

**Understanding interdependence in the Canadian sport system: The role of cognitive, normative and regulative pillars**

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Abstract 452**

Understanding the factors that contribute to or limit inter-organizational interaction is central to exploring organizations' relationships with their environments. Linkages with firms in the institutional environment, be they key suppliers, consumers, regulatory agencies, or competitors (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) are essential, yet managing interdependencies between these organizations may present challenges for community sport organizations. In Canada, the lack of coordination and integration in the sport system has been identified by Sport Canada (Canadian Sport Policy, 2002) as a key challenge confronting sport in this nation. According to the most recent Canadian Sport Policy (2002, p. 19) "collaboration, communication, and cooperation amongst the partners in the sport community" are necessary to ensure the efficient use of scarce resources. Thus, more collaborative approaches are critical to developing opportunities for increased coordination among providers of sport. Moreover coordinated approaches also have the potential to eliminate systemic barriers to success for sport organizations and participants alike.

The reasons for the apparent lack of integration among community sport organizations remain somewhat elusive; however Barnes, Cousens, and MacLean (2007) attribute the fragmented nature of interaction between sport organizations and others in their environment to the administrative structure, sources of funding, multiplexity of ties that characterize local networks. While this provides insight into the structure of the networks and patterns of interaction encompassing sport organizations, the underlying reasons for the lack of connectedness within the institutional environment of community sport organizations has yet to be uncovered. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to explore the logics of action, normative expectations, and regulative structures that shape and constrain inter-organizational interactions of community sport organizations.

This study was part of an ongoing program of research that has focused attention on the social structure of networks wherein actors participate in and are reference points for other actors' decisions (Knoke & Kuklinski, 1991). In this interpretive view of networks, Knoke and Kuklinski suggest that the relationships a given organization has with others in the system may affect that focal actor's perceptions, beliefs, and behaviour. Importantly, this study considers the factors that contribute to or limit interdependence and integration in local networks, the locales for the dissemination of information, the problem-solving arenas, or the contexts to mobilize others for goal achievement (Berry, Brower, Choi & Goa, 2004.). This is particularly salient to networks of local sport organizations that may benefit information sharing or joint problem-solving efforts to address issues of, for example, limited access to facilities, under-funding, and the scarcity of qualified coaches.

The focal organizations of this research are those that encompass providers of basketball and in the Regional Municipality of Niagara. Basketball was selected for inclusion in this study given the launch of a national program for providers of basketball entitled Be-One. The focus of this initiative by Canada Basketball is to envelop all providers of this sport under one umbrella to facilitate the development of partnerships, the sharing of resources, and to enhance the quality of basketball programs across Canada. In other words, the goal Be-One is to integrate a fragmented system.

A qualitative approach was used to gather information about the factors that contribute to or limit interdependence and collaboration between organizations in the network. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals identified by survey respondents as "crucial" to the overall formation and integrating of the network, and those that represented organizations with central positions in the networks. The interviews enabled the researchers to expand on the information gathered in the survey distributed in an earlier phase of this research, and to uncover information about the institutional (regulative, normative, cognitive) structures that inhibited or facilitated integration and interdependence among network partners. In sum, 23 interviews were completed and the data was analysed using the qualitative software package N-Vivo 2.0.

The results of this research provided insight into the level of cohesive and collaborative interaction among the basketball providers and those organizations that constitute their institutional environment. Of interest, the entrenched, taken for granted assumptions about the autonomous operations of local sport providers appeared to shape the propensity of local basketball providers to limit enduring, strong linkages. Regulative constraints within basketball organizations and the policies of local

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school boards, YMCAs, and parks and recreation departments also created structures that limited inter-organizational interaction. The normative expectations of basketball administrators and coaches, those that shaped the notions legitimacy in this context, also contributed to the lack of integration among basketball providers and others in their institutional environment.

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