

Toward a model of sport board performance

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Nonprofit voluntary sport organizations are central to the provision of organized sport participation opportunities and for the development of athletic talent for elite sport in the majority of westernized countries. These organizations not only facilitate competitions and stage events, but also manage coach development, talent identification, volunteer training, marketing and sponsorship activities at local, state or provincial and national levels. The importance of these organizations having effective governance systems and structures in place is increasingly recognized by national government sport agencies who have highlighted the negative impacts that poor governance structures and practices can have on organizational performance (ASC, 2007; SPARC, 2007; UK Sport, 2004). A central feature of the governance system and structure of these organizations is the work of the voluntary board of directors (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). A recent review of the relationship between nonprofit board and organizational behavior by Herman and Renz (2008, p. 403) highlighted that while research is demonstrating that board effectiveness is related to organizational effectiveness there is still a fundamental need for further research "both on modeling the causal ordering between board and organizational effectiveness and also to determine what board member, board process, and organizational factors are important in affecting board performance".

There have clearly been substantial efforts made in measuring and investigating the antecedents of board performance in non-profit organizations (see, for example, Bradshaw et al., 1992; Fletcher, 1992; Herman & Renz, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2004, 2008; Holland & Jackson, 1998; Kearns, 1995; Taylor et al., 1991; Wood, 1992). The majority of research that has explored correlates of board performance in the nonprofit governance literature has tended to focus on a small number of variables. There have been few attempts to draw this research together into a comprehensive model that illustrates known and prospective factors related to board performance. Prominent exceptions are the work by Cornforth (2001), Miller-Millesen (2003) and Brown (2005, 2007). In contrast, relatively greater effort has been directed towards the development of models of board performance in the context of the corporate sector, most notably by Zahra and Pearce (1989), Nicholson and Kiel (2004), Huse (2005), Murphy and McIntyre (2007) and Finegold, Benson and Hecht (2007).

There have also been an increasing number of studies that have explored board performance in the context of voluntary sport organizations (for example; Auld & Godbey, 1998; Doherty & Carron, 2003; Doherty et al., 2004; Forster, 2006; Hoye, 2004, 2006; Hoye & Auld, 2001; Hoye & Cuskelly, 2003a,b, 2004; Papadimitriou, 1998, 1999, 2002; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000). Much like the research in the wider non-profit field, these studies (and others) have tended to focus on a small number of variables, and there has yet to be a known attempt to incorporate them into a comprehensive model that represents the field of knowledge. Given the growth of studies in this area it is timely to review the conceptualization, measurement and findings with regard to the correlates of nonprofit sport board performance to date, and to identify what might be research priorities in the short to medium term. The intent of this paper, therefore, is to propose a comprehensive model of nonprofit sport board performance. This effort is framed from the outset by an adaptation of the Miller-Millesen (2003, p. 523) model, "an integrative theoretical framework of board behaviour that identifies the conceptual links between environmental factors, organizational factors and board behaviour", and the Nicholson and Kiel (2004) model, which distinguishes structural, social and human capital dimensions that impact on board performance.

The paper is presented in three parts. First, we provide a review of the conceptualization and measurement of board performance and an overview of the theoretical tenets and contents of the Miller-Millesen (2003) and Nicholson and Kiel (2004) models in order to present a conceptual framework of nonprofit sport board performance with four dimensions: environmental, organizational, social and human factors. Second, we review the empirical research into the correlates of nonprofit sport board performance for the purpose of highlighting the range of variables examined within these four dimensions: (1) environmental factors (e.g., economic, regulatory, stakeholder), (2) organizational factors (e.g., structure, formalization, age, size), (3) social factors (e.g., culture, power, conflict, composition), and (4) human factors (e.g., competencies, motives, attitudes, involvement) that impact on board performance. We conclude by highlighting the dimensions on which previous research efforts have focussed, as well as gaps in the research, before identifying a set of questions that may guide future nonprofit sport board performance research in each of these dimensions, together with the measurement of board performance.