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Innovation drivers, barriers, and strategies of organizing committees for the Olympic games: an embedded single-case study approach

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ABSTRACT

Research question: Using organizational innovation as a framework, this empirical study explores the drivers of innovation within Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs), highlights barriers that may hamper their abilities to innovate, and discusses strategies to overcome these barriers and enhance innovation capabilities.

Research method: A qualitative embedded single-case study approach focusing on two OCOGs (i.e. 2024 Paris Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games and the 2028 Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games) as the embedded units of analysis was conducted through an analysis of archival materials and interviews with key informants (n = 16) regarding innovation.

Results and findings: Results suggest OCOGs experience various environmental, organizational, and individual drivers toward innovation but also encounter certain barriers (e.g. resistance to change, organizational characteristics, and knowledge limitations) that hinder the implementation of new practices. Suggestions are provided for ways OCOGs can enhance their innovation capabilities. **Implications:** This study adds a new dimension to sport event management literature by applying innovation concepts (i.e. organizational innovation) to the unique context of OCOGs, where innovation has become increasingly important in meeting stakeholder expectations. In doing so, this study contributes to the literature on innovation-related strategies and offers insight on how mega-sport event organizers can enhance their innovative capabilities.

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Mega-sport event; sport innovation; organizational innovation

Introduction

Innovation allows organizations to adapt to evolving demands or discover new opportunities, and thus is often viewed as the crux of organizational effectiveness and survival (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). Although there is no universal definition of *innovation* (Baregheh et al., 2009), organizational studies commonly define it as 'any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption' (Zaltman et al., 1973, p. 10). A unit of adoption can be any individual, industry, market, or organization (Garcia & Calantone, 2002), and 'new,' in this context, describes anything perceived as new by the organization (Rogers, 2003). Scholarly inquiry aimed at enhancing our understanding of innovation within various sport organization contexts is surging (e.g. community sport organizations, professional teams, and sport governing bodies) (Mataruna-Dos-Santos, 2020; Svensson & Mahoney, 2020). Notably, scholars have investigated ways sport organizations are innovating (e.g. Ehnold et al., 2020; Hoeber et al., 2015) and factors that may influence whether sport organizations behave innovatively (e.g. Winand et al., 2016; Winand & Hoeber, 2017). For instance, pressure from external stakeholders (Svensson & Hambrick, 2019; Wemmer et al., 2016), aiming to operate more efficiently (Ringuet-Riot et al., 2013), enhancing reputation (Miragaia et al., 2017), and improving economic performance (Ratten, 2016) can drive sport organizations to innovate. However, numerous barriers (e.g. resource accessibility, organizational structure, managerial attitudes) often hamper innovation (Hueske & Guenther, 2015).

Motives for organizational innovation have been discussed in the sport management literature (e.g. Cadwallader et al., 2010; Gullu et al., 2018). Yet, there continues to be a lack of empirical research that explores innovation in specific contexts, such as Organizing Committees for the Olympic Games (OCOGs). OCOGs are formalized working groups with diverse stakeholders (e.g. local governments, sponsors, members of the media, and volunteers) (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013). Our meager understanding of innovation by OCOGs is an omission within sport-event management scholarship and practice and warrants exploration for many reasons. For one, due to the global recognition and influence of mega-sport events, innovations they pursue can influence the behaviour of other sport organizations (Tjønndal, 2017a). For instance, the addition of sport climbing to the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games programme significantly impacted the development of the sport (Batuev & Robinson, 2019). Byers et al. (2021) suggested the 2024 Paralympic Games use virtual reality (VR) to increase accessibility and implement diversity training to then 'be utilized and applied to other spheres of the sport industry' (Byers et al., 2021, p. 6). Moreover, OCOGs' scope and size, limited lifecycle, and potential for long-term impacts make them topics of particular interest (Parent & Smith-Swan, 2013). Over the years, mega-sport events have become increasingly scrutinized for many reasons including cost overruns and corruption (Preuss, 2019). Consequently, the desire to stage mega-sport events has declined (Kobierecki & Strożek, 2021). Thus, international sport governing bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee (IOC), encourage mega-sport event organizers to adopt new practices to make the Games more effective and less costly to host (IOC, 2021). Therefore, understanding the driving factors for innovation can help organizing committees maximize their innovation efforts and meet stakeholder expectations.

This study answers the call to enhance our knowledge of innovation in different sport settings (Tjønndal, 2017a; Yoshida & Nakazawa, 2016) by using concepts related to organizational innovation (Ratten, 2018). We address the following research questions: (1) What drives OCOGs to innovate? (2) What barriers do OCOGs face when innovating? (3) How do OCOGs overcome these barriers and increase their innovation capabilities? Answering these questions contributes to scholarship in the broader sport event

management field and provides practical information to sport organizations. Specifically, this study offers sport event organizers insight into innovation, enabling them to approach this complex phenomenon with greater awareness, understanding, and strength. This is particularly important given the need for innovation to remain effective in a continuously evolving environment (Ratten, 2018).

Conceptual framework

Damanpour's (2020) conceptualization of organizational innovation served as the guiding framework for this study. Organizational innovation is the adoption of a behavior or idea that is new to an organization (Zaltman et al., 1973). Many factors can encourage organizational innovation, such as consumer demands, keeping up with competitors, and leadership expectations (Van de Ven, 1993). Contrastingly, innovation barriers are factors that 'impede, delay, or completely block innovation' (Hueske & Guenther, 2015, p. 114) (e.g. resource scarcity or poor communication and knowledge management) (Rogers, 2003). Identifying these barriers is essential for organizations to develop strategies to overcome them (D'Este et al., 2012).

