

# **A Case Study of Organizational Capacity in Nonprofit Community Sport**

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As a pivotal part of the nonprofit and voluntary sector, community sport organizations provide opportunities for active participation, social engagement, and community cohesion. This study examined the nature and impact of organizational capacity in one nonprofit community sport club to identify factors that affect the ability of this organization to fulfill its mandate and provide sport opportunities in the community. Hall et al.'s (2003) multidimensional framework of human resources, financial, relationships/networks, infrastructure and process, and planning and development capacity was used. The study incorporated interviews with board members and coaches as well as active-member researcher observations (Adler & Adler, 1987). Key strengths and challenges of each capacity dimension were uncovered, and connections among the dimensions were revealed. The relatively greater importance of human resources and planning and development capacity for goal achievement was identified. The findings support the use of a multidimensional approach for generating a comprehensive understanding of organizational capacity in community sport, and for identifying where and how capacity may be enhanced.

Community sport organizations (CSOs) are nonprofit, voluntary organizations<sup>1</sup> whose essential goal is to provide a range of opportunities for people of various ages to participate in sport and physical activity (Allison, 2001). As the basis of "grassroots" sport participation in many countries, community sport programs are expected to provide individual and social benefits, such as youth development and community cohesion (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003). In Canada, sport and recreation organizations are the most prevalent type of nonprofit and voluntary organization, representing 21% of this sector (Gumulka, Barr, Lasby, & Brownlee, 2005). According to Hall et al. (2004), 71% of sport and recreation organizations operate at the community level. Further, according to the most recent data, over one third of Canadians reported regular participation in organized sport and 76% of those were involved in a community-based sport club of some type (Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute, 2005). Similar statistics are reported globally. For example, in Australia, 28% of the population reported participating in organized sport and physical activity (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007). In New Zealand, 92% of the youth population takes part in sport and leisure activi-

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ties, and 33% of those participate within the sport club setting. For adults in New Zealand, 83% reported active participation in sport and 36% of those were members of a formal sport club (Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2002). In England, over 10 million adults or 19.6% of the population play sport within a club environment (Sport England, 2008). Consequently, the new Sport England Strategy 2008–2011 features a significant shift in focus and direction toward community sport and seeks to address the fundamental challenges these sport clubs face, to be a world leader in community sport infrastructure (Sport England, 2008). Similarly, the most recent Canadian Sport Policy (2002) reflects the government mandate to increase sport and physical activity participation, thus encouraging healthy lifestyles, personal well-being, and more cohesive communities. The policy emphasizes the critical role of CSOs and notes that “sport is best developed at the local level where participation is provided by sport organizations” (Canadian Sport Policy, 2002, p. 14).

As important providers of sport opportunities in our communities (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006; Taylor, 2004), it is imperative to understand the factors that impact goal achievement in community sport organizations. At the community level, sport is under pressure due to declining volunteer rates, minimal government support, inadequate facilities and youth trends toward inactivity and obesity (Jurbala, 2006). Without strong capacity in these organizations (e.g., through adequate volunteers, facilities, plans for the future), sport services that contribute to further individual and societal benefits will be compromised.

The term *capacity* is broadly used in many contexts (Morgan, 2006). According to Horton et al. (2003), organizational capacity refers to an organization’s potential to achieve its mission and objectives based on the extent to which it has certain attributes that have been identified as critical to goal achievement. Further, Eisinger (2002) emphasized that key attributes of organizational capacity influence organizational effectiveness, or mission fulfillment. Similarly, Hall et al. (2003) noted that “the overall capacity of a nonprofit and voluntary organization to produce the outputs and outcomes it desires is a function of its ability to draw on or deploy a variety of types of organizational capital” (p. 4). They focused specifically on human resources, finances, relationships and networks, infrastructure and processes, and planning and development (Hall et al., 2003). A common thread throughout the literature is that organizational capacity is conceptualized as multidimensional in nature (Eisinger, 2002; Hall et al., 2003; Hou, Moynihan, & Ingraham, 2003).

