increase of participants.

Content	Limiting or fully cutting sport-specific content, to focus more on acute needs	We are using government facilities, so the rules are very, very strict. Super strict. So to some degree we couldn't actually do any physical activity...no physical activity at all. But, the main thing the parents were worried about was the academics, especially since the kids weren't able to go to school. So for them, our focus was and should be education, education, education, and nothing else." (Amahle).	Many sport programs shut down during COVID (Bates et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2021; Kelly et al., 2020; Warner & Martin, 2020)
	Reconceptualizing 'sport' when it can't look like it normally does	Hand/eye coordination for boccia is essential so one could drill back and look at ways and exercises to enhance the boccia kids' hand/eye coordination. That's what we're looking at,, how can we do what we can with what we've got? (Elna).	Some SFD programs have moved away from sport-specific programming during COVID (Dixon et al., 2020)
	Adding new forms of content to adjust to changing needs	We even managed to deliver $50,000-60,000 worth of food parcels to our direct beneficiaries during the hard lockdown where you were not allowed to leave your homes. Which was never part of our plan, to deliver food parcels (Jabulani).	Dixon et al. (2020) and Borkowski et al. (2020) similarly found educational advancement and provision of essential supplies took priority over other things in SFD organizations during COVID.
Engagement	General lack of engagement due to not seeing participants regularly/in-person	It was extremely difficult to engage participants during this time. We did not get to see many of the kids during lockdown, and when we did get in contact with them, it was almost impossible to get them to do anything (Jabulani).	Several scholars have noted the negative impact pandemic would have on participation and engagement in sport programs (Bates et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2021: Silverman, 2020).
	Empowered older youth to help engage younger ones	We designated our older youth as "psychological foot soldiers" who were responsible for being an ongoing source of support and connection for nutrition and education for the younger ones (Thabisa).	Phillips and Schulenkorf (2016) discussed the use of peer coaches and officials as change agents within SFD programs.
	Empowered coaches to connect and engage more regularly	We managed to get the coaches onboard and then they understood what was supposed to be done. Fortunately, the call center is still in place where we are reaching out to participants in groups of 10 (Mpho).	Coaching is key to SFD success. Schulenkorf (2016) has advocated for engaging community members as 'change agents,' perhaps extending to coaches?
	Better connection to parents to check in on how their youth are engaging	Obviously with COVID we had to find some way to stay in touch with our beneficiaries, so we set up WhatsApp groups with all the parents of children who's in our program, and we communicated with parents and shared with them the weekly activities we would have done on the beach, and have encouraged parents to share it with the children (Kaya).	Non-pandemic related SFD research indicates parental support is critical to the success of SFD's (Lindsey & Grattan, 2012; McSweeney, 2020); Dixon et al. (2020) found that parental involvement helped engage youth during the pandemic.

Partnerships

The importance of partnerships was highlighted by nearly all participants. Because of the variety of organizations included in this study, partnerships look different throughout the organizations, but exist with groups such as schools, non-profit organizations, funding bodies, and even similar programs abroad. During the pandemic, especially at a time when stay-at-home orders were in place, organizations were more fully committed to relying on others for ideas, best practices, and even just conversations that allowed them to relate to others who were experiencing similar challenges. Several participants alluded to the fact that SfD has not always operated in a collaborative way, and the pandemic helped them realize that there was a better, more collaborative way to help all involved. Friedrich stated:

One thing I can say, one thing we've learned from this

pandemic is that collaboration was important over this period, working together. Before a lot of organizations were protecting their piece of the pie because it's all obviously funding and so forth, so no one wants to really share information, whatever. And where this pandemic people open to sharing best practices and resources that they've used and found useful or that wasn't as useful.

Mpho similarly viewed SfD pre-pandemic as more of a competitive environment where organizations were trying to do it all alone and protect their own expertise, but views it differently now:

And then yeah, because sometimes doing things by yourself, thinking that you know better than others, it's not a good way. Because we need to always keep on networking with other organizations so that then we can learn how they do things differently. So yeah, it's one of the things that we are

also doing as an organization to keep our partnership going with other organizations, so that then we can learn from them, gain experience.

Other participants historically operated from a more collaborative spirit but recognized an enhanced dependence on partners during the pandemic. The need to be able to provide continued programming and support to their participants led to a reliance on partners with more experience or resources that enhanced what they were already doing. Thabisa commented:

And it was also done in partnerships with... The private schools we worked with obviously had a lot more educational resources and online learning platforms than the schools that some of our kids were going to, so they also allowed the kids to access those. They gave them special access.

