Readiness for Capacity Building in Community Sport Organizations

Patti Millar, Niagara University

Organizational theory/culture

Saturday, June 4, 2016

20-minute oral presentation

(Forum East 4)

Abstract 2016-307

1:55 PM

The study of organizational capacity has been the focus of increasing attention in the nonprofit sector, and community sport context in particular, as scholars endeavor to understand the critical dimensions of capacity, and determine community sport organizations’ (CSO) strengths and challenges with regard to those factors (see Casey, Payne, Brown, & Eime, 2009; Doherty et al., 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Hallman, 2013). This line of research presents important implications that support a shift in focus towards the building of organizational capacity as an approach to alleviate the challenges and build on the strengths of these organizations (Aref, 2011; Cairns et al., 2005). However, research that explores the factors and conditions, particularly the readiness-related factors, involved in successfully addressing the process of building capacity is limited. As such, the purpose of this study was to examine the strength and relative impact of dimensions of readiness on capacity building outcomes.

Readiness for capacity building derives from the notion of readiness as a critical factor in successful organizational change (Joffres et al., 2004). Literature in this area stipulates that the key causal factors of unsuccessful change are a lack of readiness for the change, a lack of acceptance of the change, and a lack of capacity to make the change (Cinite et al., 2009; Weiner et al., 2008). Further, readiness, in the context of capacity building, refers to individuals’ beliefs that an organization can initiate the required capacity building and engage in practices that will lead to the successful implementation of capacity building strategies. Capacity building research to date has examined elements of readiness that align with this conceptualization, including the organization’s climate and culture (Casey et al., 2012), compatibility with organizational mandates and objectives (Joffres et al., 2004), and commitment of board members to the building efforts (Casey et al., 2009b; Millesen et al., 2010). Readiness for capacity building is a multidimensional concept grounded in the understanding of readiness for change as a critical precursor to the successful implementation of change (Weiner et al., 2008), and has been defined as a four-factor concept (organizational readiness, congruence, capacity to build, capacity to sustain) that occupies a critical position in the capacity building process (Authors, 2013).

A process model of capacity building (Authors, 2013) guided this investigation. The proposed model, derived from the literature (cf. de Groot, 1969), contends that successful capacity building depends on the assessment of capacity needs pertaining to a given organizational response to an internal or external environmental force. Effective capacity building is purported to rely on readiness for that capacity building with respect to the identified objectives and alternative strategies. Specifically, organizational readiness (member ability, willingness, and commitment), strategy congruence with organizational processes and systems (alignment with existing processes, systems, and organizational missions and mandates), and existing capacity to both build and sustain change must be considered. The successful outcomes of capacity building are dependent on the extent to which the organization is ready to implement a strategy that addresses its capacity needs, and can be known in terms of both immediate impact (objectives have been achieved) and whether the built capacity is maintained.

Three research questions were advanced within the broad purpose of examining the strength and relative impact of dimensions of readiness on capacity building outcomes: (1) What is the level of readiness to build capacity in CSOs?; (2) Does readiness to build capacity impact capacity building outcomes in this context, and is there any variation among the different dimensions of readiness?; and (3) Does readiness vary by club size, board size, or club age?

A survey comprising four sections (environment force and organizational response, readiness for capacity building, capacity building outcomes, and organizational and respondent characteristics) was distributed to CSO presidents in one Canadian province. Presidents from 66 CSOs (N=66) representing 11 different sports completed the survey, identifying 144 (n=144) strategies of capacity building that formed the basis of the analysis. Exploratory factor analyses were performed to determine the underlying factor structures of the readiness and outcome measures developed for this study. Descriptive statistics and multivariate analysis were used to examine the relative strength of
the readiness for capacity building factors, and variation in readiness by club size, board size, and club age. Correlation and linear regression analyses were conducted to test the relationship between readiness for capacity building and capacity building outcomes.

The results of these analyses revealed a three-factor structure of readiness for capacity building – organizational readiness, congruence, and existing capacity – suggesting that the CSO context may demand an understanding of existing capacity that is focused on the present, rather than on longer term sustainability. Further results revealed that there was a stronger perception of the CSOs’ readiness to build capacity and the congruence of capacity building strategies with existing systems, than of their existing capacity to support those efforts. The results also provided evidence that readiness predicts successful capacity building, and that existing capacity is a unique significant predictor of that outcome.

The findings of this study contribute to a greater understanding of the multidimensional nature of readiness for capacity building, particularly as it relates to the nature of the psychological and structural dimensions of readiness. The findings suggest that the psychological dimensions (organizational readiness and congruence) were more prevalent than the structural dimensions (existing capacity). Further, the findings suggest that the psychological dimensions are, alone, not sufficient in contributing to the success of capacity building efforts; there needs to be a structure or foundation (i.e., existing capacity) in place. This is particularly insightful in the CSO context, where volunteers are typically highly committed and passionate about their role (Cuskelly, 2004; Doherty et al., 2014), and often operate in an environment of resource vulnerability, with unstable financial resources and high volunteer turnover (Breuer et al., 2014; Cuskelly et al., 2006). 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.

Select References:


