

Innovation in Sport for Development and Peace: A Quantitative Analysis of Organizational Learning, Innovation Capacity, and Types of Social Innovations

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Aim

A growing body of scholarship has examined innovation in different types of nonprofit sport organizations including those in Sport for Development and Peace (SDP). To date, however, these studies were guided by conceptualizations of innovation and frameworks developed in the context of for-profit businesses. These conceptualizations are “not applicable to the nonprofit setting without accounting for the peculiarities of [this] specific context” (Lurtz & Kreutzer, 2017, p. 108), including the underlying emphasis on achieving a social mission compared to profit maximization (Mulgan, 2006). Therefore, the aim of this study was to examine the nature of innovation in an international sample of organizations through a social innovation framework (Shier & Handy, 2015). Furthermore, potential antecedents, mediating variables, and outcomes of innovation were also examined. Based on previous literature, four hypotheses were developed:

Hypothesis 1a: Organizational learning will significantly predict the social innovation practices of SDP organizations.

Hypothesis 1b: Organizational learning will be positively associated with increased organizational performance.

Hypothesis 2: Innovation capacity will significantly predict the social innovation practices of SDP organizations.

Hypothesis 3: Social innovation practices will be significantly associated with increased organizational performance among SDP organizations.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Innovation was defined as doing something different from previous practice that positively impacted the ability of a SDP organization to promote social change. Shier and Handy’s (2015) framework conceptualized nonprofit innovation in three dimensions: (1) types of programs and services provided by an organization, (2) processes of how organizations manage those services and programs, and (3) undertaking efforts to advocate for change and promote systemic or socially transformative change. Prior literature on social innovation identified organizational learning as a fundamental factor underlying the process of innovation by nonprofits (Phillips, Lee, Ghobadian, O’Regan, & James, 2015). The ability of nonprofits to implement organizational learning was identified as critical for continuous improvement and organizational sustainability, particularly due to the current competitive nonprofit landscape. Additionally, the literature suggests the ability of nonprofits to achieve desired goals is dependent on their ability to draw on a set of different capacities. Therefore, the Bridgespan Group (2017) recently developed a framework identifying six dimensions of nonprofit innovation capacity: (1) *Catalytic Leadership*, (2) *Curious Culture*, (3) *Ready Resources*, (4) *Diverse Teams*, (5) *Idea Pathways*, and (6) *Porous Boundaries*. Collectively, these six organizational dimensions are critical factors underpinning nonprofit innovation.

Methodology

A quantitative research design was used to address the purpose of this study. An electronic questionnaire was developed based on prior social innovation, organizational learning, and nonprofit capacity literature. An existing database created through a systematic analysis of publicly available SDP networks and organizational lists was used as the sampling frame of potential participants for this study. 817 SDP organizations received an invitation to complete the survey during a four-week period. Multiple regression analyses were used to test the study hypotheses.

Results and Discussion

154 survey responses were recorded for a response rate of 18.9%. Respondents represented the diverse geographic and program foci found in SDP. Reliability coefficients for each scale met recommended acceptability levels. Socially transformative innovation was the most common type of social innovation reported by respondents whereas process-related innovation was the least common type of innovation. The results of the multiple regression analysis revealed that organizational learning had an indirect effect on social innovation through innovation capacity ($F= 10.606, p = .001, R^2 = .075$), but no direct effect on social innovation practices. Interestingly, no significant relationship was found between organizational learning and organizational performance. Innovation capacity, however, was identified as a significant predictor of social innovation ($F= 24.586, p < .001, R^2 = .149$), which in turn was found to be significantly associated with increased organizational performance ($F= 54.552, p < .001, R^2 = .289$). Thus, having a learning orientation within a SDP organization is not sufficient to be innovative, but SDP organizations also need sufficient capacity to be able generate new ideas, experiment and pilot test innovation practices, as well as to implement and sustain successful innovations over time. Additional analyses allowed for standardized regression coefficients to be identified for the relationship between the six dimensions of innovation capacity and the three types of social innovations.

Conclusion and Implications

Our findings highlight the multi-dimensional nature of social innovation in SDP and indicate sound processes and pathways allow for innovative ideas to be implemented, as this dimension of innovation capacity was the only one significantly associated with all three types of social innovations. Findings from this study provide a foundation for funders and policymakers to develop more targeted capacity-building programs to better support specific types of social innovation. Additionally, the results of the analysis can serve as a starting point for SDP practitioners to identify how their organizational practices align with their desired social innovations to enable them to more effectively promote social change through sport-based initiatives.

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