

Fundraising at the 'Ice-roots' Level: A Case Study of the Impact of Communityengage.com on Minor Hockey

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Organizational theory/culture

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(including questions)

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The community sport sector represents a critical structure for sport delivery throughout the world. Community sport organizations (CSOs) act as the central pillar of this sector providing important opportunities in our communities for physical activity, skill development, friendship, civic engagement, and social cohesion among other benefits (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Doherty & Misener, 2008; Nichols, Padmore, Taylor, & Barrett, 2012). Various national sport policies also emphasize the critical role that these small, membership-based nonprofit organizations play in fulfilling social and health-related objectives (e.g., Canadian Sport Policy, 2012; Sport England, 2011). Despite their potential, research has demonstrated that CSOs may not have the capacity to respond to the demands of public policy (Nichols, Taylor, James, Holmes, King, & Garrett, 2005) nor the ability to meet the increasingly diverse expectations of their participants and other stakeholders (Enjorlas, 2002). Financial capacity is one notable area where CSOs face external pressure from rising insurance and facility rental costs, as well as internal pressure from participants to minimize membership fees and associated costs such as travel, equipment, and tournament expenses (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2010; Wicker & Breuer, 2012). Further, the rising costs of sport club participation and resulting inaccessibility, particularly for lower income households, are never far from media and political discourse (Ifedi, 2008). In order to maintain their role within the broader nonprofit and voluntary sector's social welfare agenda, remaining accessible to a diverse population is an important focus for capacity-building efforts.

In response to financial challenges, CSOs are increasingly diversifying their revenue streams beyond traditional sources such as fees, grants, sponsorships, donations, and events (Wicker, Breuer, & Hennigs, 2012). CSOs are also responding with innovative organizational practices to address rising costs (Hoeber, Doherty, Hoeber, & Wolfe, 2009). For example, interorganizational relationships or partnerships have been shown to be an effective means of alleviating some of the financial challenges facing CSOs as sponsors, suppliers, and other community partners provide in-kind or other resources that would otherwise require financial investment (Misener & Doherty, 2012). Other evidence of unique responses to financial pressures is emerging such as the use of technological advancements (Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012). The focus of the current study is on one innovative fundraising partnership that links CSOs and their members with sport-related retailers through group buying technology in order to facilitate mutually beneficial exchanges.

For this study, we draw on social exchange theory as a theoretical basis for understanding the organizational citizenship behavior occurring in this partnership (Lavelle, Rupp, & Brockner, 2007). Social exchange theory is one of the most widely adopted conceptual paradigms in the management literature (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Specifically, social exchange theory exposes the self-interest of various parties and purports that in addition to an economic exchange, a shared obligation exists in which both parties perceive responsibilities to each other which determine the level of investment in particular relationships (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Byrne, 2000). This approach illuminates stakeholder perceptions of 'give-and-take' and enables their evaluation of the various costs and rewards associated with the exchange (Standford, 2008). In sum, social exchange theory explains behaviors by focusing on: "(a) rules and norms of exchange, (b) resources exchanged, and (c) relationships that emerge" (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005, p. 875).

The current research involves a case study of communityengage.com, an innovative community-based approach to fundraising in local ice hockey clubs located in Eastern Ontario, Canada. Communityengage.com is a commercial service that provides hockey clubs with an opportunity to offer discounts on sport-related products sold by retailers to the parents of club members using group buying technology. When parents make purchases through communityengage.com, a portion of the funds (12.5%) is provided back to the designated club. Deals offered by retailers change weekly and present parents with the opportunity for significant savings (e.g., 50% off). A case study approach (Stake, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2011) was used for this study to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the

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various exchanges that occur through this innovative approach to fundraising and entrepreneurship in the community sport context. Further, because ice hockey is the second most played sport in Canada, drawing approximately 1.3 million Canadians annually (Ifedi, 2008), the research findings will be highly relevant in the Canadian community sport context. Moreover, the implications of the study likely extend beyond Canada to other countries in need of developing innovative approaches to funding community sport.

The study incorporates two phases of data collection. First, semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders are used to provide a rich understanding of the business model, expectations from involvement, successes and challenges associated with implementation, and perceptions about the successful development of relationships. In order to gather this data, interviews are currently underway with the founder and management team at communityengage.com, as well as presidents or treasurers of partnering CSOs and representatives of sporting equipment retailers. The interviews (N = 15) serve to develop an understanding of how and why various stakeholders engage in the initiative and will be transcribed and coded using constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The interviews will also be used to contextualize the questionnaires employed in the second phase. In phase 2 (January 2013), data will be collected through a written questionnaire completed by consumers of the service (i.e., parents of hockey players). Questionnaires will be administered in partnership with CSOs to ensure the privacy of members and increase the response rate. The purpose of this phase is to develop an understanding of the motivations, perceived benefits, costs, and outcomes associated with involvement in the initiative. Existing scales assessing these key constructs and outcomes (e.g., De Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000; Eisenberger et al., 1987, 2001) will be augmented based on findings from Phase 1. Cluster analysis techniques (k-means) will be employed to develop a classification of the types of consumers in terms of their motivations for engaging in the exchange and perception of the exchange (perceived benefits – costs). Subsequently, a series of ANOVAs will determine how these segments differ, if at all, in terms of key outcomes (satisfaction, intention to continue purchasing, and affordability of hockey program).

This study will contribute to the literature on partnerships, capacity, and innovation in community sport through a holistic approach utilized here to uncover the perspectives of all individual and organizational stakeholders involved in the program. Further, given that diversity of revenue sources is essential for organizational sustainability in this context (Wicker et al., 2012), the study illustrates how group buying technology may provide a new opportunity for revenue generation. The presentation will also include a discussion of the challenges and implications of multiple social exchanges and how linkages can be strengthened to enhance opportunities for cross promotion and capacity building.