There has been a recent movement in the nonprofit literature toward measures of capacity as indicators of organizational effectiveness (Eisinger, 2002). Understanding the factors that contribute to effectiveness in terms of mission and goal achievement has become increasingly important as nonprofit and voluntary organizations commonly face competing pressures from multiple stakeholders, limited resources, and vague goals (Sawhill & Williamson, 2001; Sowa, Seldon, & Sandfort, 2004). Research advocates that nonprofit capacity be assessed along multiple dimensions to capture all aspects of these complex organizations (e.g., Sawhill & Williamson, 2001). It has been argued that, by virtue of their multidimensional nature, capacity-based studies hold the key to understanding organizational reforms more completely than traditional measures of effectiveness (Hou et al., 2003). However, it should be noted that an organization’s capacity profile is

not necessarily indicative of organizational effectiveness (Sharpe, 2006), as capacity attributes are latent unless used (Eisinger, 2002).

To date, research on CSOs has been limited to a focus primarily on aspects of human resources capacity (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Cuskelly, Taylor, Hoyer, & Darcy, 2006; Doherty, 2005a, 2005b; Shibli, Taylor, Nichols, Gratton, & Kokolakis, 1999), with some consideration of relationship and network capacity (e.g., Cousens, Barnes, Stevens, Mallen, & Bradish, 2006; Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004; Thibault, Frisby, & Kikulis, 1999). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the perceived influence of multiple capacity dimensions on CSO goal achievement by examining the nature of organizational capacity in the context of one nonprofit community sport organization. As such, the study aims to provide an empirical illustration of organizational capacity in one CSO, while extending the use of the Hall et al. (2003) framework. The next section presents a brief review of organizational capacity in the nonprofit and voluntary sector and an overview of capacity-related studies in sport. The theoretical framework for the case study is then presented.

## **Organizational Capacity**

### **Organizational Capacity in the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector**

Organizational capacity has emerged in the nonprofit literature as a framework for referring to a set of organizational attributes that bears on organizational effectiveness, or “the ability of an organization to accomplish its mission effectively” (Eisinger, 2002, p. 115). A number of conceptual frameworks related to capacity have been developed and used in various nonprofit contexts, such as neighborhood communities (e.g., Chaskin, 2001), international development organizations (e.g., Morgan, 2006), human service organizations (e.g., Eisinger, 2002), and other community development organizations (e.g., Glickman & Servon, 1998). As well, investigations of the degree to which various organizational practices and characteristics are related to organizational effectiveness among nonprofit social service agencies (e.g., Forbes, 1998) can certainly be linked to the concept of capacity. Capacity frameworks vary in the number of dimensions they use, ranging from three to seven (e.g., Chaskin, 2001; Eisinger, 2002; Glickman & Servon, 1998; Hall et al., 2003; McKinsey & Company, 2001). The specific capacity dimensions within these frameworks also tend to vary in name; however, there are many common features or characteristics among them such as financial and/or capital resources, human resources, formalization, and external linkages. Hall et al.’s framework was developed specifically for the nonprofit and voluntary sector and as such will be used as the framework for this study. It is reviewed in detail later in the article.

Overall, research on nonprofit organizational capacity from a multidimensional perspective has not identified consistently critical aspects. For example, Chaskin (2001) found that engaged individuals and the strengthening of associational networks were required to have success in pursuing a community organization’s objectives. Hall et al. (2003) noted that human resources capacity was the

most critical factor for organizational goal achievement. Glickman and Servon (1998) identified effective partnerships as particularly important for capacity-building as they enabled community development organizations to improve planning and financial management as well as connecting with needed resources and support. Meanwhile, McKinsey and Company (2001) found that the nonprofit organizations that experienced the greatest gains in capacity were those that undertook a reassessment of their aspirations and their strategy. However, they also noted that effective capacity building is rarely confined to addressing only one aspect of capacity in isolation (McKinsey & Company, 2001). Taken together, the nonprofit and voluntary sector literature suggests that the nature and impact of each dimension should be considered individually and the connections among dimensions examined, while accounting for differences in organizational context.

