

A Model of Capacity Building in Community Sport Organizations

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Organizational theory/culture

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(including questions)**

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Organizational capacity has emerged in the nonprofit literature as an effective framework for the study of organizational attributes and their impact on organizational effectiveness (Misener & Doherty, 2009). The nonprofit literature has not, however, devoted the same level of focus towards strategies that further develop the capacity of these organizations. Community sport organizations (CSO) are nonprofit, voluntary organizations that provide accessible and affordable pathways for children, youth and adults alike to participate in sport and physical recreation (Cuskelly, 2004), and form the basis of “grassroots” sports participation in Canada. Despite, or perhaps due to, the positioning of local soccer clubs, baseball leagues, lacrosse associations, and so on in the sport structure, these CSOs face many challenges in the provision of sport, including decreasing participation levels (Taylor, 2004), limited revenue diversification (Wicker & Breuer, 2012), and informal planning strategies (Misener & Doherty, 2009). With hopes of alleviating these, and other, challenges, organizational capacity building aims to improve an organization’s ability to formulate and achieve objectives (Aref, 2011). More specifically, capacity building is a strategic approach towards improving the mobilization of the various dimensions of organizational capacity (Cairns et al., 2005). The capacity building literature has, however, focused predominantly on its conceptualization and the identification of capacity building strategies, rather than the identification of the key components and influential factors in the capacity building process (Sobeck & Aguis, 2007).

Research that has considered capacity building as a process has tended to use a simplified approach that comprises planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Austin et al., 2011; Heward et al., 2007; Nu’Man et al., 2007). Previous research has focused more specifically on the individual strategies of capacity building, suggesting the appropriate areas on which strategies should be focused, such as workforce development and partnership enhancement (Casey et al., 2009; Cairns et al., 2005; Crisp et al., 2000; Joffres et al., 2004; Sobeck, 2008). While research offers insight into the phases of capacity building and the effectiveness of various strategies (Sobeck, 2008), it neglects to depict a complete process of capacity building that stems from organizational needs and challenges. As such, the purpose of this study is to develop a theoretically-based model of capacity building that recognizes the components and factors involved in the capacity building process, specifically in the context of community sport organizations.

The capacity building model was developed according to de Groot’s (1969) four-phase interpretative-theoretical methodology. This qualitative process of interpretation and theoretical evaluation of existing material results in knowledge extension that is fundamental to model building. This methodology is not only particularly useful when addressing an area, such as organizational capacity, that is supported by a growing body of theory and research, but also for the development of sport management practice and theory through integration with other developed fields (Armstrong et al., 1991). The four-phase process involves the exploration and analysis of existing literature within the area of study, the interpretation of the relationships, processes, and practices of the phenomenon under study, and a theoretically based explanation of the proposed integrative model (de Groot, 1969; Wright, 1982). Through the first three phases of the current study, the various components of organizational capacity and capacity building, and the factors that influence the capacity building process, were uncovered and explored within the nonprofit and community sport literature. The final phase of de Groot’s (1969) interpretative-theoretical methodology involves the compilation of the analysis and interpretation of existing literature through the explanation of the newly developed model.

The model resulting from this effort depicts four components of the capacity building process in CSOs within a broader framework of change. The model draws on Casey et al’s (2012) use of Oakland and Tanner’s (2007) interacting cycles of change – readiness for change and implementing change – with capacity building strategies centering on these factors. The underlying premise of the model is that successful capacity building is a function of organizational assessment and appropriate capacity building and implementation strategies. The literature suggests that capacity building must be assessment-led (Nu’Man et al., 2007; Sobeck & Aguis, 2007) and, as such, the first

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component of the model is needs assessment, involving the identification of capacity related challenges within the formal and informal structures, and the resources of the organization. The second component is also assessment-focused, involving determination of the organization's readiness for capacity building (Casey et al., 2012; Sobek, 2008; Sobek & Aguis, 2007), the sustainability of the initiative (Brown, 2012; Casey et al., 2009; Mandeville, 2007), the congruence between the initiative and organizational processes (Joffres et al., 2004), the key drivers of change, and the leadership and planning present within the organization (Casey et al., 2012). Understanding the readiness of community sport organizations is particularly important in assisting sport leaders and funding bodies in decision-making regarding capacity building, and is useful in gaining stakeholder support and empowering others to implement change (Casey et al., 2012). Also of particular importance in the community sport context is the close link between sustainability and funding diversification (Brown, 2012), as CSOs often face many challenges associated with revenue acquisition (Wicker & Breuer, 2012). Evidently, the factors that compose the readiness assessment represent aspects of the organization and its environment that influence the success of a capacity building initiative.

The third component of the model includes the capacity building strategies that coincide with the needs and readiness assessments. These strategies ultimately contribute to the fourth, and final, component which is the implementation outcomes, revealing the impact of the capacity building strategies on organizational processes, structures, and systems (Casey et al., 2012; Crisp et al., 2000). Capacity building is purported to be an ongoing and cyclical process (Horton et al., 2003) that requires continual evaluation and monitoring (Nu'Man et al., 2007). As such, the model recognizes the capacity building strategies and the resulting outcomes continually shape and reshape the needs and readiness of the targeted organizations (Austin et al., 2011).

The proposed model of capacity building not only depicts the components from needs assessment to implementation, it also captures the interplay between the components and factors involved in the capacity building process. As a result, this model addresses a major gap in the field of organizational capacity building by providing a complete depiction of the process that enables the development and evaluation of capacity building initiatives. Through the use of de Groot's (1969) interpretative-theoretical methodology, the stringent exploration and analysis of existing literature has resulted in the development of an appropriate model of capacity building in the community sport organization context. The model furthers understanding surrounding capacity building as a construct, while providing a practical and theoretically-based approach towards building capacity in community sport organizations.

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