Drivers of and barriers to innovation are often categorized as either internal (i.e. individual or practices within the organization) or external (e.g. environmental elements) (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010; Thun & Müller, 2010). However, scholars have called for more multi-level approaches in innovation research (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). Thus, we use Damanpour's (2020) three main categories of organizational innovation: environmental, organizational, and individual.

Environmental drivers, barriers, and strategies

An organization's environment consists of stakeholders outside of its boundaries whose actions can impact its behavior (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Child, 1997). An environment can be broken into two parts: the operational environment and the general environment (Damanpour, 2020). The *operational environment* (i.e. micro-environment) includes sectors that closely surround and interact with an organization. For example, customers, suppliers, and competitors are 'key stakeholders who are affected by an innovation or who can affect it' (Hueske & Guenther, 2015, p. 116). The operational environment is embedded in the general environment.

The general environment consists of an array of macro-level social, legal, technological, economic, and political factors that can significantly impact an organization's incentives and capabilities for innovation (Damanpour, 2020). For instance, the commercialization of technological developments often influences organizations to adopt and implement new technologies more efficiently (Zhang et al., 2019). Given the impact an environment has on an organization embedded within it, internal stakeholders often establish strategic relationships with external entities to obtain various resources (e.g. knowledge, financial, human) to enhance their innovation capacity (Chesbrough, 2003). This strategic approach, coined by Henry Chesbrough in 2003, is known as open innovation, which postulates that large organizations should not view innovation as a purely internal matter.

Organizational drivers, barriers, and strategies

An organization is 'a stable system of individuals who work together to achieve common goals through a hierarchy of ranks and a division of labor' (Rogers, 2003, p. 404). An organization's structure (i.e. size and complexity) can influence the innovation process (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006). However, findings are mixed regarding how structure affects innovation (Camisón-Zornoza et al., 2004; Damanpour, 1992). Some research suggests that larger, more complex organizations cultivate innovation through already existing systems (e.g. research and development departments and marketing expertise) (Damanpour, 1992), whereas other studies have found that simple organizational structures with smaller staff sizes can promote innovation through effective communication and greater flexibility (e.g. Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012). There is also conflicting evidence on the role of lacking resources, as it might hamper an organization's innovation capabilities (Hueske & Guenther, 2015) or be a significant motivator (Winand et al., 2013).

Perhaps the most critical factor is organizational culture. Organizational culture can be defined as a 'complex set of values, beliefs, assumptions, and symbols that define the way in which a firm conducts its business' (Barney, 1986, p. 657). Existing literature has established a connection between culture and innovation (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). For instance, non-profit sport organizations with pro-innovation culture (e.g. encouraging new thinking and risk) resulted in employees meeting their mission of social change more effectively (Svensson & Mahoney, 2020). However, an innovation that does not align with an organization's overall culture and operational strategy can reduce their effectiveness (Arevalo & Aravind, 2011; Li et al., 2018; Naqshbandi & Kamel, 2017). Reduced effectiveness is not the only possible negative outcome of innovation. Innovation is typically perceived as inherently positive, often leaving negative innovation outcomes (e.g. competitive pressure, disruptions, and employee burnout) overlooked (Khessina et al., 2018).

Individual drivers, barriers, and strategies

Innovation often depends on the abilities and attitudes of individuals in the organization (Anderson et al., 2004). Specifically, those in leadership positions directly influence strategy, expectations, allocation of resources, and implementation of policies (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010; Damanpour, 2020; Wolfe, 1994). Thus, a significant amount of research has explored various managerial characteristics regarding innovation (e.g. demographics, personalities, and behaviors) (Damanpour, 2020). Skilled leaders with a positive attitude toward and understanding of innovation promote organization-wide adoption of innovation (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010).

Conversely, managers and employees who are resistant to change can hinder innovation (Beheshtifar et al., 2012). Leaders can implement strategies to enhance employee innovation, such as giving them the freedom to approach challenges differently (Katz, 1964) and praising successfully implemented initiatives (Aman et al., 2018; Stowe & Grider, 2014). Moreover, sharing knowledge among internal departments stimulates innovation by encouraging employees to circulate creative thinking (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998).

Literature review

Innovation in sport organizations

Sport organizations have emerged as an interesting context for scholars to explore the phenomenon of innovation. There is an increasing body of literature on organizational innovation in nonprofit sport organizations (NPSOs) (e.g. local sport clubs, sport councils, and sport federations) due to the greater challenges NPSOs face competing for memberships and resources (e.g. financial, human, infrastructure) (Corthouts et al., 2021; Delshab et al., 2022; Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2013, 2016). Again, however, findings are mixed. Some scholars have argued that resource scarcity makes non-profit organizations risk-averse and reluctant to innovate (Hull & Lio, 2006), whereas others have found that having limited resources can foster innovation within NPSOs (Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2013).

Leaders often drive innovation in sport settings (Tjønndal, 2017b). Hoeber and Hoeber (2012) indicated that leadership commitment and a pro-innovation board of directors were the primary managerial determinants of innovation in a Canadian community sport organization that adopted a new technology. Notional governing bodies of sport with leaders who created a pro-innovation culture had greater medal counts, financial resources, and memberships (Harris et al., 2021). In addition to leadership, organizational culture and infrastructure, financial resources, and paid staff are necessary preconditions for social innovation in sport (Svensson & Mahoney, 2020). Corthouts and colleagues (2020), however, found paid staff to have no significant impact on implementing innovation in voluntary sport clubs.