### Organizational Capacity in Community Sport

Wing (2004, p. 154) emphasized the importance of context when considering organizational capacity in the nonprofit sector:

The term *nonprofit* encompasses a huge diversity within itself, referring to everything from a handful of volunteers in a neighborhood banding together in their spare time to plant flowers to huge universities and health care systems. Whatever capacity building might be, it is not going to be the same across such a diversity of kinds of organizations.

As CSOs comprise one of the largest subsectors of nonprofit and voluntary organizations in many developed countries (Seippel, 2006), there is merit in exploring their unique strengths and challenges, and how these influence their ability to contribute to sport development in our communities. Several dimensions of organizational capacity in sport have been examined independently in the literature. Aspects of human resource capacity have been the focus of much of the research at the community sport level, providing a strong base of knowledge on human resource management and, in particular, sport volunteerism (e.g., Cuskelly, 2004; Cuskelly, Taylor, et al., 2006; Doherty, 2005a, 2005b; Doherty & Carron, 2003; Kim, Chelladurai, & Trail, 2007; Shibli et al., 1999). Relationship and network capacity has also been considered, and shown to be important to sport and leisure organizations at the community or municipal level for the purposes of acquiring needed resources, coordinating activities, increasing participation, and maintaining and enhancing service quality, among others (e.g., Barnes, Cousens, & MacLean, 2007; Cousens et al., 2006; Frisby et al., 2004; Thibault & Harvey, 1997; Thibault et al., 1999; Vail, 2007).

Several large-scale studies are also informative about the nature of various forms of organizational capital in sport organizations. Drawing from a survey of Canadian nonprofit voluntary organizations in general, Gumulka et al. (2005) noted that sport organizations have fewer financial resources than many other types of nonprofit organizations and thus report a variety of problems related to finances and obtaining external funding. These particular organizations also rely more heavily on volunteers and face difficulty obtaining the type of volunteers they need. However, a consistent strength related to the capacity of sport organiza-

tions is the “dedication of their volunteers, their local community focus, and the priority they place on serving their members” (Gumulka et al., 2005, p. 57). Another large-scale study specifically investigated the nature of sport clubs in Scotland (Allison, 2001). The results from this study identified that, regardless of the size of the club, growth was difficult due to a shortage of facilities and a need for better planning and management of the existing facilities. Their success was attributed to factors such as a strong focus on the needs of members, the ability to raise necessary finances from within the club, and a focus on short-term planning and flexibility (Allison, 2001). Drawing on a large-scale study of CSOs in England, Taylor (2004) identified what he described as a spectrum of sport organizations, ranging from “traditional/informal” to “contemporary/formal” in structure. The CSOs could be classified according to several organizational dimensions, including managerial skills, ability to react to pressure, culture, and receptivity to external assistance. Taylor argued that contemporary/formal CSOs have greater ability to enhance sport development because of these attributes. While these large-scale studies did not use the theoretical tenets of organizational capacity, their findings provide evidence of the multidimensional strengths and challenges of sport organizations.

Research on sport organizations, as a unique subsector of nonprofit and voluntary organizations, has yet to engage a multidimensional framework to investigate the impact of organizational capacity on goal achievement. One exception to this is a study by Sharpe (2006), who examined how several capacity dimensions affected the quality of participants’ experience in one grassroots recreation organization, as well as the ability of the organization to achieve its mission. Sharpe found that certain dimensions of capacity were critical to goal achievement as they inhibited or mobilized other forms of capacity. In particular, she found that a lack of human resource capacity (volunteers with professional competencies) limited the ability of the organization to generate social capital (trust, reciprocity) from networks and connections among individuals. This, in turn, hindered the organization from meeting increasingly complex administrative demands and garnering further organizational resources through social connections. She noted that “social capital does not emerge without at least some input of human and even financial capital to help establish the social networks that can then be used productively” (Sharpe, 2006, p. 398). This notion is consistent with other work that links participation in community sport organizations with the generation of social ties that contribute to trust, commitment and the sense of connectivity within a community (Doherty & Misener, 2008; Seippel, 2006). The current study builds on Sharpe’s research by exploring the multidimensional nature of organizational capacity in the context of one CSO according to the dimensions of capacity outlined by Hall et al. (2003).

