

An exploration of the nature of innovations in community sport organizations

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Community sport organizations (CSOs) comprise the largest proportion of nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Canada (Hall et al., 2004). According to the 2004 Physical Activity Monitor (CFLRI, 2005), local soccer organizations, baseball leagues, swim clubs, and so on serve over three-quarters (76%) of Canadians who participate in sport on a regular basis. They are run almost exclusively by volunteers who take on various administrative, coaching, and support roles to provide members with opportunities to participate (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). This may explain why, according to Taylor (2004), CSOs tend to be characterized by a culture of tradition and informality, one that is reflected in a problem solving style that is reactive rather than proactive, and pragmatic rather than strategic. Maintaining stability and the status quo are consistent with the focus of CSOs on survival in the face of scarce resources (Taylor, 2004). However, these organizations are not immune to pressures to be innovative through the consideration of new ideas and practices. These pressures may come from several sources. The competition for volunteers and participants has resulted in an increased demand for quality, sophistication and professionalization on the part of the CSO (Taylor, 2004). In addition, there are pressures from various levels of government to increase services to its citizens, adopt new initiatives, and implement new legislation, all of which may be tied to the acquisition of government funding by CSOs (Hall et al., 2003; Nichols et al., 2003). Other pressures may come from societal changes including technological advances and the need to increase risk aversion and cater to increases in safety consciousness (Taylor, 2004). Further, CSOs are expected to keep up with innovations that are being introduced at higher levels of sport, such as new rules or equipment designs.

It appears that CSOs are faced with competing forces. On the one hand, there are pressures to uphold traditions. Yet, on the other hand, they face pressures to change. Within this landscape of competing forces, it is our goal to understand whether CSOs are being innovative, and if so, to what extent. This presentation is based on a larger research project that explores the attributes, processes, and determinants of innovation in community sport organizations in Canada. The purpose of this presentation specifically is to describe and discuss the attributes of innovation in community sport organizations. Because little is known about innovations in CSOs, we first need to identify and understand the nature of the innovations before we can study the processes of innovations and the determinants contributing to innovation. Three sets of attributes, that describe the nature of innovations, have gained the most interest in the literature (Camisón-Zornoza, Lapedra-Alcami, Segarra-Ciprés, & Boronat-Navarro, 2004; Damanpour, 1992). In the first set of attributes, process innovation, that is "new elements, equipment or methods introduced into the firm's production system to develop a product or service" (Camisón-Zornoza et al., 2004, p. 335), is differentiated from product innovation, that is "new products or services aimed at answering a market need" (p. 335). In the second set of attributes, technical innovation, or anything "directly related with the productive process and is closely linked with the core activity of the organization" (p. 335) is contrasted with administrative innovation, or anything "related with the coordination and control of the firm, the structure and management of the organization, the administrative processes, and human resources" (p. 335). In the third set of attributes, radical innovation, which "gives rise to fundamental changes in the activities of an organization or industry with respect to current practices" (p. 336) is viewed as different from incremental innovation, which "represents a lesser degree of departure from existing practices [but] [e]nhances the capacities already present in the organization" (p. 336). Together, these three sets of attributes provide a useful framework for exploring the nature of innovations in community sport organizations.

For this exploratory research project a sample of sport organizations was purposefully selected (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) using a three-dimensional cross section (sport, region, community size) to achieve variation in factors that may be meaningful to innovation in CSOs. Four different sports were selected which differ in participation rates, participation structure, participant ages, governance structure, and history: soccer, swimming, curling, and ultimate frisbee. CSOs in communities in two distinct regions of Canada were identified to be included in the study.

Data collection consists of one-to-one, semi-structured, telephone interviews with up to 48 volunteer presidents (or designates) of the selected CSOs. In this work in progress, the interviewees are being asked to identify and describe recent examples of

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innovation in their CSO. Innovations are defined as 'anything new or different in the organization'. The interviews are being audio-taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts will be organized, read, reviewed, reflected upon, coded, categorized, compared and finally themed (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Strauss, 1994). The transcripts will be uploaded to Atlas.ti to assist with data analysis. To date, 28 interviews have been completed, and initial data analysis reveals that CSOs have considered, adopted, or implemented 113 specific innovations. These range from the creation of new programs and leagues, to the development and implementation of new online services, to the establishment of partnerships with external stakeholder groups. Upon completion of the interviews and their transcription, the identified innovations will be coded with regard to whether they are: i) process or product, ii) technical or administrative, and/or iii) radical or incremental. Emergent themes within these categories will also be identified.

The presentation of findings will involve illustrating the breadth and nature of innovations, including highlighting the proportion of innovations that reflect each type of attribute and discussing the emergent themes. These findings will provide some insight into CSOs' responses to the seemingly competing demands to maintain traditions and as well as innovate. The implications for future research on innovations in the community sport sector will be presented.