Researchers have also explored the role of external pressures in NPSO innovation. NPSOs often feel the need to innovate given stakeholders' expectations for more professionalized service and better products (Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2016). Yet, not all sport organizations favor innovation (Hull & Lio, 2006; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Winand et al., 2013), especially those with long histories and rich traditions (Smith & Shilbury, 2004). The importance of tradition in many sport contexts can create a desire to maintain the status quo and lower environmental pressures to change (Winand et al., 2013). Other barriers, such as stakeholder conflict, can prevent sport organizations from successfully adopting innovations (Caza, 2000). In response, scholars have identified and discussed strategies implemented by sport organizations to enhance their innovation capabilities, such as establishing strategic external partnerships (Svensson & Hambrick, 2019), creating programs that foster innovative initiatives (Jones et al., 2022), and enhancing organizational cooperation and communication (Tjønndal, 2021).

Although these studies offer meaningful insights into innovation, inconsistent findings support the implications that innovation is a context-specific phenomenon (Baregheh et al., 2009). Moreover, while various types of sport organizations (e.g. community, voluntary, national) have been studied, more research into sport events' innovation is needed (Yoshida & Nakazawa, 2016). To fill this gap, our research focuses on the innovation drivers, barriers, and strategies of OCOGs. In addition to the lack of scholarly work on this topic, mega-sport event organizing committees provide a novel context to explore innovation of sport events that are 'elevated above ordinary life' (Getz, 1989, p. 125). The unique lifecycle, traditions, status, and relative infrequency (Ritchie, 1984) of OCOGs suggest the motives, methods, and challenges of OCCG innovation would be

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similarly unique. Thus, further investigation of innovation in this context provides practical implications for Olympic stakeholders and understanding innovation more broadly as a context-specific phenomenon.

Method

This paper uses an exploratory embedded single-case study design to enhance our understanding of the innovation drivers, barriers, and strategies experienced by OCOGs. Exploratory case study approaches are viable when addressing gaps in knowledge and seeking to answer a 'how' question about a social phenomenon (i.e. innovation) in a contemporary setting (Yin, 2018). Previous studies employ exploratory case study approaches to facilitate meaningful empirical research on innovation in sport organizations (e.g. Best et al., 2021; Harris et al., 2021). Specifically, an embedded single-case study design includes a context, single case, and embedded units of analysis (Yin, 2018). In the context of the Olympic Games, the case of this study pertains to OCOGs with POCOG and LAOCOG serving as the embedded units of analysis.

Embedded units of analysis

In 2017, the IOC awarded the cities of Paris and Los Angeles the rights to host the 2024 and 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, respectively. The 2024 Paris Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (POCOG) and the 2028 Los Angeles Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (LAOCOG) are ideal embedded units of analysis for several reasons. First, innovation is integral to their vision statements. POCOG's candidature file states, 'In 2024, and in the years before, we dream of welcoming the IOC and the entire Olympic family, and again, collaborating to stage the innovative and inspiring Games that will connect, inspire, and engage – throughout France, Europe, and the world' (p. 13). Similarly, LAOCOG's candidature file states that '[LAOCOG] will create a transformative Olympic Games utilizing our city's ideal climate, its unparalleled culture of creativity and innovation, and its youthful energy to reimagine a Games that delivers the ultimate personalized experience [...]' (2016, p. 1).

Second, POCOG and LAOCOG have both already demonstrated innovative initiatives years before staging their events. For instance, POCOG is the first OCOG to establish an innovation department within their organizational structure (European Olympic Committees, 2021). Moreover, the Games have historically been represented by one emblem, but LAOCOG released 26 different emblems created by a range of people, including Olympic athletes (e.g. Alex Morgan), celebrities (e.g. Reese Witherspoon), local creatives (e.g. tattoo artist Dr. Woo) chefs (e.g. Jorge Alvarez), and social justice leaders (e.g. Rachel Sumekh).

Furthermore, POCOG and LAOCOG have both similar and different organizational characteristics. At the time of this study, both OCOGs were in the pre-event phase, which consists of strategic planning and decision-making (Bohlmann & Van Heerden, 2005). However, POCOG and LAOCOG are in different geographical regions, offering the possibility of findings that are unique to each context and that could therefore expand the generalizability of the results.

Data collection

A case study approach emphasizes the importance of triangulation or gathering data from varied sources to confirm and justify the researchers' interpretations (cf. Yin, 2018; Miles et al., 2014). Data sources included publicly available documents of significance (i.e. archival material, official documents, website information) about POCOG and LAOCOG and innovation, such as IOC reports, OCOG bid books, candidature files, press releases, and online news articles. In total, 466 pages of documentation were reviewed. Such documents are considered stable, unobtrusive, specific, and broad sources of evidence (Yin, 2018). These materials helped the researchers identify key stakeholder contacts. The documents, therefore, served as secondary data sources by giving way to interviewees' perspectives (Bowen, 2009).

Using purposive sampling (cf. Rubin & Rubin, 2011), semi-structured interviews were conducted with informants from key stakeholder groups: OCOGs (i.e. POCOG and LAOCOG); National Olympic Committees (NOCs), including the Unites States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC); and the parent organization of the Olympics, the IOC. Interviewees had appropriate knowledge of the OCOGs' inner workings since many were highly experienced and well-respected insiders in their field. Such individuals exhibit great influence, authority, or power within a collective group (i.e. OCOGs) (Zuckerman, 1972). Researchers also examined the interviewee's previous working experiences to provide support for their innovation expertise before the interview. Moreover, participants were asked to describe their understanding of innovation that corresponded to how it is explained and explored in this study.

