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### Implementation

Istvan Balyi tells the story of the admirals of the American Navy meeting during WW II to discuss the German U-boat problem. No solution could be found to stopping the damage to the ships, caused by the submarines, as they tried to keep up the supply of materials to England. As possible solutions were being tossed around the head of the navy spoke;

"I have listened to your solutions long enough! It is really quite simple. All we have to do is boil the ocean. Once the temperature rises to a dangerous level, the U-boats will have to rise. When they do, we shoot them down."

The other admirals were flabbergasted; "But sir you cannot be serious, it is impossible to boil the ocean."

"Let me remind you", the head of the navy replied; "It is my job to design the plan, it is your job to implement it."

For many the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) or Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) is like boiling the ocean. How do you expect us to implement such a groundbreaking way of delivering sport?

CS4L started with Sport Canada and the National Sport Governing bodies. Over time, it has expanded into all sectors of Canadian sport, education, recreation and health. It crosses over all sectors of government. Most of these organizations or associations have or are developing their goals and guidelines for LTAD. Once the working document is developed, the challenge becomes the implementation of the key concepts into Canadian life. As someone who has worked on LTAD for the past five years, I have witnessed many challenges in the implementation. Some of the roadblocks to implementation are:

- System alignment
- Lack of knowledge or understanding
- Spin
- Not ranking goals or values
- Hijacking
- Administrative change
- Structure of competition
- Financial models

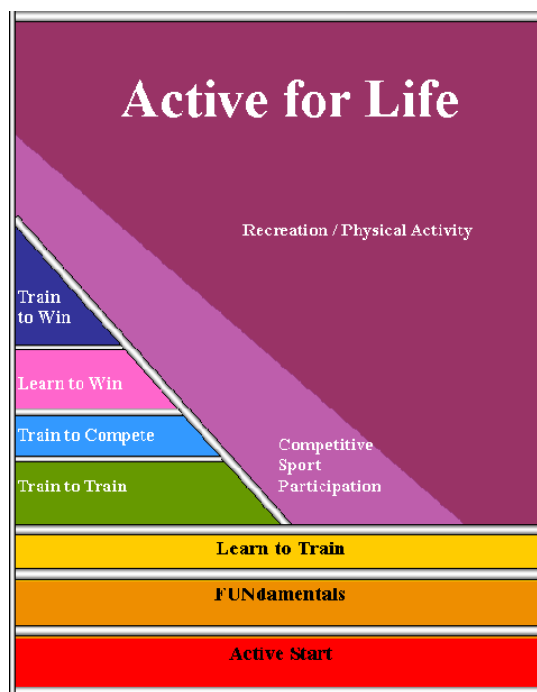
### System Alignment

We have all operated in silos in the past. Each group or organization dealt with its own membership. The problem is that the end user, the athlete, student, or child is involved in many different organizations at one time. For CS4L to work, it is upon us all to break down the silo concept of deliver and become truly aligned and integrated. A lot of this alignment has to begin within in the various levels of government. When one area of government is giving funding for participation and another is demanding results, the deliver is getting a conflicting message.

Organizations are now being challenged to work on the edge of their comfort zones. It is

important to break down old barriers, communicate, and collaborate with other deliverers of the sport. An example is official/coach recruitment, development and retention. In the past, each group looked out for itself. In a new aligned system the clubs and schools, who are the main users of officials/coaches are actively involved in the process. How can this happen?

- Require schools/clubs to identify potential new official /coaches that will enter the program. They are required to offer names to take official/coach education.
- Education of fans /parents about abuse of officials/ coaches. Each group works together to make sure that the competition sites are a fair play facility.
- Aligned and integrated the scheduling and periodization of games and seasons. This is to ensure that players, coaches and officials are not being burnt out.
- Implement a levy on games that goes towards paying for official /coach development.



National Sport Governing bodies are responsible for the guidance in all areas of the model. They are not the deliverers. They can help groups to break down the walls of the silo and expand their scope and depth. The Provincial Sport Government body is responsible guidance within the province. Relationships need to be developed with all deliverers of basketball within the province.