Because they could not see the kids daily, as they had pre-pandemic, they tapped into partners who had valuable resources that allowed them to stay connected and engaged with the youth in a different way. Oratile felt that managing programming through a pandemic highlighted just how valuable their existing partnerships were:

But for us, it's been accentuated during this period with the pandemic, and we've really benefited from working like partnering with other organizations in this period. Also, it's definitely made us realize more the value of doing that and trying to continue to do it. So that one, I would say, a positive from this period that we will try and keep going for sure, is some of the partnerships that we've formed, that have enabled us to deepen our impact and also broaden our impact in terms of the number of beneficiaries that we can reach and what we can achieve.

The takeaway seemed to be an accentuated value on partnership-building and partnership-management, all focused around the very best way to serve their constituents. Whether it was a newly formed belief in the importance of partnerships or a renewed commitment to existing partners, nearly every organization saw this as an important strategy in managing through the pandemic. Even more so, they communicated the need for this to be a continued commitment, recognizing that through partnerships you can better serve your program participants, and can learn from the expertise of others rather than having to do everything yourself.

Creativity/Innovation

A second significant theme, a bright spot that emerged out

of the pandemic, was the recognition that creativity and innovation were central characteristics in organizations most able to shift programming to continue to support beneficiaries during the pandemic. The words 'innovation' and/or 'creativity' were cited by all 10 organizations and appeared 39 times in the interviews in total. Participants acknowledged that the pandemic almost forced a sense of creativity and innovation, but that they rose to the occasion and emerged with a stronger belief in themselves and their organizations. Similar sentiments were shared by multiple organizations. Elna stated, "Something that I've really learned is that our team has a lot more to offer than...it's almost been an opportunity to reveal hidden talents and skills. In our ordinary roles, they don't really get an opportunity to flourish and so that's been great." Imka similarly said, "I think it's about not being complacent, being creative, thinking out of the box. And I think appreciating what we do have here, because I think a lot of people took for granted, it's always going to be this normal." Lerato noted, "I think it just strengthened the sense of resilience and innovation and creative problem solving that we have. So, I mean, who knows what's going to happen in 2021 or even the rest of 2020. But we feel like we're very adaptable, we're very resilient."

Although all participants mentioned this sense of creativity and innovation as a point of pride, some provided specific examples to reinforce how important it was to survive as an organization amid stay-at-home orders and social distancing regulations. Thabisa provided this example:

But we were very reliant on the physical-ness of our gym. The four walls, the boxing bags, the gloves, the equipment, and everything was about being in contact with the kids. That was really in that space. What we realized is that we can do quite a lot of what we need to without the actual physical gym. We've done a lot of park activations and just outside training sessions, which achieve the same thing.

Others provided similar examples such as encouraging youth to create exercise equipment out of items they could find in their home, which is a type of program enhancement that will remain valuable into the future, even when traditional programming returns. Another organization innovated by partnering with a local TV station during the stay-at-home order. Through this partnership, they were able to broadcast physical activity and life skills programming to over 10,000 households for free, reaching a much broader audience than their traditional programming. This innovative idea resulted in a trickle down of other positive outcomes:

But it [pandemic] forced some level of innovation and we

definitely try to embrace that and not lose some of the innovation and different ways of working that we've developed in this period. So things like doing the TV show, to reach further appeal. And coming up with more innovative ways of reaching our beneficiaries. And the interesting thing is that both of those two learning points have a benefit, have clearly been positive aspects for our funders, because we actually raised more money this year even though we lost some funding in this period (Oratile).

Collectively, organizations felt their ability to be creative and innovative was a driving force of successfully navigating the pandemic. Organizations spoke about the renewed level of importance they will place on this moving forward. There was a sense of pride among the organizations for being able to survive the pandemic as an organization that is nearly 100% dependent on in-person programming, and without utilizing creative-problem solving, they would not have been as successful as they have been. Thabisa summed it up as, "Yeah, I speak for all of us in my organization when I say we're really proud of how we innovated during that time of national disaster, and how we were able to keep a source of connection and support open for our kids."