In total, 16 individuals with first-hand insight into OCOG innovation were interviewed and given a numeric code to protect their identity. Interviews lasted between 17 and 80 min, depending upon the interviewee's availability and knowledge regarding the research topic. Interviews with important individuals are sometimes shorter (e.g. 17 mins) due to their limited availability; however, their insights are particularly meaningful given their significant role (Harvey, 2011). Additional interviewee information can be found in Table 1.

Interviewees were initially identified from a review of documents and then contacted by email. Often an interviewee would recommend other protentional informants who could be of interest to this study (i.e. chain referral sampling) (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Data saturation occurred by approximately interview 12 as no new information was attained, further coding was not feasible, and enough information was provided to replicate the study (Fusch & Ness, 2015). All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed by Rev, an online software application. To ensure accuracy, the lead researcher thoroughly reviewed the transcripts and sent them to each interviewee for confirmation (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). No amendments were made.

Data analysis

A general content analysis of the collected data was conducted using Atlas.ti to facilitate our coding process. Specifically, we used Saldaña's (2021) three-stage approach. This

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Table 1. Interviewee desc	riptions.
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Stakeholder Group	Interviewees	Interviewee Code	Interview Duration (in minutes)
Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games	Paris Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games	1	58
		2	67
		3	61
		4	58
		5	63
	L.A. Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games	6	80
		7	35
		8	85
		9	40
		10	36
		11	17
		12	32
National Olympic Committee	United Sates Olympic and Paralympic Committee	13	53
		14	51
		15	25
Parent Organization	International Olympic Committee	16	34

approach includes first identifying initial codes (i.e. first-cycle), recoding and categorizing those initial codes into corresponding words or phrases that explicitly describes some segment of the data (i.e. second-cycle), and lastly, categories are identified to provide an overall description of the categorized codes (i.e. third-cycle). Thus, first-cycle coding consisted of deductive and inductive coding (Miles et al., 2014). For deductive coding, the lead researcher created a preliminary code list based on the existing literature that frames this study, including environmental, organizational, and individual factors that often impact organizational innovation. Inductive coding enabled new codes (e.g. time, communication, external relationships) to be identified or established (Miles et al., 2014).

Next, second-cycle coding involved identifying patterns and relationships among the first-cycle coded data. Major factors of innovation-related drivers, barriers, and strategies and specific sub-factors came to fruition that helped to thread the data together. In terms of drivers, several factors that encourage innovation proposed by Rogers (2003) appeared (e.g. consumer demands, organizational culture, and proinnovation leadership). Similarly, common factors from existing innovation barriers (e.g. internal knowledge constraints) and strategy (e.g. external partnerships) literature also occurred. Additional sub-factors were created inductively, representing the unique innovation-related pressures (e.g. IOC recommendation), barriers (e.g. temporary organization lifecycle), and strategies (e.g. previous Olympic hosts) specific to this context.

Finally, selective coding enabled the researchers to provide illustrative examples of the major and sub-factors from the data. A figure was developed that embodies the study's findings by illustrating what drives OCOGs to be innovative, the barriers that may prevent them from doing so, and strategies that can be employed to enhance OCOGs' innovation capabilities (see Figure 1). These findings move beyond existing research that often explores these factors (i.e. drivers, barriers, and strategies) in insolation.



Figure 1. Innovation drivers, barriers, and strategies of OCOGs.

Findings

Employing Damanpour's (2020) conceptual framework of organizational innovation, this study focused on the three central elements of innovation by OCOGs (i.e. drivers, barriers, and strategies) at three levels of analysis (i.e. environmental, organizational, and individual). In doing so, major factors were identified. These findings and sample quotes from the data will be presented in this section and have been summarized in Table 2.

Drivers of innovation

As shown in Figure 1, three major innovation drivers were identified in this research context: external pressures (i.e. sponsor expectations, IOC recommendations, consumer demands, athlete experience), organizational identity (i.e. organizational culture, previous hosting image); and internal leaders (i.e. pro-innovation leadership).

External pressure

Most notably, the existing relationships between The Olympic Partners (TOP) and host OCOGs resulted in interviewees feeling that 'the commercial partners put pressure on the OCOGs to make sure they are innovative' (Interviewee 1). This commercial pressure was due to TOP sponsors seeking a return of investment by 'using the biggest event in the

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Element	Major Factors	Sub-factors	Example Quotes from the Data
Drivers	External pressure	Sponsor expectations	'The commercial partners put pressure on the OCOGs to make sure they are innovative' (Interviewee 1).
		IOC recommendations	'Innovative solutions must be continuously explored to reduce costs and optimize revenues' (IOC, 2021, p. 7).
		Consumer demands	'We are trying to drive for change because people are evolving. Consumers are changing their demands' (Interviewee 8).
		Athlete experience	'We want to be innovative and think differently that is relevant for the athletes' (Interviewee 4).
	Organizational identity	Organizational culture	'Innovation is a core value and something we use for our own personal objectives' (Interviewee 4).
		Previous hosting image	'There is so much pressure on what '84 delivered to the movement from a commercial innovation perspective that we cannot host the Games in L.A. and not strive to be innovative in our approach' (Interviewee 15).
	Leadership traits	Pro-innovation leadership	'Our leaders bring a background of interruption and innovation and bring that expertise to the L.A. 2028 Games' (Interviewee 11).
Barriers	Resistance to change	Maintain tradition	'[The IOC] are more traditional, and they do not always see an issue with how things have been done in the past' (Interviewee 8).
	Organizational characteristics	Temporary lifecycle	'Sometimes being innovative has to be pushed aside so the OCOGs can deliver what they were asked for within the time constraints they have' (Interviewee 1).
		Stakeholder complexity	'Innovation is stifled when we are expected to please everybody' (Interviewee 9).
	Knowledge limitations	Lack of innovation experience	'People who can think purely about innovation and have the ability to actually strategize and execute is a resource that we are probably lacking' (Interviewee 8).
Strategies	External relationships	Previous Olympic hosts	'There is an observer program in place that allows OCOGs to learn and build on that for each edition' (Interviewee 12).
		Industry partners	'We relied on establishing relationships to help make us smarter and deliver innovations along the way' (Interviewee 15).
	Formalize systems	Innovation specialists Pilot testing	'We have a tech and innovation group' (Interviewee 9). 'It takes time getting new things right, so we test and pilot them often' (Interviewee 10).
	Informal knowledge sharing	Internal communication	'I will often jump on the phone with someone and literally just share what I know about innovation so others can have a better understanding' (Interviewee 8)

