

# AN EXAMINATION OF SPORT VOLUNTEERISM THROUGH THE LENS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

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## Abstract

### Background

Organizational capacity has received increasing attention in the nonprofit and voluntary sector where it is recognized as a valuable concept for understanding the critical assets and resources that organizations draw on to perform (e.g., Chaskin, 2001; Eisinger, 2002; Germann & Wilson, 2004; Raymond, 2011; Wing, 2004). Hall et al. (2003) proposed a model of capacity which comprises five broad dimensions that purportedly influence the ability of nonprofit and voluntary organizations to achieve their goals: human resources, finances, infrastructure, planning and development, and external relationships. Human resources is considered to be fundamental to overall capacity, and is expected to influence the nature and extent of the other dimensions. However, Hall et al.'s model is purposely broad, and the critical elements of each dimension are expected to be unique to different types of nonprofit organizations (also Eisinger, 2002; Letts et al., 1999; Wing, 2004). Therefore it is important to understand the specific nature of these capacity dimensions in a given context.

Hall et al.'s model of organizational capacity may be expected to be useful for examining factors that affect the ability of nonprofit community sport clubs to perform. These clubs provide opportunities for competitive and recreational sport and physical activity in our communities and rely heavily, if not exclusively, on volunteers to achieve their goals (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006). Thus, it is important to understand the specific nature and extent of human resources (or volunteer) capacity in these organizations. Hall et al.'s model can be used to identify critical elements pertaining to volunteerism that are expected to influence the clubs' ability to achieve their goals.

### Purpose

This paper draws on the findings of a project examining organizational capacity in community sport clubs. The purpose of this paper is to describe the critical elements of human resources capacity as they are defined by the clubs themselves, and to identify the relative magnitude of those elements in the clubs. The findings will enhance our understanding of sport volunteerism in community clubs by viewing it through the lens of organizational capacity.

### Method

A sequential mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) approach (Creswell, 2005) was used to first uncover the critical elements of capacity in community sport clubs, and then measure the extent of capacity with a broader sample. In the first phase, 13 focus groups were conducted with 51 presidents of community sport clubs in five different Canadian communities. The sample was generated from clubs representing a broad range of individual and team sports whose contact information was publicly available. A total of 23 different sports were represented in the final sample. Participants were asked to describe their clubs' greatest human resource strengths and challenges with regard to achieving their goals. These strengths and challenges represent critical elements of capacity. Inductive analysis of the transcripts from the audio-recorded focus group interviews uncovered several critical elements. In the second phase, an online survey was developed to measure the capacity elements. Again, the sample was generated from clubs across a broad range of sports whose contact information was publicly available. Data were collected from 365 club presidents from 20 different sports across different communities, for a response rate of 22%. Psychometric analyses indicated support for the human resources capacity elements and a MANOVA statistic was used to examine their relative magnitude in the community sport clubs.

### Results

The focus group findings uncovered six critical elements of capacity, including (1) Positive attitude of volunteers, (2) Human capital in the form of valued skills and experience, (3) Common focus among volunteers on the values and priorities of the club, (4) Sufficient volunteers to do the work, (5) Continuity of volunteers, and (6) Volunteer development and support. Analysis of the survey data revealed that club presidents perceived volunteer attitude and capital to be corresponding elements as they loaded onto a single factor. Results of the MANOVA indicated that volunteer attitude and capital were the greatest strengths of the club, followed by volunteers having a common focus, and the club's volunteer development practices. The weakest elements were volunteer continuity and having sufficient volunteers.

The findings provide insight into what community sport clubs have self-identified as critical elements of human resources capacity in their organization, and the relative strength of those elements. The implications of these findings for building community sport club capital are discussed, and directions for further research are presented..

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