## Theoretical Framework

*The Capacity to Serve* (Hall et al., 2003) is the first report from the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO), a project designed to build the body of knowledge about this sector as an important set of institutions in Canadian society. To guide the research, a framework was developed based on the

literature on nonprofit and voluntary organizational capacity; in particular, the intangible or hidden assets that result from human capital and structural capital (Edvinsson & Malone, 1997; Roos, Roos, Dragoneetti, & Edvinsson, 1998), and the management of relations with external parties (Roos et al., 1998). Five dimensions were derived from this literature: human resources, financial, relationships and networks, infrastructure and process, and planning and development capacity (Hall et al., 2003). These are consistent with what Eisinger (2002) summarized as the most common dimensions in capacity research. The model further highlights the potential connections among the capacity dimensions; for example, human resource capacity may impact on planning and development capacity, while financial capacity may impact on relationships and network capacity. Hall et al. (2003) used the model to assess the role that the five dimensions played in the ability of organizations to achieve their missions and objectives, or constrained them from doing so, through research based on data from 36 focus groups in 13 communities across Canada, as well as key informant interviews. A description of each dimension and selected findings of Hall et al.'s (2003) study are presented below.

Human resources capacity is the ability to deploy human capital (i.e., paid staff, volunteers) within the organization, and includes the competencies, knowledge, attitudes, motivation, and behaviors of individuals in the organization. It is purported to be the key element that impacts directly on all other capacities (Hall et al., 2003). This dimension was reported to be the greatest strength in nonprofit and voluntary organizations by an overwhelming majority of participants who recognized volunteers and staff for their commitment, dedication, and ability to work with limited resources. Recruitment of general volunteers, staff, and board members was cited as the most significant issue affecting human resource capacity. However, other issues such as the need for more specialized staff, need for training for board members, and need for effective volunteer management strategies were also identified. The connections among capacity dimensions were evident as adequate and competent human resources were linked to financial capacity, where greater access to stable funding would enable nonprofit and voluntary organizations to better develop human resources capacity.

Financial capacity is the ability of an organization to develop and deploy financial capital (i.e., the revenues, expenses, assets, and liabilities of the organization). Based on Hall et al.'s (2003) findings, financial capacity issues included revenue generation capacity and financial management and accountability issues. It was also noted that human resource issues such as a lack of fundraising skills and difficulty retaining qualified staff also negatively impacted financial capacity. Financial issues posed the greatest capacity challenges as organizations in Hall et al.'s (2003) study identified difficulties fulfilling their missions due to problems associated with project funding and the lack of financial support for infrastructure.

The third dimension identified by Hall et al. (2003) is relationship and network capacity. The framework draws on Putnam's conceptualization of social capital, which refers to "features of social organizations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation of mutual benefit"



(Putnam, 1995, p. 17). As such, relationship and network capacity is the ability to draw on relationships with clients, members, funding agencies, partners, government, media, corporations, and public. This ability is purported to be an asset to an organization as it enables access to shared resources, knowledge, and experience (Hall et al., 2003). Human resources and finances were reported to affect relationship and network capacity as organizations lacked the resources necessary to engage in these relationship-building activities. Specifically, a lack of qualified staff with expertise in dealing with the media was identified as a significant challenge for this area (Hall et al., 2003).

Infrastructure and process capacity is the ability of an organization to deploy or rely on organizational elements related to day-to-day operations (e.g., databases, manuals, policies, procedures, information technology, culture). In this area of capacity, the most important challenges that participants identified pertained directly to information technology. Specifically, internal technical capacity, maintenance, and training were cited as barriers to building stronger organizations (Hall et al., 2003). The need for improved collaboration was seen as a way to share infrastructure and overcome deficiencies in physical infrastructure, such as a lack of permanent facilities. Thus, lack of human resources, financial capacity, and insufficient relationship and network capacity were all cited to impact infrastructure and process capacity.

