



EDITORIAL

**Reframing Youth Development in Scouting:  
Toward a Mechanism-Based Approach to Member Development**

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Global transformations driven by digitalization, social complexity, and shifting youth values have fundamentally altered how learning and character formation occur. Young people today develop within dynamic, fragmented environments shaped by rapid information flows and hybrid social interactions. In this context, non-formal education institutions face increasing pressure not only to remain relevant but also to reconstruct their developmental approaches. Scouting, as a long-standing institution of youth character development, must therefore adapt its conceptual foundations to address these emerging realities (Verhoef et al., 2021).

**The Emergence of a Mechanism Gap in Youth Development**

A central challenge in scouting-based youth development lies in the absence of a clearly articulated mechanism explaining how developmental activities translate into meaningful individual outcomes. Existing practices often emphasize participation and program delivery without sufficient theoretical grounding in the psychological and social processes that drive development. This condition reflects a mechanism gap, defined as the disconnect between the intensity of developmental activities and the depth of developmental impact.

Research in youth development suggests that behavioral change and character formation are not automatic outcomes of participation, but rather emerge through internal mechanisms such as motivation, reflection, and meaning-making (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Without an explicit understanding of these mechanisms, developmental processes risk becoming fragmented and ineffective, limiting their transformative potential.

**Limitations of Activity-Based Approaches in Contemporary Contexts**

The traditional activity-based approach to youth development reveals significant limitations in addressing the complexities of contemporary youth contexts. Activities designed without attention to underlying psychological and social dynamics often fail to generate meaningful engagement. This results in weak internalization of values, limited identity formation, and constrained leadership development.

From an experiential learning perspective, experience alone does not guarantee learning; it must be accompanied by reflection and cognitive integration to produce meaningful outcomes (Kolb, 2015). Similarly, identity formation within group contexts depends on sustained social interaction that fosters a sense of belonging and shared meaning (Tajfel &

Turner, 2004). The absence of these processes reinforces fragmentation in youth development practices and reduces their long-term effectiveness.

### **Toward a Mechanism-Based and Integrative Framework**

Addressing these limitations requires a paradigm shift from activity-based to mechanism-based youth development. This perspective conceptualizes development as a process emerging from the interaction between experience, reflection, motivation, and identity formation. Such an approach necessitates the integration of multiple theoretical perspectives to capture the complexity of developmental processes.

Self-Determination Theory highlights the role of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in fostering intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Experiential Learning Theory explains how experiences are transformed into knowledge through reflective processes (Kolb, 2015). Social Identity Theory emphasizes the role of group interaction in shaping collective identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Integrating these perspectives allows youth development to be understood as a dynamic system in which interconnected mechanisms produce developmental outcomes.

Furthermore, youth development should be positioned within a broader systemic framework, where individuals, groups, and organizational structures interact within a learning ecosystem. A systems perspective enables a more holistic understanding of how contextual conditions influence developmental effectiveness and how interventions can be designed to support sustainable outcomes (Jacobides et al., 2018).

### **Advancing a Research Agenda for Scouting Development**

Strengthening youth development in scouting requires a research agenda focused on mechanism-based conceptual models. Future studies should examine how developmental experiences translate into psychological change, how group dynamics contribute to identity formation, and how organizational systems enable or constrain these processes.

Such an approach is essential not only for advancing the scientific foundation of scouting but also for ensuring its continued relevance in addressing contemporary youth challenges. By shifting the focus from activities to mechanisms, scouting-based youth development can evolve into a strategic process that generates meaningful and sustainable individual and social transformation.

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