"Pick and choose our battles" – Understanding organizational capacity in a sport for development and peace organization

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A B S T R A C T

A growing number of sport for development and peace (SDP) organizations seek to address social issues through sport. Hall et al. (2003) created a multidimensional framework that suggests SDP and other nonprofit organizations need human resources, financial, and structural capacities to accomplish their organizational goals and objectives, but may face challenges with developing these capacities. The current study used this framework and examined the capacities of Gainline Africa – a small SDP nonprofit organization based in North America and operating programming in an East African post-conflict community – to identify critical elements that influenced the organization's ability to fulfill its mission. Semi-structured interviews ($n = 10$) were conducted with its North American staff members. The study's findings build upon the theoretical understanding of organizational capacity within nonprofit sport organizations, and several new elements such as community funding and managing nontraditional Global North-Global South dynamics, were revealed that could be unique to the SDP context. Practically speaking, smaller SDP organizations can use the findings to help increase their organizational capacity through leveraging local partnerships and understanding the role and usage of paid versus volunteer staff members.

1. Introduction

The use of sport for development and peace (SDP) has grown to new proportions since the late 1990s – largely driven by the formal support of SDP by the United Nations – with numerous organizations using sport with intentions to address a plethora of social issues in communities around the world (Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2010; Giulianotti, 2011; Kidd, 2008). However, a growing body of research has raised critical concerns regarding the idealistic beliefs associated with a large aspect of these programs (e.g., Coakley, 2011; Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2007). Critical scholars argue for more realistic expectations regarding what these programs can accomplish, as even well-structured ones may not result in positive outcomes for all participants considering the influence of environmental factors (see Coalter, 2010).

Kidd (2008) asserted the grassroots nonprofits implementing SDP programs in communities worldwide are generally "woefully underfunded, completely unregulated, poorly planned and coordinated, and largely isolated from mainstream

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development efforts" (p. 376). As a consequence, many agencies lack sufficient capacity to achieve their intended goals and objectives or fulfill funding requirements. Therefore, it is imperative to develop a better understanding of appropriate structures and processes needed for implementing sustainable SDP programs (Schulenkorf, Sugden, & Burdsey, 2014).

Scholars have conceptualized how sport managers can leverage traditional sport events for various social and community outcomes (e.g., Chalip, 2006; Green, 2001; O'Brien & Chalip, 2007; Taks, Chalip, Green, Kesenne, & Martyn, 2009). These studies provide a seminal contribution in terms of organizations using traditional competitive sport events in high-income countries. However, their findings do not necessarily generalize to grassroots NGOs operating sport-plus or plus-sport (Coalter, 2010) programs in low- and middle-income countries, as these studies are not rooted in a development context.

More recently, scholars have proposed conceptual frameworks for the planning and implementation of sustainable SDP programs. These frameworks draw from a broad range of theories and outline a multitude of aspects to consider for increasing the likelihood of sustainable outcomes associated with SDP programs. They include Lyras and Welty Peachey's (2011) Sport for Development Theory (SFDT), Schulenkorf's (2012) S4D Framework, and Sugden's (2010) "ripple effect" model (p. 269). The current study used Hall et al.'s (2003) organizational capacity framework, which purports that SDP and other nonprofit organizations should possess sufficient capacity in three areas – human resources, financial, structural – in order to accomplish their missions and goals. Multiple researchers (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009, 2013; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011, 2014) have since adopted the Hall et al.'s (2003) approach and applied it within various nonprofit sport contexts.

The current study was designed to advance our theoretical and practical understanding of SDP in this area by building upon the previous research and exploring the complex realities of a small international SDP organization through the lens of Hall et al.'s (2003) multi-dimensional theoretical framework. In order to better understand organizational capacity in the context of this study, it is imperative to first examine literature on organizational approaches in SDP.

1.1. Organizational capacity

Research within the broader nonprofit management literature suggests organizations are unable to facilitate internal change or implement new practices in the absence of sufficient structures and organizational processes (Eisinger, 2002; Schuh & Leviton, 2006). The extent to which an organization is able to produce change and achieve its mandate is known as organizational capacity (Christensen & Gazley, 2008). While different terminology has been used, existing frameworks on nonprofit organizational capacity are typically characterized by similar dimensions related to: (a) human resources, (b) financial management, (c) external relationships, (d) internal structures and processes, and (e) planning and organizational development (see Christensen & Gazley, 2008; Eisinger, 2002; Fredericksen & London, 2000; Hall et al., 2003; Minzner, Klerman, Markovitz, & Fink, 2014; Schuh & Leviton, 2006).

Following extensive focus groups with representatives from a broad range of nonprofits, Hall et al. (2003) conceptualized a three-dimensional capacity framework consisting of (a) human resources capacity – ability to mobilize and deploy human capital; (b) financial capacity – ability to solicit and expend financial capital in a sustainable manner; and (c) structural capacity – ability to leverage processes, support systems, and organizational infrastructure enabling the organization to carry out its work. Hall et al. (2003) argued for the importance of examining these key aspects of capacity that may influence a nonprofit organization's ability to achieve its goals. This supports Eisinger's (2002) call for the need "to move beyond simply logical lists of capacity characteristics to an empirical understanding of which of these contribute to organizational mission fulfillment" (p. 118).

Hall et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of examining connections between dimensions as critical strengths or challenges in one area (e.g., financial capacity) may have noticeable implications for other areas of capacity (e.g., human resources capacity). For example, nonprofit organizations that generate financial capacity through donations and other monetary contributions can use those funds to hire staff members and additional human resources support. The increased financial and human resource capacities in turn can strengthen the structural capacity as the organizations develop better support systems to carry out their programs. Thus, the capacity in one area can positively influence the capacity levels in the other areas.

This framework has been adopted for nonprofit sport settings to explore critical strengths and challenges related to organizations' goal achievement (Doherty et al., 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009, 2013; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011, 2014). Misener and Doherty (2013) conceptualized organizational capacity as "the ability of an organization to harness its internal and external resources to achieve its goals" (p. 136). Guided by Hall et al.'s (2003) framework, Sharpe (2006) examined the influence of organizational capacity on the quality of experience in the Appleton Minor Softball League – a Canadian community sport organization – as expressed by league stakeholders. Findings revealed volunteer recruitment and volunteer management were major concerns for the organization. The lack of human resources appeared to influence other areas of capacity. Committee members did not pursue several important projects due to time constraints. Moreover, insufficient professional expertise among volunteer committee members resulted in the organization's inability to meet external demands.

Similarly, Misener and Doherty (2009) conducted a case study of a Canadian community sport club in an attempt to identify factors influencing its goal achievement through the lens of Hall et al.'s (2003) multidimensional framework. One of the researchers was invited to serve as an active-member researcher, and this allowed for a presence at monthly board meetings and other organizational events. Their work supported Sharpe's (2006) findings on the perceived importance of