A Multiple Case Study Investigation of Organizational Capacity Building in Community Sport

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Organizational capacity has received an increasing amount of attention within the community sport context as an important indicator of how effective an organization is at attaining its goals and meeting the needs of its members (see Misener & Doherty, 2009; Misener & Doherty, 2013; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Hallman, 2013). The study of organizational capacity also provides a meaningful understanding of the challenges and strengths that exist within these organizations. Despite the growing body of literature in this area, significant gaps remain in our knowledge when the analysis shifts to the building of that capacity. Organizational capacity building refers to the strategic process of enhancing an organization’s ability to draw on and deploy its resources (Aref, 2011; Cairns, Harris, & Young, 2005). Capacity building is designed to help organizations respond effectively to new or changing situations through a structured decision-making process (Bryson, 2011). Thus, it is equally important when discussing capacity for organizational effectiveness to consider the conditions and processes that contribute to capacity building. The purpose of this study is to examine capacity building in community sport organizations.

A process model of capacity building in nonprofit organizations (Authors, 2013) guides this investigation. The proposed model, derived from the literature (cf. de Groot, 1969), contends that successful capacity building begins with a needs assessment that determines whether the organization has the capacity to address a given environmental stimulus. This is followed, as necessary, by the determination of readiness for capacity building, where organizational readiness, congruence with organizational processes and systems, and capacity to build and sustain change are considered. Readiness is also considered in the organization’s selection of the specific strategy(ies) to achieve the capacity building objectives, where alternative strategies are generated and chosen based on the organization’s readiness to implement them. Following the implementation of the capacity building strategy(ies), the short-term impact of those strategies and the long-term maintenance are assessed. Successful capacity building enables an organization to respond to new or changing situations, proceed with its program and service delivery, and ultimately achieve its goals. The model provides a useful framework for examining the conditions and processes pertaining to capacity building in community sport organizations.

There are several objectives within the study’s broad purpose of examining the process of capacity building in community sport organizations: (1) To understand the extent to which community sport organizations, in the face of some stimulus, assess their existing capacity and consider their readiness to build capacity as necessary; (2) To understand how community sport organizations generate and select the strategy(ies) that are implemented; (3) To understand whether and how community sport organizations assess and maintain the outcomes of capacity building; and, (4) To verify and refine the proposed concepts and relationships within the process model of capacity building (Authors, 2013).

An instrumental multiple case study design is used as it enables the development of rich insight into the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2005). Data collection is currently underway. In order to fully address the study’s objectives, two community sport organizations are purposefully investigated (Patton, 2002) – one that experienced successful capacity building that ultimately impacted the organization’s program and service delivery, and one that experienced unsuccessful capacity building where organizational needs were not addressed and outcomes were not realized. Multiple methods and sources are used to triangulate data that generate insight into the capacity building process (Stake, 2006), including: (1) relevant program and organizational documentation (i.e., meeting notes, organizational policies and procedures, strategic plans, operating regulations, mission and vision statements) that provide information regarding the organization’s capacity building initiative; (2) semi-structured interviews with volunteer board members in the key executive positions (president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer) to determine their perceptions of capacity building within their organization; and, (3) semi-structured interviews with a sample of coaches and general volunteers who are able to provide additional perspectives on capacity building in their organization. Together these individuals represent management, programming, and delivery perspectives that are
expected to provide meaningful insights into the capacity building process, while providing a more holistic understanding of capacity building within the community sport organization context. The interview guide is consistent for both groups, addressing the nature of the environmental stimulus that initiated capacity building; the organization’s capacity needs and assets identified; the capacity building objectives; consideration of the organization’s readiness for capacity building; strategy generation, selection, and implementation; and the outcomes, including how they were assessed, their impact on program and service delivery, and whether they have been maintained within the organization. The semi-structured nature of the interview guide allows flexibility in each interview. Raw data from the documents and audio-recorded interviews will be transcribed in full and subjected to a priori coding in line with concepts in the model, and emergent coding based on the identification of further themes and subthemes pertaining to capacity building in the focal organizations (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The findings are expected to contribute to a greater understanding of capacity building as a process, and in community sport organizations in particular. Through the examination of both a successful and unsuccessful capacity building initiative, the study will reveal the conditions and processes that contribute to the relative success of these efforts. From a practical standpoint, this may provide important insight for community sport leaders who are interested in, or perhaps requiring, the enhancement of capacity within their organization. Further, this study intends to offer empirical verification of the concepts outlined in the proposed process model of capacity building (Authors, 2013), providing a comprehensive framework for future research and practice.

References