Community sport organizations (CSOs) are non-profit, volunteer-based organizations that support local sport programming by providing accessible and affordable pathways for participation (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014). CSOs are governed by a volunteer board of directors that work to oversee the strategic direction of the organization and help to navigate the day-to-day operations of the club (Cuskelly et al., 2006; Hoye & Inglis, 2003). These small, membership-based associations face many capacity challenges related to rising costs of infrastructure, having skilled volunteers in appropriate roles, and obtaining financial resources necessary to continue their programming (Doherty et al., 2014; Gumulka et al., 2005). These examples provide evidence of systemic issues that can reinforce a problem solving style that is reactive and pragmatic, rather than proactive and strategic (Taylor, 2004).

The study of organizational strategy offers insight into how organizations may navigate their environments in order to meet their mandates. Organizational strategy refers to “the determination of the basic long-range goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out those goals” (Chandler, 1962, p.13). Within the business environment, organizational strategy has been linked to the achievement of desired outcomes, such as competitive advantage (Porter, 1985; Srivastava, 2005), increased effectiveness (Zheng, Yang, & McLean, 2010), improved service performance (Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012), financial performance (Das, 1990), and overall organizational performance (Gebauer, Gustafsson, & Witell, 2011). Within the nonprofit domain, less is known about the particular elements of strategy that may influence a voluntary organization’s ability to shape their long term goal achievement.

The current presentation is part of a larger research program that seeks to understand the nature of strategy in the community sport context. The research program is framed by three central elements that have been shown influence a strategy and its performance (cf. Pettigrew, 1987; de Wit & Meyer, 2010). These elements are content (the subject of the strategy itself), context (pre-existing conditions and forces within an organization’s operating environment), and process (the management of activities, actions, and methods that influence how a strategy is formulated and implemented) (Bryson, 2011). Given that little is known about strategy in the CSO context, we first need to identify and understand why CSOs use strategy (context) and how they use strategy (content) before we can study the third element of strategy: process (Pettigrew, 1992). Therefore, the research is guided by the following three questions: (1) What is the perceived purpose and scope of organizational strategy in community sport?; (2) What are the key components of strategy in CSOs?; (3) What are the internal and external pressures that influence the use of strategy in CSOs?

Although research on strategy in other sport contexts is growing (e.g., Cunningham, 2002; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012; Thibault, Slack & Hinings, 1993), few studies have explicitly examined strategy within the nonprofit or community sport sector. Instead, knowledge of the topic to date primarily stems from findings of studies focusing on organizational capacity. For example, several studies have examined “planning and development capacity” as part of larger investigations on organizational capacity, revealing that strategic planning, creativity in that planning, and plan implementation are critical to a club’s ability to achieve its goals (Doherty et al., 2014; Wicker & Breuer, 2011). Further, while CSOs cite the importance of long-term planning, they typically undertake some kind of short-term planning, characterized as reactionary and informal, rather than undertaking a formal strategic plan (Misener & Doherty, 2009). Although these studies on planning capacity help to inform our knowledge of CSO strategy, they have not explicitly examined how and why CSOs use strategy or the pressures that influence their ability to do so. The lack of attention to strategy in the community sport sector is particularly problematic as these organizations face...
increasingly competitive environments in which they are under pressure to fulfill their mission with their existing, often limited, resources, while still meeting rising stakeholder expectations (Yeh, Hoye, & Taylor, 2011). Indeed, the pressures that CSOs face may lead to the adoption of specific practices and processes, causing them to become more similar, or isomorphic (Washington & Patterson, 2011). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggested that isomorphism may occur through one of three mechanisms: 1) coercive isomorphism; 2) mimetic isomorphism; and 3) normative isomorphism. Each of these mechanisms have their own antecedents and may lead to different outcomes (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Thus, examining these isomorphic pressures may help us to better understand why CSOs use organizational strategy, the degree to which strategy is embedded within the operations of CSOs, and what types of strategies CSOs use.

This exploratory research project employs semi-structured interviews with Presidents or their representatives of CSOs from a variety of sports (N=20) in Southern Ontario. An interview guide was designed by integrating the wider strategy literature, CSO capacity literature, and institutional theory (particularly, isomorphic pressures). Audio-recorded interviews are currently underway. It is expected that data collection and verbatim transcription will be completed by January 2018. Transcripts will be reviewed independently by each of the researchers in order to get a general sense of the data. From there, the investigators will develop an emergent coding scheme based on the themes of organizational strategy context and content. Transcripts will then be coded independently and discrepancies between the investigators’ coding will be discussed, including the verification of code descriptors and, whether codes are deemed too similar and should be collapsed (Charmaz, 2006). NVivo will be used to manage and store the data.

Findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of literature on community sport management by providing insights into the nature of strategy in CSOs. Results will help to illuminate how and why CSOs use organizational strategy as they continue to navigate increasingly complex and ever-changing environments (Bowen & Bowen, 2014). Implications for practice and future research on organizational strategy in the community sport sector will be presented.