New Content and Emerging Social Issues

The final theme related to pandemic survival strategies revolved around awareness of developing needs among youth. Primarily, the recognition that programming has to change in order to best serve the youth. Organizations included in this study focused their programming on a variety of social issues including gender inequity, health education, disability services, life skill development, and violence, among others. Although each highlight certain social issues, they all operate from a place of holistic development. Mental health arose as a focal point in the interviews. Nine out of the 10 organizations that participated in this study mentioned mental health as an emerging social issue in South Africa, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Although they will continue to focus on their primary organizational goals, participants communicated the importance of addressing mental health to best support their youth holistically. Lerato said:

Well, I guess a big one, which seems to be big globally is just the mental health aspect of it. So whether it's the isolation or anxiety or whatever. I think those things compound the continuous trauma that most of them live with. So that would be going forward something that we're paying attention to...I think as part of the growth process also is the kids are getting older. It's something that we really want to be more in tune with. So during the

lockdown, we did work with one of our partners that's developing mental health curriculum.

The pandemic created rising rates of mental health issues, especially in young people (Kross, 2020), and South Africa was no different. Through regular connection with their participants, SfD organizations saw an increasing need for mental health to be a baseline piece of their curriculum and were working toward strategies to integrate this. Some of the organizations took an initial approach toward mental health involving more frequent check-ins with participants to get a sense of how they were doing. Imka noted:

Our programs team also did a round of calls every three weeks or four weeks to the individual participants. So, we would literally spend a week phoning each and every child we could get hold of and ask them "What's your need?" "How are the family doing?" So, we detect not only physical health, but mental health as well. And just that connection to show that we were still thinking of them.

Oratile's organization similarly recognized emerging mental health challenges through regular communication with participants, noting a need for more focus in that area, "And then the other one that we're starting to also put a bit more of a focus on in and look at in a bit more detail is mental health and emotional well-being related to that [gender-based violence]." Recognition of mental health challenges was consistent across organizations, but strategies for response to it varied.

Some organizations, noting this need, worked toward better training their coaches and/or partnering with organizations who already held the expertise in mental health curriculum. Lerato commented, "So implementing some of that curriculum which will also entail, I think, the coaches and the staff getting more training in how to offer that sort of psychosocial, emotional support, develop trauma informed programs. So I think that's a big thing. That's probably one of the big issues. I think other issues were compounded or exacerbated in the lockdown." Kaya noted, "The training shifted a little bit from curriculum training for how to implement the program and a little bit more to…we focused this year a lot more on theories around mental health, theories around our service delivery, around working with children, but also on young people developing themselves." Finally, Oratile's organization relied on a partner with existing expertise in mental health, stating "We've teamed up with another organization who specialize in that kind of programming. And we're working together with them to do the curriculum with some of our participants, but then also to include elements of their programming in our own curriculums and ongoing activities." The organizations

included in this study showed a responsiveness to emerging social issues in order to holistically serve their participants.

DISCUSSION

It is no surprise that the COVID-19 pandemic drastically changed the way SfD organizations conduct business, at least temporarily, if not permanently. Although many of these forced changes were negative (e.g., less access and engagement of participants, restrictions to in-person programming), the current study attempted to focus not only on what happened and how SfD organizations reacted, but also what positives or innovative practices may have resulted from the forced changes. At such a pivotal change point in the life of many SfD organizations, what did administrators learn that will make them a stronger organization that can better serve participants into the future?

As noted in the *Impact and Adjustment* umbrella of findings, access, inclusion, content, and engagement were all strongly impacted by the pandemic. Interestingly, though, there were both positive and negative resulting actions, with some organizations noting that the changes resulted in more participants, new programming strategies, and altered ways of serving their youth. Similarly, in the *Keys to Long-term Success* umbrella of themes, organizations recognized that they have become stronger program deliverers, partners, and leaders through the challenges they faced and overcame during the pandemic. In March of 2020 the United Nations suggested that two keys to surviving the pandemic would be collaboration and creativity (United Nations, 2020a), both of which emerged clearly as findings in this study.

In terms of collaboration, scholars have historically talked about the importance of partnerships in SfD, though often alluding to strategic public-private or government-NGO partnerships focused on sustainability of individual SfD programs (e.g., MacIntosh et al., 2016; Schulenkorf, 2017; Svensson & Hambrick, 2019). The United Nations, in considering sport an important catalyst for reaching its Sustainable Development Goals, specifically talks about strategic partnerships in SDG17. They note, "Sport can catalyze, build and strengthen multi-stakeholder networks and partnerships for sustainable development and peace goals, involving and bringing together the public, governments, donors, NGOs, sport organizations, the private sector, academia and the media" (United Nations, 2020b, p. 10). What successful partnerships look like, however, is not specified by the UN, but the current study sheds light on this topic, especially related to collaborating with other SfD organizations.