Table 2. Coded data themes and sub-themes.

world as a platform to showcase their innovative capabilities and be seen as innovative and cutting edge' (Interviewee 12). This is best described by Interviewee 7:

The price point that the LA28 sponsorship package is being sold for is one that many companies cannot afford, so you are only getting certain kinds of companies who are expected to experience a lot in return in terms of innovation.

In addition to experiencing pressure to be innovative from sponsors, the OCOGs also felt pressure from the IOC. Specifically, in 2021 the IOC Executive Board established a strategic roadmap: *Olympic Agenda 2020* + *5: 15 Recommendations*. In the report, the IOC states that 'innovative solutions must be continuously explored to reduce costs and optimize revenues, while delivering key legacies prior to and after the Olympic Games' (2021, p. 7). As a result, interviewees expressed that there was 'pressure to host the Games differently' (Interviewee 4).

Several interviewees also commented that the OCOGs feel pressure 'to make the Games spectacular and innovative for people who watch' them (Interviewee 5). Interviewee 8 stated, 'it is important to innovate for consumers because their demands are evolving, and if OCOGs do not keep up with that innovation and have something ready for our fans, then we missed them.' The OCOGs also see all Olympic and Paralympic athletes as key stakeholders within the Olympic Movement. Therefore, enhancing the overall Olympic experience for participating athletes was an important driver for LAOCOG and POCOG to be innovative. As Interviewee 4 stated, the OCOGs 'want to be innovative and think differently than what has been done before for the athletes.' For instance, stakeholders of LAOCOG recognized that 'there is a problem with the way athletes make money and are employed' (Interviewee 8). This problem led to LAOCOG implementing the Athlete Marketing Program (AMP) initiative. AMP is 'the first time in Olympic history that athletes can be directly connected to sponsors to drive more revenue for athletes and add more value to sponsors' (Interviewee 14).

Organizational identity

Evidence suggested that the values and beliefs of the OCOGs resulted in an organizational culture that encouraged team members to be innovative. For instance, 'creating a creative and innovative Olympic Games experience that benefits everyone is at the core of Paris 2024s mission' (IOC, 2019, p. 1). This was supported by Interviewee 4, who said that 'innovation is one of the key elements of [POCOG's] vision. It is really a core value and something we use for our own personal objectives.' Similarly, LAOCOG 'was not built on just producing the Olympic Games. And with that as our culture, it allows us to think about things a bit differently and be more innovative' (Interviewee 11). Their organizational culture was also key in motivating them to implement 'innovative initiatives that last longer than the Games they host' (Interviewee 9). Specifically, POCOG wanted their 'innovative initiatives to be a legacy so people can look back and say it started here with us' (Interviewee 3).

All OCOGs are expected to innovate in some capacity (e.g. including new technological developments and adding new events to the programme). However, these are more likely incremental because such changes are expected. Conversely, Paris and L.A. previously hosted editions of the Olympic Games that could be considered radically innovative as they both implemented revolutionary initiatives that changed how the Games were managed and experienced by participants and viewers. For instance, in 1924, Paris created the first Olympic Village in history and L.A. 1984 established the first sponsorship program that altered how the Games were funded. Given their previous Olympic innovative initiatives, it was evident that both cities' 'history of innovation around the Olympic Games' (Cruz, 2019, p. 1) created an image that they wanted to maintain. Specifically, whether incrementally or radically, 'Paris 2024 wants to feel that we are continuing to raise the bar, and that's where innovation comes in' (Interviewee 3). Similarly, a LAOCOG member said, 'there is so much pressure on what '84 delivered to the Movement from a commercial innovation perspective, that we cannot host the Games in L.A. with all it has to offer and not strive to be innovative in our approach' (Interviewee 12).

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Leadership traits

Findings also revealed that individuals inside the OCOGs drove innovation. Notably, pro-innovation leadership was a sub-factor as leaders within both POCOG and LAOCOG were considered to be highly supportive of innovative initiatives. For instance, Interviewee 5 noted that employees feel the need to be innovative because 'as soon as you hear our President, Tony, speak, he is always talking about innovation.' Likewise, for LAOCOG being innovative 'comes down to leadership. Our leaders bring a background of interruption and innovation and bring that expertise to the L.A. 2028 Games' (Interviewee 14). This is further echoed by Interviewee 8:'innovating starts with having a chairperson like ours who has been innovative their entire life. When you have a leader like that, who wants to continue to do innovative things, it all just starts there for us'.

Innovation barriers

Despite there being various factors that drive OCOGs to be innovative, barriers to innovation were present: resistance to change, managing intangible resources, and internal knowledge constraints.