Lastly, planning and development capacity represents the ability to develop and draw on organizational strategic plans, program plans, policies, and proposals. The lack of core, stable, long-term funding posed the greatest challenge to the development of organizational vision and strategic planning for many organizations in the Hall et al. (2003) study. Uncertainties about future funding and constraints on how current funds can be used appear to have a significant effect on the ability of organizations to plan strategically. Planning and development capacity was also directly impacted by insufficient human resource capacity. Specifically, concerns in this area focused on the expertise of board members and the skills of staff, as many organizations contracted help from external consultants to assist them with research, planning, and organizational development.

According to Eisinger (2002), "there is a clear 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.'s (2003) multidimensional model of organizational capacity in the nonprofit sector delineates key areas of capacity that potentially influence the ability of nonprofit and voluntary organizations to achieve their mission and goals. It also highlights the importance of examining capacity dimensions in combination. Indeed, Hall et al. (2003) found that problems with respect to financial capacity were identified as posing the greatest challenges for the organizations; however, these issues were only critical because they had implications for the other areas of capacity. The framework has particular utility for exploring organizational capacity in nonprofit community sport organizations because it was developed specifically for the nonprofit and voluntary sector. Further, it comprises broad dimensions that may be adapted and refined to particular nonprofit contexts (Hall et al., 2003).

## Research Method

The use of case studies is advocated as an effective means of organizational analysis in sport management (e.g., Caza, 2000, Sharpe, 2006; Stevens & Slack, 1998). This study follows an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 2003) as a means of better understanding organizational capacity. Accordingly, the context of the case is scrutinized and ordinary activities are detailed, as this helps the researchers to pursue the focal interest (Stake, 2003); in this case, organizational capacity. Case studies employ the theoretical assumptions underpinning the epistemology of bounded systems (Kemmis, 1980; Yin, 2003). Indeed, the value of case studies is found in their ability to encourage insight, illustrate issues, and generate broad understandings (Stake, 2003). It is not suggested that the findings of the current study are generalizable across all community sport organizations. Rather, this study is consistent with a constructivist perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Patton, 2002; Schwandt, 2001) which values multiple individual perspectives to enhance understanding about the nature of capacity within one CSO. Through a study of the singular, however, it may be possible to uncover conceptual and empirical patterns that are transferable to other settings given similar contexts and conditions (Frisby, Crawford, & Dorer, 1997; Kemmis, 1980). When contexts and conditions differ, important additional insights into organizational capacity and its impact will be gained.

## Research Context

The subject of the current case study is the Westbury Gymnastics Club (WGC). To protect the anonymity of the organization and the participants, pseudonyms are used throughout the case study. The WGC is situated in a mid-sized city in central Canada, and provides recreational, precompetitive, interclub competitive, and provincial-level sport programs for youth age 5 through 17. There were 33 athletes (15 recreational, 10 precompetitive, and 8 competitive) registered at the time of the study. The club operates within a lower-income area of the city and there are several other gymnastics clubs within the city operating on a for-profit or non-profit basis. The WGC's mandate is to provide a nonprofit, supportive environment for the development of athletes, while recognizing that the club holds a unique position based on its location for providing an accessible program at a reasonable cost for the immediate community.

The club was established in 2004, yet two years later faced a critical juncture because of a division among board members over whether to remain a nonprofit club, or allow the previous head coach to purchase the club's assets and operate it as a for-profit business. This resulted in a situation where a new board was formed, composed primarily of parents who desired the club to remain within the non-profit sector. Others who had previously held leadership positions within the club chose to leave and start their own for-profit club. The resulting board for the WGC was composed primarily of parents who were previously involved at a minimal level and were now taking on positions of leadership to help the club continue to provide its sport service in the community. Two parents carried over from the previous club's board. As well, one of the assistant coaches from the previous club took on the position of head coach for the WGC and another assistant coach



remained as the new recreation coach. The board positions of the WGC include: president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer, member-at-large, and recreation convenor. The head coach is an ex-officio board member. The treasurer position was vacant at the time of the study. Further, while the club had yet to establish formal goals, it was revealed during the study that participants perceived the main goals of the club to be: (1) providing an excellent opportunity for athlete development, and (2) providing stability for the organization—particularly, financial stability.

