

# **(SP) ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY IN COMMUNITY SPORT: THE INFLUENCE OF VOLUNTEERS AND VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT ON THE POTENTIAL TO PERFORM**

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## **Introduction**

Organizational capacity is defined as an organization's potential to perform (Horton et al., 2003). A focus on organizational capacity presumes a strategic management approach; that is, attention to what an organization has, and what it needs, to maintain and enhance its competitive advantage (Shapek, 2000). Capacity is reflected in the organization's resources and management, including personnel (staff, volunteers), infrastructure, technology, and financial resources, strategic leadership, program and process management, and networks and linkages with other groups (Horton et al., 2003). While organizational capacity is well-accepted in profit-oriented organizations, nonprofit organizations, including those in the sport sector, tend to have a narrow focus on maximizing programs and minimizing costs, "rather than building the organizational capacity necessary to achieve their aspirations effectively and efficiently" (McKinsey, 2001, p. 19). Instead, it is argued, nonprofit organizations that are looking for new and more effective ways of making tangible progress towards their missions must focus on building organizational capacity (Letts, Ryan & Grossman, 1999; McKinsey, 2001).

There appears to be a variety of frameworks in the literature outlining the key elements of organizational capacity (cf. Shapek, 2000), and we may not expect one model to fit all organizations. Indeed, Letts et al. (1999) suggest that different elements of organizational capacity will be paramount depending on the organization's strategic focus (e.g., program delivery, expansion, or adaptation). Nevertheless, the literature consistently identifies human resource capacity as a critical element; that is, the people, their skills, their needs, and the management processes that support these resources. Within a broader framework of organizational capacity, the purpose of this paper is to consider the human resource or volunteer capacity of community sport clubs in Canada. Community sport organizations are responsible for providing recreational and competitive sporting opportunities at the local level in Canada, and are run almost exclusively by volunteers. This paper examines the composition of the volunteer workforce, as well as volunteer management practices within these clubs with a particular focus on issues and challenges that are perceived to impact the organization's potential to perform.

## **Method**

The data upon which this paper is based were collected as part of a two-phase study commissioned by Parks and Recreation Ontario and the Sport Alliance of Ontario to examine community sport volunteerism. In the first phase, a demographic and psychographic profile of community sport organization volunteers was developed based on data extracted from the 2000 Canadian National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (NSGVP). In the second phase, telephone interviews were conducted with 90 volunteers from 49 clubs in 8 sports across the province of Ontario to obtain perceptions of volunteer management within their own clubs. These coaches, administrators, and board members were asked to describe practices and

issues with respect to volunteer recruitment, training, support, retention, and recognition.

## Results

The “typical” Canadian sport volunteer is male, 35-44 years old, employed full-time, a college or university graduate, married, with a child involved in the club. He is involved to support a good cause, use his skills to help because he knows someone involved in the club. From the interviews, sport club volunteers identified volunteer recruitment and recognition as the key challenges. There was consensus that more volunteers are needed to do the existing work of the club and for the club to expand. The biggest challenge was identifying and attracting coaches and board members. They also indicated the recruitment of volunteers who are willing to put in the time and follow through on tasks, younger volunteers, and volunteers with fresh ideas as particular challenges. The formal recognition of volunteers was identified as a critical practice, however there was consensus that this is a challenge both in terms of time and money required. Interestingly, volunteer retention was deemed to be satisfactory within the clubs; getting volunteers was perceived to be a greater challenge than keeping them.

## Discussion

The profile of the Canadian sport volunteer is consistent with what has been identified in other developed countries (e.g., Taylor et al., 2003). It contributes to our understanding of the capacity of community sport organizations by identifying who is typically involved, what they do there, why, and why they do not contribute more. The profile also provides a better sense of what the organizations are able to accomplish and, by the same token, the limitations they face in realizing their potential to perform. Some of these limitations have to do with the fairly narrow profile of the “typical” volunteer. Capacity also appears to be limited by the number of volunteers in the clubs, and by volunteer recruitment practices in particular. These observations are also consistent, and can be discussed in parallel, with research in other countries (e.g., Cuskelly, 2006; Taylor et al., 2003). The findings highlight several implications for capacity development in community sport organizations with a specific focus on human resource or volunteer capacity.

## References

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