Resistance to radical change

Findings revealed that the IOC's desire to maintain tradition within the Olympic Movement hindered the OCOG's ability to innovate. Albeit Interviewee 15 stated that they believe the 'IOC is definitely more open to innovation recently' (Interviewee 15); yet, it is also 'risk-averse' (Interviewee 9). The risk adversity of the IOC is said to be 'partly because they are more traditional, and they do not always see an issue with how things have been done in the past' (Interviewee 8). For instance, 'the IOC says, 'Here is your playbook.' If [OCOGs] do not like it, it's important to have people who will challenge it and not mind if the IOC say not to challenge it but continue to push anyways' (Interviewee 8). Consequently, 'being really innovative is a culture shock for an organization like the IOC' (Interviewee 13). Therefore, the IOC's resistance 'is a factor that can make it hard for OCOGs to be innovative' (Interviewee 7).

Organizational characteristics

The natural characteristics of OCOGs that often make them unique compared to other sport event organizations (e.g. limited lifecycle and high levels of stakeholder involvement) were found to be a significant barrier to innovation. Specifically, innovation was hindered by the OCOGs operating within a temporary organizational lifecycle. Notably, time was described as a 'conundrum' (Interviewee 15) because 'OCOGs are temporary and will not be here forever, so they cannot just be innovating everywhere' (Interviewee 3). Consequently, 'sometimes being innovative has to be pushed aside so the OCOGs can deliver what they were asked for within the time constraints they have' (Interviewee 1). The impacts of time constraints were also described by Interviewee 4:

If we [POCOG] want to be innovative, we must think about it very quickly because our life cycle is only six and a half years to seven years, but most of the time you have to make a decision many years in advance to be able to implement the innovation.

Planning for an event many years in advance can also create challenges because 'over 10 years things will change; certainly, technology will evolve' ('LA's 2028 Olympics,' 2018, n.p.).

Regarding stakeholder complexity, staging the Games 'requires [OCOGs] to have many different perspectives on how to execute innovative initiatives' (Interviewee 7). Although 'OCOGs want to be informed by stakeholder input, innovation is stifled when they are expected to please everybody' (Interviewee 13). The impact of the complex stakeholder network in this context is described by Interviewee 13:

Sometimes innovation does not happen because it is too complicated. OCOGs have the IOC, International Sport Federations, large commercial programs, and all the governments that run these different entities. So, the layers of change is probably challenged in one way or another because of how many people have to be involved.

Knowledge limitations

Specific to the individuals within the OCOGs, a lack of existing innovation-related knowledge was another barrier identified. Within OCOGs 'there are a lot of great, brilliant people. However, there is not a lot of deep technical talent, like engineers and people building technology is not very strong, but that's not the reasons the organization exists' (Interviewee 14). This was supported by Interviewee 8:

We do not have the bandwidth to support the amount of innovation we actually want to do. So people who can think purely about innovation and have the ability to actually strategize and execute is definitely a resource that we are probably lacking.

Strategies for enhancing innovation capabilities

Despite the presence of barriers, two major strategies have been implemented by OCOGs to enhance their innovation capabilities: relationships and formalized systems (See Figure 1).

External relationships

Having a relationship with previous OCOGs was identified as an important way to obtain new innovation-related knowledge and enhance their innovation capabilities. Specifically, 'there is an observer program in place each Games that allows organizing committees to show the previous one so that they can learn and build on that for each edition' (Interviewee 15). In this regard, both POCOG and LAOCOG can obtain diverse insight into new technologies and ideas being implemented for the Games. For instance, Interviewee 2 noted that 'there was a lot of knowledge exchange' between POCOG and the 2020 Tokyo Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games, where stakeholders could observe Tokyo's innovative initiatives (e.g. use of drones, robotic mascots, and autonomous transportation) in their implementation phase. Similarly, LAOCOG is 'learning from colleagues in Tokyo and Paris... so that anything they develop there, [LAOCOG] can transfer to L.A. quickly' ('LA's 2028 Olympics,' 2018, n.p.). However, as Interviewee 4 pointed out, 'the way one host OCOG may do innovation is very different from what another host may be able to do because innovation has to be contextualized because of what resources and expectation each OCOG has.' 824 😉 K. HOFF ET AL.

Findings also revealed that the OCOGs 'do not want to be exclusive innovators' (Interviewee 15). Instead, POCOG and LAOCOG 'relied on establishing relationships to help make [them] smarter and deliver innovations along the way' (Interviewee 12). For example, the head of POCOG's innovation department stated:

During the preparation and delivery of the Olympic Games, there are many stakeholders involved from public institutions to global and local partners, startups, tech companies, and many different types of organizations. During this phase, Paris 2024 is monitoring, researching, and having many conversations with the ecosystem to see what solutions are out there than can be applied at the Olympic Games. (Shehabi, 2020, p. 1)

Similarly, LAOCOG 'has created a sandbox of collaboration and co-creation with private companies' (Cruz, 2019, p. 1). In doing so, LAOCOG 'depend on these companies' existing knowledge, technology, and experience to help us come up with innovative solutions and be able to implement them themselves' (Interviewee 7). Trusting their partnerships to lead many innovative projects gives LAOCOG 'more time to focus on delivering the Games' (Interviewee 8).