In July 2006, the researchers were contacted by the WGC for assistance with formalizing procedures in the club. It was determined that the CSO would not have time for formal, long-range planning for several months, thus one of the researchers would join the new board as a volunteer active-member researcher (Adler & Adler, 1987). This would enable her to study the CSO as a case in organizational capacity and, in return, provide assistance on strategic planning and formalizing procedures when the club was ready. This assistance was provided once the club was ready, which coincided with the conclusion of the research project. Approval to conduct the study was granted by the Ethics Review Board at the researchers' institution.

## Data Collection

The research was conducted between July 2006 and February 2007. The study design incorporated two main approaches to data gathering. Semi-structured, audio-recorded interviews were conducted in person with all personnel who currently had primary involvement in the organization, including six board members and the recreation coach ( $N = 7$ ). There were six female participants and one male, and all participants were parents of athletes in the club with the exception of the recreation coach and recreation convenor. All board members held voluntary positions and coaches received a small wage. The interviews lasted approximately one hour each and all participants were interviewed once. An interview guide was developed based on the five dimensions of organizational capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Participants were asked about the strengths and challenges of each capacity dimension as well as what difference they thought each dimension made to the club's ability to fulfill its goals.

The second form of data collection was active-member researcher observations (Adler & Adler, 1987). The observations took place at monthly board meetings and other events (registration evenings, end of session galas). According to Adler and Adler (1987, p. 50), "with active membership, the researcher moves clearly away from the marginally involved role of the traditional participant observer and assumes a more central position in the setting." This greater degree of participation allowed the researcher to gain the trust of other board members and resulted in closer, more accurate, and more in-depth insight into the capacity of the organization. Board members were well-informed about the research in advance and the active-member researcher perceived that participants were comfortable with her participation as she had many informal conversations with them, thus enabling participant observation to play a prominent role in data collection (Yin, 2003). Extensive field notes collected during all observations were typed and further expanded upon after returning from the "field." Further, the research-

ers discussed the activities of the CSO biweekly. This was a useful technique to periodically realign the perspectives of the active-member researcher with the other researcher to analyze the setting critically (Adler & Adler, 1987). The data from memos, interviews, and observations were managed by the computer-aided data analysis software NVivo. To systematically reflect on her position in the inquiry process, a research journal was maintained by the active-member researcher. This helped ensure that her experience in the research process was transparent within the research investigation (Kirby, Greaves, & Reid, 2006).

It has been noted that there is a need for a variety of “ways of seeing” in sport management research and multifaceted approaches are one means of challenging the limitations of traditional research practices (Amis & Silk, 2005). Active-member researcher observations as a form of data collection, however, also have challenges and require consciousness, reflection, and integrity of the researcher (cf. Frisby et al., 2005). The researcher must work together with a group of participants to co-construct knowledge and create a safe space in which participants can speak openly about the challenges facing the organization. The researcher needs to be accessible and respectful of the time frame of the group and careful not to push her own agenda. In this case, extensive time commitment was required for each meeting, which challenged the active-member researcher’s assumptions of what “should take place” during board meetings. In addition, a large amount of data were collected and researchers needed to take great care to analyze the findings in a timely and accessible manner, while providing adequate representation of the data.

