

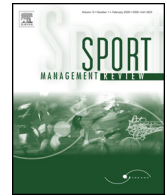


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The impact of organizational capacity on voluntary engagement in sports clubs: A multi-level analysis

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ABSTRACT

As volunteerism occurs in an organizational context, both individual factors and organizational characteristics affect (potential) volunteers in sports clubs. Whereas a number of researchers have studied individual-level determinants, knowledge on the role of organizational-level factors is limited. Based on the concept of organizational capacity, in the present study, the authors investigate whether and how human resources, financial, and structural capacities of sports clubs influence individual voluntary engagement. Using data from German football and track and field clubs ($n = 296$) and their members ($n = 1222$), the effects of organizational capacity on voluntary engagement within two subsamples, adult members and parents of underage members, are examined. The results of multi-level mixed effects regression analyses show that all capacity dimensions are significantly associated with voluntary engagement of both adult members and parents of underage members. A larger number of members and a greater share of volunteers reduce the amount of time a volunteer devotes to voluntary work; adult members are less likely to volunteer when their club has a balanced budget; and strategic planning increases the likelihood of individuals to volunteer informally. Overall, the results support the notion that the organizational context is more relevant to volunteering of adult members than individual characteristics and equally relevant to parents of underage members. Managerial implications to facilitate volunteering, such as shifting club goals towards youth development and sports for all provision, are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Volunteers are the cornerstone for the functioning of several sports systems worldwide and a reason why nonprofit sports organizations operate cost-effectively (Andreff, 2006; Schlesinger, Klenk, & Nagel, 2015; Taylor, Panagouleas, & Nichols, 2012). However, sports clubs in numerous countries, such as Germany (e.g., Wicker & Breuer, 2013), Australia (Cuskelly & O'Brien, 2013; Cuskelly, 2004), Canada (Lasby & Sperling, 2007; Misener & Doherty, 2009), the United Kingdom (Burgham & Downward, 2005; SARC, 2013; Taylor, Barrett, & Nichols, 2009), Finland (Koski, 2012), and Switzerland (Lamprecht, Fischer, & Stamm, 2011; Schlesinger et al., 2015) have to cope with increasing difficulties in recruiting and retaining volunteers. In addition, researchers have reported trends of decreased voluntary engagement (Ringuet-Riot, Cuskelly, Auld, & Zakus, 2014).

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Since volunteers are indispensable for the functioning of sports clubs (Wicker & Hallmann, 2013) and typically only a small share of club members engages in voluntary work (Wicker & Breuer, 2013), a comprehensive understanding of factors determining individual voluntary engagement is needed. Existing studies aiming to identify relevant factors of an individual's decision to volunteer mostly examined the role of individual-level determinants, such as socio-demographic characteristics, experiences, and motivations (e.g., Burgham & Downward, 2005; Taylor et al., 2012; for an overview see Wicker, 2017).

However, from a theoretical perspective, individual behavior, including volunteering in a sports club, is not only affected by individual factors, but also by organizational characteristics (Penner, 2002; Schlesinger & Nagel, 2013; Studer & von Schnurbein, 2013; Wicker & Hallmann, 2013). According to ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), individual behavior is a function of individual features and their social ecologies with which the individual is in constant interaction. The individual, who is at the center of the model, is nested within a specific social context consisting of different systems. The microsystem, which is closest to the individual, refers to groups and settings that surround individual behavior directly and immediately (e.g., sports clubs). Interaction between these systems emerges from individual experiences, interpersonal relations, and roles (Deal et al., 2017). Likewise, institutional theory argues that individual behavior is determined by these social institutions (Rotolo & Wilson, 2012). Researchers support the importance of organizational factors, such as organizational culture and human resources practices, to individual employee behavior (e.g., Liao & Chuang, 2004; Nohria, Groysberg, & Lee, 2008).

With regard to volunteerism as individual behavior, researchers outside the sport sector have shown that organizational factors affect an individual's decision to volunteer and the extent of volunteering (e.g., Hager & Brudney, 2011; Musick & Wilson, 2008). Based on a comprehensive literature review of organizational studies examining volunteerism, Studer and von Schnurbein (2013) summarized that practices and instruments of volunteer management, organizational attitudes towards volunteers, and organizational values, as well as structural factors, all influence volunteers and their behavior. Penner (2002) confirmed that individual voluntary engagement depends on an organization's reputation, its values, and personnel practices, and highlighted the importance of organizational factors for long-term volunteering in particular. Within sport, only a few researchers have examined the influence of organizational factors (i.e., characteristics of sports clubs) on individual voluntary engagement in clubs (Schlesinger & Nagel, 2013; Wicker, 2017), although the organizational context is a central characteristic of volunteerism (Penner, 2002). It is, therefore, critical for club management to understand the role of organizational capacity in voluntary engagement and, ultimately, the factors that enable these organizations to meet their objectives (Doherty, Misener, & Cuskelly, 2014).

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of organizational factors on an individual's decision to volunteer and the extent of individual voluntary engagement. We distinguish between two groups of volunteers, adult members and parents of underage members, who have been selected based on two criteria. The first criterion is their relation to the organization, which is either internal (adult member volunteers) or likely external (parent volunteers) (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003; Nichols and Shepherd, 2006). The second criterion is their intended beneficiaries (Cnaan, Handy, & Wadsworth, 1996), who are either themselves (adult member volunteers) or their own children as relatives (parent volunteers). According to Cnaan et al. (1996), the latter form is more purist and determines more narrowly how individuals perceive what makes a volunteer. Given these differences, we examine whether and to what extent these two subgroups of volunteers are distinctively influenced by organizational factors.

The research context for this study is Germany, where sports clubs have reported serious problems regarding the recruitment and retention of volunteers (e.g., Wicker & Breuer, 2013). The main research question is: how does organizational capacity influence an individual's decision to volunteer and the amount of time devoted to voluntary engagement? Findings of this study enable sports club managers to identify dimensions where capacity building is needed to mitigate problems associated with volunteerism.

2. Theoretical framework and literature review

As the focus of this study lies on the identification of organizational-level factors impacting voluntary engagement, individual-level determinants, which have been widely studied in previous research, are not discussed in this section (for an overview see Wicker & Hallmann, 2013; Wicker, 2017; Wilson, 2012). Instead, we draw from Hall et al.'s (2003) conceptual model of organizational capacity of nonprofit and voluntary organizations. The center of this model is the capacity of an organization, which is influenced by environmental constraints and facilitators, access to resources, and historical factors. Human resources capacity is at the core of organizational capacity and shapes the other two capacity dimensions – financial and structural capacity. Organizational capacity also determines an organization's outputs or outcomes, including any goods produced or services provided, populations served, policies influenced, or changes in behavior elicited (Hall et al., 2003). A comprehensive needs assessment is the foundation for developing and building organizational capacity (Millar & Doherty, 2016).

Past scholars have already drawn from the model of organizational capacity in their research on volunteers in sports clubs (Doherty et al., 2014; Millar & Doherty, 2016; Misener & Doherty, 2009, 2013; Sharpe, 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011, 2013). The selection of factors within each capacity dimension is based on existing conceptual (Wicker & Hallmann, 2013) and empirical research (Breuer, 2011, 2013; Breuer, 2011, 2013). In the present study, we explain their relevance for volunteering in

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