Formalized systems

Within POCOG and LAOCOG, both mega-sport event organizing committees formalized systems within their organizations to be more successfully innovative. Specifically, the OCOGs in this study created innovation-specific departments within their organizational structures. POCOG was the first to create an Innovation Department. This department is 'a team of three innovation leaders who try to implement innovative solutions to identified problems and has 30 'explorers' who go through an intensive threemonth course on innovation' (Interviewee 1). While POCOG has their own innovationspecific department, LAOCOG has innovation specialists who 'sit in the marketing research and insights team [...] to observe consumer behavior within the Olympics and L.A.' (Interviewee 8).

Findings also suggest the importance of pilot testing innovations. Specifically, OCOGs 'usually pilot test anything that is new or different' (Interviewee 8) to ensure successful implementation. In doing so, 'there is comfort that it has already been tested' (Interviewee 9). Given the OCOGs' time constraints, 'the quicker you test your innovations the sooner you know if you are on the right track or not [...] and these pilot tests serve as metrics to ensure the innovation can actually happen' (Interviewee 1).

Informal knowledge sharing

As previously noted, individuals within the OCOGs often lacked innovation-specific knowledge and experience. To try to overcome this barrier, findings revealed that individuals who do have innovation insights will often take the time to share their knowledge with others within the OCOG. For instance, Interviewee 8 explained that they 'will often jump on the phone with someone and literally just share what I know about innovation so others can have a better understanding' (Interviewee 8). Similar actions were described by a POCOG informant, Interviewee 1, who described themselves as an innovation 'internal consultant' given they regularly have 'casual conversations with other people in different departments about innovation to help people try to better understand something that is not always quite so simple'.

Discussion and implications

This study applied organizational innovation as a framework to the unique context of OCOGs. This approach extended existing research that has thus far employed organizational innovation as a framework in other sport organization contexts (e.g. Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012; Næss & Tjønndal, 2021; Newell & Swan, 1995). In doing so, we found that OCOGs experience various drivers to be innovative. However, despite these pressures, some stakeholders from its operational environment are risk-averse. Furthermore, OCOGs lack innovation-related knowledge and time to implement innovative initiatives successfully. Thus, OCOGs could implement strategies such as establishing external relationships and formalized structures to overcome these barriers, as illustrated in Figure 1. These findings answer calls from the literature to apply innovation concepts (i.e. organizational innovation) to sport studies (Ratten, 2018), expand our understanding of innovation in diverse sport contexts (Tjønndal, 2017a), and enhance our theoretical and practical understanding of spot event innovation (Yoshida & Nakazawa, 2016).

Findings also identified competing institutional logics concerning innovation by OCOGs. Institutional logics represent the reality and rules of individual and organizational actions and social behavior (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 1999). Competing institutional logics occur when organizations face contradictory pressures from various stakeholders (Pache & Santos, 2013). In our study, for example, the OCOGs experienced pressure from the IOC to be innovative in many aspects of Games planning to reduce costs and prevent potential negative consequences (e.g. unused infrastructure, damaging environmental impacts, and unrest from local residents). However, the IOC was also change adverse in other areas of Games hosting (e.g. how they deal with political protests) due to fear of failure and the urge to maintain tradition. While a degree of plurality is acknowledged as the norm in many situations (Greenwood et al., 2017), these contrasting expectations create additional complexity for OCOGs as the IOC expects them to be innovative in some ways, but not 'too' innovative in others. This might be particularly true for OCOGs in highly resource-dependent relationships with the IOC (Pache & Santos, 2013). While Paris and L.A. have strong domestic sponsorship markets and a well-developed capacity for organizing international events, this is not always the case, thus potentially limiting the facility for implementing radical innovation to more wealthy and experienced hosts who can better navigate these complexities.

Data analysis also revealed that time is a unique challenge to innovation in the OCOG context. Time pressure, defined as 'limitation of the time allocated for employees to finish their work' (Hsu & Fan, 2010, p. 378), is a factor that has been studied on organizational creativity – a linchpin necessary for innovation in sport (Smith & Green, 2020). However, findings regarding the impact time pressures have on creativity and innovation are inconsistent as studies found that high time pressure can have positive (Wu et al., 2014), negative (Maqbool et al., 2019), both positive and negative (Byron et al., 2010; Hsu & Fan, 2010), or nonsignificant (Amabile et al., 1996.) implications. The disparity among these findings may be attributed to much of this work being limited to postproject perspectives (Winsor, 2012). Findings from this study that explored barriers of innovation before the completion of a project (i.e. staging the Olympic Games) suggest that the pressure of limited time for OCOGs to operate is great a barrier to

innovation as resource limitations (e.g. infrastructure, monetary, human) are to other sport organizations (Corthouts et al., 2021; Newell & Swan, 1995; Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2013, 2016). Thus, time is a uniquely significant factor that needs to be considered when discussing innovation in OCOGs.

Furthermore, findings revealed that OCOGs establish strategic relationships to overcome innovation-related barriers (e.g. knowledge and time). This finding confirms that sport organizations, including mega-events, establish relationships for co-creating innovative solutions (Erhardt et al., 2019; Svensson & Hambrick, 2019). This finding suggests that OCOGs participate in open innovation (cf. Chesbrough, 2003). Open innovation holds that innovating should not be purely an internal process and those seeking to innovate should establish external linkages to harness additional resources (Chesbrough, 2003). Hence, OCOGs strategically establishing relationships with various entities (e.g. local start-ups, fortune 500s, and previous hosts) for innovation-related purposes illustrates open innovation. Yet, little is known about open innovation in sport organizations, including the mega-sport event context. This is a significant omission considering megasport event organizers regularly rely on external constituents due to the size and scope of the Games (Parent, 2008) and this study illuminates open innovation as a key strategy for OCOGs to innovate.