Partnerships and collaborations are nothing new to SfD, yet most SfD research in this area focuses on collaborating with organizations outside of SfD, such as funders, academics, governments, or non-sport NGO's (e.g., Marlier et al., 2020; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2016; Welty Peachey et al., 2018). Some of the organizations in the current study talked about partners that come from outside of sport, such as funders who adjusted support levels to support programmatic needs, or a domestic violence specialty group that was able to provide curriculum around this topic. However, most of the collaborations highlighted in the interviews were with other SfD organizations in South Africa.

Svensson and Loat (2019) discuss collaboration as 'bridge-building,' discussing SfD partnerships broadly, including collaborations forming outside of and within SfD. But generally, there has been a lack of focus around how SfD organizations can better collaborate and/or partner with other SfD organizations for the advancement of all youth and constituents. Welty Peachey et al. (2018) outlined some of the reasons collaborations might present challenges (e.g., competition for resources, unequal power relations, misaligned goals), yet the current study suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic may have brought out more strategic thought around SfD's being more collaborative, rather than competitive, with one another. In short, there are challenges, but the positive outcomes likely outweigh the negatives, so finding models that work will be key. The current study makes a strong case for a model that might be a good starting point: Communities of Practice.

The South African community of practice that served as the population for this study is clearly seeing positive results in terms of collaboration within SfD. The group, which meets via Zoom once per month, typically leans on its own 'experts' within the group to share best practices and lead discussions around challenges they are facing. The result has been a network of like-minded individuals who can support one another as needed in creating strong programming and assessment. As an example, outside of the community of practice monthly calls, participants in this study mentioned contacting other program administrators from within the group to share mental health resources, brainstorm ideas for stay-at-home programming, discuss how to shift funding to meet participant needs, and even consider sharing resources for collaborative projects. These are relatively simple ideas that are having great impacts within programs and are happening simply because the community of practice exists under the belief that everyone will become stronger through teamwork and collaboration.

For SfD deliverers who do not have a formal community of

practice or may work in an area far from other SfD organizations, some models exist that can serve as a guide for those hoping to better embrace the current study's findings. BeyondSport attempts to bring together SfD organizations across the globe to develop a more sustainable, collaborative movement (BeyondSport, 2021). Its newsletter shares job openings, best practices, and stories of success that can be beneficial to others doing similar work. Although this organization provides valuable resources and support to enhance collaboration, it might feel too global for some who want to make local connections that might be more culturally relevant. Initiating a local community of practice may be a jumping off point. This does takes leadership, management, and initiative from a few to get it going, but it could pay dividends into the future, as indicated by the current study. Ultimately, partnerships within SfD may lead to fully collaborative programming or even joint organizations who can serve more participants through more activities; the possibilities are limitless but certainly more attention needs to be given to the idea of within-SfD collaborations, as they appear to have greatly helped the organizations in the current study.

Another important implication for SfD practitioners relates to the creativity and innovation findings. Innovative practices and underpinnings are familiar to SfD. Svensson and colleagues have explored innovation in SfD extensively related to how internal conditions support innovation (Svensson & Mahoney, 2020), the impact of external stakeholders on innovation (Svensson & Hambrick, 2019), outcomes of social innovation (Svensson et al., 2020), and leadership's impact on innovation (Svensson et al., 2019), among other topics. Dixon and Svensson (2019) note that a unique balance of structure and flexibility is important to the success of SfD organizations. This type of leadership, difficulty balancing two competing needs, may play a role in innovation and creativity emergence within SfD organizations. Similarly, Ratten (2020) posits the entrepreneurial spirit, often linked to innovation and creativity, has the potential to play a central role in SfD's re-emergence from COVID-19. The current study's findings demonstrate the importance of creativity in SfD managing through and beyond the pandemic.