### **Lack of knowledge or understanding**

Most people see the world through their own experiences. We call this perception. We cannot expect people to see things differently if we do not take the time to educate. Counter to this, you cannot educate people who do not want to learn. Time must be taken to invite people to learn. Even after taking the time to explain the outcome, people need to be given concrete examples of the process. The sharing of best practices as possible solutions to change is crucial to successful implementation. You can never relax in this area as new people are constantly being drawn into the sport.

## **Spin**

If people do not have the proper information, rumours and gossip can fill in the gaps. This is why people opposed to change are often successful in making use of spin. Paraphrasing the Microsoft dictionary, spin is:

- To shape public opinion by relating a story in such a way as to influence the desired outcome.
- To invent or make up a story or a series of lies
- Give publicly biased information or to present information in a way meant to influence public opinion

Wikipedia also describes spin as:

- "Burying bad news": announcing one popular thing at the same time as several unpopular things, hoping that the media will focus on the popular one.

I have witnessed all of these variations of spin. It always amazes me how someone who is opposed to change can invent a fact on the spot and it is often not challenged. This "fact" now is taken as the truth. The statement is often anecdotal or has no validity or study to back it up. Sometimes they are outright lies. This "fact" is then used in future meetings as the reason to forbid the change. In order to ensure the implementation of LTAD we need to ensure that only "true facts" are used in the education of the basketball community.

Very often those opposed to change will buy people's opinions by burying the facts with gifts. "If you join my team you will get this wonderful trip and this beautiful gear." This type of statement can often be hiding the fact that the team may not be following LTAD. Players and parents can get caught in the glitter. Association and organizations can spin the CS4L document to justify that what they are doing already meets LTAD; therefore, no change is required. They only use the facts that justify there already existing programs.

## **Not ranking goals or values.**

When this happens, it is often the little picture that can dominate. Very often goals can be in conflict. A common example is as follows: An association decides on a number of goals:

- To increase the number of participants
- To provide a quality experience.
- To ensure financial accessibility to all

If they do not rank the goals very often, coaches and administrators within the organization can emphasize the goal of his/her choice.

Coach #1 - emphasizes the quality experience. He sees this as taking the children on elaborate trips and buying expensive uniforms. Because of the cost, it excludes many children from playing and the roster is limited to 10 players.

Coach #2 - see the first goal as the priority. She wants to include as many children as possible. This coach establishes a no cut policy. As a result, there are no more travel teams and the cost for facilities goes up.

The league administrator decides that the third goal, low cost is the priority. He keeps cost down by only allowing one session a week.

Which person, if any, is meeting the goals of the organization? Priorities need to be established for when goals are in conflict.

## **Hijacking**

This is closely tied to the ranking of goals. When confusion or shades of gray are in policies and procedures it allows for the hijacking of the goals and values to occur. The plan has been developed, everyone has agreed and it is now time to implement. Someone walks in and goes in a completely different direction. This is a hijacking if it is allowed to happen. Sometimes this is completely by accident because the person who does the hijacking was not informed of the goals. Many times, it is deliberate. In these cases, the person often bullies his/her way into getting what he or she wants. In volunteer groups, this often happens because people do not want to have to deal with the other person's behaviour.

## **Administration**

Very often no one within an organization can explain why things are done the way they are. It is similar to a famous experiment done with a group of monkeys. Inside a room, a bunch of bananas was tied to a pole at the top of a ladder. If one of the monkeys tried to climb the ladder to reach a banana, the entire group was sprayed with cold water. The monkeys in the group, not wanting to be sprayed, learned to drag down any monkey trying to climb to get a banana. Over time, new monkeys were brought into the group. The bananas were removed from the room. This behaviour of not climbing the ladder was taught to all of the new monkeys. Eventually no monkey that had ever been directly sprayed by the cold water existed in the group, yet every time a monkey tried to climb the ladder it was pulled back. How often is a new idea pulled back down the ladder because that is not the way we do things? No one knows why we do what we do, but we still do not do it.

Administrators can be the conduit or the bottleneck for change. Administrators who are the conduit are leaders who create and accelerate the sharing of best practices. They accept and embrace change. Those administrators who are the bottleneck often exhibit inherited thinking; "This is the way we have always done it.", is the common reframe. Too often administrators are very busy in implementing a past action plan. They often do not see where new time can be created to implement something new. "This is Wednesday; I always do this on Wednesday's. How do you expect me now to do ...?" If you had a loved one dying from cancer, would you want a doctor who is using the most up to date methods and practices or do you want the doctor who is doing the same thing he/she learned in 1960. Change occurs in all areas of life.