Our study also has practical implications that can impact the actions and strategies of mega-sport event organizers. For example, host OCOGs should continue to leverage existing partnerships and establish external relationships to obtain innovation-related knowledge. Specifically, OCOGs could partner with local universities and researchers to develop, test, and introduce innovations on various topics (e.g. logistics, athlete safety, risk management). Doing so would offer OCOGs enhanced innovative capacity while allowing the universities space to complete their research and potentially contribute to broader advances in their fields. Additionally, temporary organizations such as Olympic-related projects can overcome internal knowledge constraints by establishing relationships within the broader ecosystem beyond organization boundaries (Davies et al., 2014; Worsnop et al., 2016). Moreover, OCOGs should identify innovationspecific salient stakeholders (i.e. change agents and champions) early in their planning stage, as competing stakeholder logics can be problematic. Event organizers should then prioritize the stakeholders' expectations and implement strategies on how they can be met. OCOGs seeking to be innovative should also focus their efforts on innovations that are less likely to generate pushback from key stakeholders, and that can be implemented promptly, such as continuing to make implement more social and environmental initiatives and upgrades to enhance fans' experience through modern media (e.g. social media, cellphone applications). In doing so, OCOGs can enhance their innovation capabilities and better meet stakeholder expectations.

Conclusion

Organizational innovation was used to explore the drivers of and barriers to innovation OCOGs face and the strategies they use to implement innovations. OCOGs experience heightened pressure to innovate from their external operational environment (i.e. sponsor expectations, IOC recommendations, consumer demands, athlete experience), their own organizational identity (i.e. culture and previous hosting image), and internal individuals (i.e. pro-innovation leadership).

Despite these pressures, OCOGs must overcome various barriers, such as resistance to certain changes, particular organizational characteristics (limited lifecycle and stakeholder complexity), and innovation-related knowledge limitations. Strategies OCOGs used to enhance their innovation capabilities included establishing external relationships with previous Olympic hosts and industry partners, implementing formalized systems (e.g. innovation specialists and pilot testing), and partaking in informal knowledge sharing. These findings contribute to the sport innovation literature and offer practical strategies to help guide OCOGs to enhance their innovation capabilities.

Limitations and avenues for future research

Although many diverse perspectives were accumulated and data saturation was met by interview 12, interviewees in this study do not fully represent their respective stakeholder groups. Findings are also limited to cases in the North American (LAOCOG) and European (POCOG) contexts. Consequently, innovation drivers, barriers, and strategies may differ for OCOGs in other geographical locations, as innovation is a context-specific phenomenon, and stakeholders may influence OCOGs differently. Examining other temporary, non-fixed mega- and large-scale sporting events (e.g. FIFA World Cup, Superbowl, Rugby World Cup) would serve as valuable avenues of future research into sport innovation. However, it is also important to note the limitations of certain data associated with such events (e.g. bid books, candidature files, and final reports) as they are often written to provide a positive perspective. Consequently, negative implications associated with staging such events are often under-recognized. Innovation has also been perceived as inherently beneficial. Thus, future research should consider applying Coad et al's (2021) dimensions of harmful innovations (i.e. public health risk, environmental degradation, harm to society, harm to the economy) to conduct a post-event analysis of whether innovations implemented by a mega-sport event result in potentially harmful outcomes.

Findings from this study also illuminate various opportunities for future research. For one, there is an extensive body of innovation-related literature illustrating that risk aversion is a main factor that reduces the adoption of innovations (Arundel et al., 2019; Rogers, 2003). These findings prove to be problematic for OCOGs seeking to meet stakeholder expectations and also advances awareness of competing logics as it pertains to innovation in sport organizations. Such insights can be used to understand institutional adaptation to organizational innovation further, as suggested by Nite and Washington (2017). Future research should consider exploring innovation decision-making and how OCOGs can manage competing stakeholder expectations. Time is a unique factor that hampered the OCOGs innovative capabilities. This suggests that further research on time pressure and the innovation process (Damanpour & Schneider, 2006; Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012) within organizational contexts that operate in limited timeframes is needed. This study also found that the OCOGs undertook open innovation by co-creating value for themselves and their partners as it pertains to innovation. Identifying who exactly OCOGs establish external relationships with and how these relationships are managed was beyond the scope of this study. Therefore, future research should further

explore the phenomenon of open innovation within mega-sport event organizing committees to offer a more holistic understanding of open innovation and knowledge transfer in the context of mega-sport event organizing committees.

Also noteworthy, the findings of this study do not aim to generalize beyond the context of OCOGs. However, the findings of this study may be analytically generalizable. Analytic generalization occurs when researchers depict how their case study findings are relevant to a particular theory or construct (i.e. innovation) and can be applied to other similar contexts (i.e. OCOGs) (Yin, 2018). Thus, elements from this study may be analytically generalizable to other mega-sport event organizing committees, as organizational innovation was a viable framework to explore innovation in both POCOG and LAOCOG.

Finally, this study explored two case settings with organizing committees in the preevent stage. Researchers should conduct a post-event analysis, as barriers and new strategies may emerge the closer POCOG and LAOCOG are to delivering the Games. In this vein, scholars should also consider exploring the innovation process throughout the entire lifecycle of OCOGs. There are discrepancies in how scholars depict the innovation process (e.g. Mintzberg et al., 1976; Rogers, 2003; Seligman, 2006). Our findings reveal that mega-sport event organizing committees can offer a unique perspective on the innovation process because while OCOGs are not meant to last, their insights are expected to be passed on. Doing so will continue to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon that is innovation in sport.

Disclosure statement

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