Interestingly, the statements made by participants in the current study related to creativity and innovation felt, at times, like realizations the organizations came to as a result of the need brought on by the pandemic. Statements such as "Something that I've really learned is that our team actually has a lot more to offer," "I think it just strengthened the sense of resilience and innovation and creative problem solving that we have," and "I speak for all of us in my

organization when I say we're really proud of how we innovated during that time of national disaster" demonstrate the almost unexpected nature of these realizations. Participants talked about 'hidden talents' emerging and taking 'pride' in how they had been able to adapt. These comments indicate that perhaps the levels of creativity needed to manage through the pandemic were always there, but not fully utilized until they were most needed. Svensson and Mahoney's (2020) organizational conditions for social innovation and Svensson et al.'s (2020) antecedents to social innovation indicate important internal factors that promote innovation, such as leadership, infrastructure, and financial resources, among others. The current study raises the question of development versus emergence of social innovation. That is, how much might an organization's culture of innovation emerge through a necessity for change, such as that created by the pandemic?

One of the major changes created by the pandemic related *to new content and emerging social issues*, specifically mental health challenges. Although awareness around mental health worldwide is on the rise, the pandemic certainly exacerbated the issue (Pearl, 2020; Pons et al., 2020), and previous scholars (Hughes et al., 2020), as well as the current study, have noted the need for SfD programs to integrate coping strategies into their curriculum. This is clearly a long-term commitment from the organizations and one that they feel will better support their participants even after fully emerging from the pandemic. The ability for these organizations to recognize and be open to changing issues and ways of supporting their youth falls in line with Ettekal and Agans' (2020) call to "be intentional about discovering the needs, challenges, and opportunities that arise during the pandemic for youth and the practitioners who serve them" (p. 15). The organizations interviewed in the current study seemed strongly committed to this ideal.

Although nine of the ten organizations included in this study recognized mental health as an emerging participant need, not all were sure how to combat the issue or integrate it into their curriculum. They were all committed to helping, yet the strategy for doing so was less clear. The organizations presented levels of support ranging from more regular check-ins to see how participants were doing to consulting with mental health specialists on how best to permanently integrate prevention into their curriculum. Consulting with other SfD organizations on their strategies, indicative of the collaborative environment suggested above, may be an initial strategy for navigating through how best to support emerging needs.

It is important to note, beyond this, that mental health was the emerging social issue that manifested itself acutely

during the pandemic. So, although improved support for mental health challenges is a take-away for SfD organizations, so too is the idea of being committed to a central mission while also leaving room for growth and development as an organization. Dixon and Svensson (2019) note, "the organization's evolution through key points in its early life course provides evidence of the delicate balance needed between structure and flexibility in hybrid organizations" (p. 463). When a social issue among constituents emerges so acutely, there is a clear need to adjust and address it.

A final note related to the implications of this study has to do with the Global Theory of Change. The Global Theory of Change is not an academic theory, perse, but rather a theory used in practice when working with non-profit organizations across the globe. As previously noted, Internews, who conceptualized the Global Theory of Change, has worked with and utilized this framework in over 150 countries with non-profit partners focused on advancing society (Internews, 2020b). Their work, although media-focused, is not dissimilar to the work of SfD organizations across the globe, though the social element and delivery through sport differ. It also appeared a very practical encapsulation of the various aspects SfD organizations should be considering in approaching their work.

The authors considered more well-known and widely utilized SfD theories in conceptualizing this study but did not feel any of them truly fit the direct focus here on organizational change related to participant needs. For instance, Sport for Development Theory (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011) seemed to have too broad a focus. A hybridity model (Svensson, 2017) covers organizational change, but is focused both internally and externally, considering various dynamics at play; that did not seem appropriate given the focus here specifically on meeting the needs of participants exclusively, so we sought a narrower focus. This process continued and left the research team still searching, eventually landing on the Global Theory of Change. Its focus on four primary areas (access, content, inclusion, engagement), all of which are relevant and applicable to every SfD organization in thinking about reaching and serving participants, appeared ideal in constructing an interview protocol that would meet the needs of this study.

Theoretically, elements within the theory were interspersed throughout several theories that have been well used in SfD literature (e.g., Positive Youth Development, Lerner et al., 2005; Social Capital Theory, DeGraaf & Jordan, 2003; Sport for Development Theory, Lyras & Welty Peachey,

2011). Practically, having implemented SfD programming in the field, the authors felt the foci of the Global Theory of Change aligned well with the purpose of SfD in serving participants. Therefore, this theory, and specifically the content areas of access, content, inclusion and engagement, served as a guide to this study. Although much more work needs to be done to determine its long-term effectiveness as a theory applied in SfD, the results of the current study indicate that it hit the mark, evidenced by the follow up interview question of "are there any other major areas we did not discuss that you would like to include?". None of the organizations interviewed suggested additions. Given that, the Global Theory of Change worked well as a foundation for the interview guide here, though there is certainly more work to be done in advocating for it as a potential theoretical guide in SfD.