## **Competition**

Recognizing that the adult game is not the game that is played at all stages of development is a crucial stepping-stone in the implementation of CS4L. Having said that, it does not mean that each association or organization goes willy-nilly making rule changes. The modifications that are made are made to assist the athletes in achieving the outcomes of their stage of development. Everyone in basketball has recognized the idea of a smaller ball and lower baskets as part of youth basketball. There are other things beside this that need to be considered.

**What does a competition look like?**

A basketball competition does not only mean two teams of twelve, wearing different uniforms, traveling to a different local and playing a game with two referees. When we duplicate the adult game for children, we are missing the opportunity to help children develop the love of the sport and activity. Competition can be:

- 1 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 3 and 4 on 4

When we play 5 on 5, only 10 children are active. Since only one ball is used, the amount of time that each child gets to touch or interact with the ball is limited. If we play 4 on 4, cross-court in a gym, we now have 16 children being active and we have expanded the time that they are involved with the ball. Drop this down to playing 3 on 3 in a gym with six baskets we now have 36 children active at one time with six basketballs in play. Because the court space is reduced, less time is wasted in running up and down the floor. Playing smaller games also allows coaches to appropriately match children of equal abilities and maturity.

- Jamborees

Each school/club brings as many children as possible. The children are divided into different teams (3 on 3) based on the overall number of participants.

- Skill work

For younger children they need more opportunities to practice their skills before trying to apply them in the game. Baseball has invented Rally Cap to meet this need. The children are divided into three teams. One team plays the infield, the other bats and the third goes in the outfield and works on skills. It made no sense to have children playing the outfield since the ball was never hit there during a game. Many organizations make use of skill sessions before the competition begins.

### **Length of the game**

Why is it that youth basketball games are shorter in length than the adult game? This goes back to the thinking that the youth are miniature adults. It was felt that if they played the long game it would be too tiring on the players. This is true if the coach was making substitutions similar to the adult model, only the top players play. In fact, at the youngest ages the length of the game should be longer so more children can play meaningful minutes. If you only have an hour gym time maximize the playing time. Why only four quarters? Each extra quarter allows more playing time for the children. If we are rolling in a new shift every four minutes there is no need for extend half times and quarter times. The coach can coach the children on the bench when they are resting. Let the children on the floor play.

### **Number of players on a team**

How did twelve become the magic number? There is nothing worse than a coach being forced to cut one player so that he/she only has twelve. I understand how difficult it can be in finding meaningful minutes for these players, but if we look at different formats for our competition these problem can be solved. Many school jurisdictions are looking at no cut policies. I completely endorse this policy as long as we show schools ways to properly implement. It is not a good idea to have this policy and still play the adult game. In some situations, it is directing children to community teams in

the area. In others, it is forming a comprehensive intramural approach in the school. Coaching education is a big part of the process. You cannot expect implementation to take place without helping those who have to do the implementing. Taking someone who is not trained in elementary education and asking them to accommodate a gym full of 30 excited children is asking for trouble. Helping coaches with strategies and techniques to handle the increased participation is crucial. Do not ask them to handle the increased numbers with the same type of competition structure.

### **LTAD rules modifications**

In some cases, we modify the rules to encourage certain skill development. The use of zone defence is an example. By eliminating zones, it removes one more thing that coaches have to deal with. The focus can now be placed on the skills and concepts that are appropriate for that stage of development.

### **Financial Models**

If the financial models for change are not in place, then the change will not likely take place. The cost of change must always be taken into consideration. The main problem is when the funding model is in direct conflict to the goal of the organization. If you trying to promote participation, but the funding goes to the group that wins by eliminating the weaker players you will never achieve your outcome. Since there is such a lack of funding for amateur sport, organizations are often forced to chase the pot of gold even if it does not correspond with the goals of the organization. Very often individuals with money can buy the direction of the association by funding the program. It takes a strong organization to resist this type of pressure.