

Radical and Incremental Innovation in Community Sport

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Organizational theory/culture **Friday, May 31, 2013** **20-minute oral presentation**
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(Room 416)

This study is part of a larger research program investigating the nature and process of innovation in community sport organizations (CSOs) and the factors that impact on that. With the increasing reliance on CSOs to deliver sport participation programs and services that provide many physical, social, and emotional benefits to individuals and their communities (Adams, 2007; Nicholson, Hoye, & Houlihan, 2011; Taylor, 2004), it is important to understand the extent to which these organizations are innovative and how that process unfolds. Innovation is defined as “any idea, practice, or material artifact perceived as new by the relevant unit of adoption” (Zaltman, Duncan, & Holbek, 1973, p. 10). It is a critical phenomenon because of its connection to organizational competitiveness, effectiveness, and survival (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). CSOs, like other nonprofit voluntary organizations, are turning to innovation as a means to meet member and societal demands, and to compete and survive in an ever changing environment (e.g., Franke & Shah, 2003; Hoerber & Hoerber, 2012; Hull & Liao, 2006; Jaskyte, 2004; McDonald, 2007). However, the nature of those innovations is not entirely clear, particularly whether they are radical or more incremental, representing a greater or lesser departure from existing organizational practices, respectively (Damanpour, 1991; Dewar & Dutton, 1986). Insight into the nature and process of these different types of innovations in CSOs will enhance understanding of how these nonprofit grassroots organizations respond to environmental pressures, with implications for the effective delivery of community sport. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine radical and incremental innovation in CSOs, describing and distinguishing, as relevant, their characteristics and the process by which they are adopted (or not) in this context. Damanpour and Schneider’s (2006) framework of the innovation process guided an exploration of the stages of innovation initiation, adoption decision, and implementation.

Individual telephone interviews are currently under way with the president (or representative) of a sample of 15-20 CSOs from a variety of sports in communities across Ontario, Canada. The sample comprises clubs that self-identified having at least considered both radical and incremental innovations in the past three years. Ensuring participants are able to make a direct comparison between the two types of innovations increases the ability to distinguish their attributes, determinants and outcomes. Prospective participants were contacted by email with an invitation to take part in an interview if their CSO met the inclusion criteria. Telephone interviews have been arranged at the participants’ convenience. The semi-structured interview guide was developed to tap into the attributes or characteristics of what the participants considered to be radical and incremental innovations in their club, the innovation decision process, and expected or realized outcomes. The interviews will be transcribed verbatim and member-checked for accuracy. Data analysis will comprise a priori (deductive) coding based on the two types of innovation and Damanpour and Schneider’s (2006) innovation process framework, and further emergent (inductive) coding to identify any sub-themes within those broader categories (Patton, 2002).

Preliminary findings indicate that what participants consider to be radical innovations in their CSOs include new programs for previously untapped markets, elimination of existing programs, and implementation of new technology. Efficiency was the driving factor for several of these innovations. In contrast, incremental innovations tend to reflect administrative changes, such as a new board position. The impetus for incremental administrative changes tended to be efforts to increase membership. Those incremental innovations, defined as lesser departures from existing practice, were generally adopted through informal decision making, whereas the adoption of more radical innovations was more likely to involve board discussion and an official vote. Further, radical innovations tended to generate resistance among club members, even after the decision to adopt, whereas incremental innovations were generally implemented without delay.

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The findings will inform a model of radical and incremental innovation in CSOs that illustrates their determinants and (expected) outcomes in that context. Perhaps most importantly, the findings will highlight factors that impact the decision to consider, adopt and ultimately implement radical versus incremental innovations, with implications for strategy and practice pertaining to innovation for community sport delivery.

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