Directions for Future Research

There are many future directions to take this study. Depending on how long restrictions remain in place from the pandemic, there is continued information we can glean from how SfD organizations continue to adapt. Beyond the pandemic, however, there will certainly be times of drastic change and uncertainty in the future, and better understanding some of the major takeaways from this study would be worthwhile. For instance, how do organizations create collaborative partnerships that are successful and how can SfD's shift from seeing themselves as competitive for limited resources and rather collaborative for the greater good? Bridge-building research provides some initial strategies (Svensson & Loat, 2019), but this is worthy of future exploration.

In terms of creativity and innovation, what makes an organization innovative and how does the leader's impact influence this? Although the current study indicated strategies that seemed to be successful in navigating the pandemic, they did not dial deeply into the 'how,' which is a critical next step. Some respondents briefly mentioned leadership within the culture of the organizations as playing a role, which is a topic explored in the SfD literature (e.g., Svensson et al., 2019; Svensson et al., 2020; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2016). The current study provides evidence that organizations were acutely tuned into change during the pandemic, so better investigating the 'how' of what worked well is warranted. In addition, in terms of change, how do originations remain structured yet flexible, mission driven yet responsive to changing needs? Some emerging needs occur acutely, while other are the result of mission-shift over time. Understanding how innovation plays a role in these questions warrants further study.

Theoretically, the need for diverse theories in SfD continues (Haudenhuyse et al., 2020; LeCrom et al., 2019; Welty Peachey et al., 2019). As noted by Schulenkorf et al. (2016), a small number of theories (e.g., positive youth development, social capital) are widely used in SfD literature. Schulenkorf and Spaaij (2015) state:

A major challenge for SDP researchers, then, is to develop and apply theory that is meaningful and revealing within the particular context under study, while refraining from over-using, recycling, or salami-slicing concepts for studies that add minimal theoretical or practical value (p. 73).

The theory used in the current study has yet to be academically validated but provided a very practically applicable starting point for the interviews conducted. Testing or reconceptualizing it in a way one might approach a scale development project (validation, for example), should be considered with the Global Theory of Change, and perhaps even other untested theories that might lay a solid groundwork for SfD.

CONCLUSION

In closing, the COVID-19 pandemic, for many, has been one of the most life-altering events they have yet to experience. Although there is hope for a return to normalcy, in many ways organizations will never truly return to the way they conducted business prior to the pandemic. The findings of this study indicate that, perhaps, we do not want to return to business as usual, as we can learn from many of the strategies, we were forced to enlist in 2020 and beyond. SfD will likely always depend on face-to-face interaction, but the findings of the current study would argue that a full return to face-to-face interaction, coupled with what has been learned through the pandemic, will make for stronger organizations who can better serve their constituents in the long run.

Some of the key takeaways highlighted in this study include an enhanced collaborative spirit, a focus on creating an innovative organization, and responsiveness to emerging needs. In terms of collaboration, findings suggest that there is strength in building inter-SfD organizational bridges to better serve the needs of constituents. Communities of practice, cross-organization programming, and collective resource development may be strategies that can work to enhance the work of all SfD organizations, rather than viewing one another as competition for scarce resources. Innovation and creativity were terms that cut across all participants in this study and are clearly topics that are front of mind for SfD organizations in managing through the pandemic. Innovation has been well researched in SfD, but

the pandemic may have provided a platform for it to emerge in organizations who had not previously thought about its importance. Finally, related to innovation, organizations identified the emerging need of addressing mental health amongst their constituents. This study indicated that organizations can identify emerging needs, and want to respond to them, but may not always know the best way to do so. Both collaboration and innovation might play a role in an organization's readiness to be responsive to changing programmatic needs. In conclusion, the pandemic forced drastic change in SfD organizations. These changes were acute and drastic, yet many organizations found a way to adjust. If organizations can continue to build on the changes they made, integrating collaboration and innovation into their daily practices, they will emerge stronger in terms of how they are able to serve their participants and respond to ever-changing needs.

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