## Researcher Positionality

Researcher positionality acknowledges the impact of the researchers’ backgrounds, assumptions, and relationships with research participants and subject matter to provide more thoughtful and critical representation of ourselves within our research. Qualitative researchers advocate high standards of reflexivity, openness, and transparency about their “location” or positionality within their research and the implications of this position on those involved in the research (Amis & Silk, 2005; Frisby, 2005; Kirby et al., 2006). The researcher who entered directly into an active membership role, was an outsider in collaboration with insiders (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001). Initially, she experienced some frustration and disappointment as she perceived that the group viewed her as an “outside expert” because of her affiliation with the University. However, over the time frame of the study, relationships were formed and the researcher had a greater level of participation in the activities of the organization, which caused some transformation in her perceived status from “outside expert” to “insider/collaborator.” This transformation highlighted the constant negotiation required between positions of insider and outsider (Harrison et al., 2001). It should be noted, however, that while this negotiation was encountered, the active-member researcher ultimately held her role as a researcher within the social science community as her “most critical reference point and source of self-identity” (Adler & Adler, 1987, p. 66).

The researchers were both Canadian-born, White, female academics who identified strongly with participation in organized sport. As such, we acknowledge

that our assumptions are based on our own social experiences in sport and through doing research on community sport. Further, the active-member researcher has a background in gymnastics and while this was not the reason for her involvement with the club, it provided a common ground of knowledge and interest between the participants and herself. Kosygina (2005) suggested that, as female researchers, we experience discrepancies between interviews with men and women. While we certainly agree that stages of social research are gendered, in this case, the interactive style of board meetings enabled the active-member researcher to get to know all board members, regardless of gender, for several months before the research interviews. Thus, the inherent relationship-building within the study design further enabled the transition from outside expert to insider/collaborator.

## Data Analysis

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed in a multistep process. Hall et al.'s (2003) model of organizational capacity provided a priori categories by which to analyze the data (Patton, 2002). The observation data were coded and analyzed simultaneously with the interview transcripts. Both researchers independently read through the transcripts of each interview participant as well as the active-member researcher observations. This generated an understanding of each participant's perspectives on capacity (Patton, 2002). An emergent coding scheme was then developed based on the themes of organizational capacity referred to most often by the board members, coaches, and the active-member researcher.

The analysis followed Guba and Lincoln's (1989) criteria for authenticity, which is consistent with constructivist epistemology (Schwandt, 2001). That is, methods of triangulation, including member-checking by sending the transcripts back to participants for verification and clarification as well as multiple data sources, were used to clarify meaning and ensure fairness of interpretation (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Harrison et al., 2001) while providing converging lines of inquiry within the case (Yin, 2003). Another means of triangulation was the involvement of the second researcher in the generative phase of analysis (Patton, 2002). This involved discussion of the data and, when necessary, reconciliation of the researchers' interpretations to reach consensus on the meaning of the data. As the active-member became more involved in the organization, this process was increasingly important as it encouraged reflection and clear articulation about the nature of capacity in the club, while enabling the second researcher to pose questions, challenge assumptions, and become engaged in the data herself.

## Findings and Discussion

Key elements of each dimension that emerged as perceived strengths or challenges for the organization, as well as the overall perceived impact of each dimension on goal achievement, are presented. The findings are discussed in light of the existing literature, drawing comparisons and highlighting new insights. Several connections among the various dimensions are also noted and then discussed at the end of the article. A selected sample of quotations that best represent the themes is provided throughout to further illustrate the findings.

## Human Resources Capacity

The board members and coaches in the WGC identified several strengths related to human resources capacity, including group dynamics, mutual values, and skills, knowledge, and attitudes. Overall, group dynamics within the board were very positive in nature. While one member mentioned that they had only been working together for approximately six months with the reformed club, and did not know each other well, members generally trusted one another and had confidence in the abilities within the group to effectively carry out the mission of the club. Doherty and Carron (2003) similarly found that tenure or length of time with volunteer sport executive committees was not a significant predictor of cohesion. Together, these findings suggest that, in the nonprofit community sport context, factors other than time together likely contribute to positive group dynamics.

Mutual values may be one such factor, and it emerged as a theme within human resources capacity as board members spoke of the strengths of the human resources in terms of their shared values, which included the club's nonprofit status, the athlete-focused mission, and dedication to the club and the community in which it is situated. Upholding the club's nonprofit status was a central factor in its initial division from the original club and reformation during the previous summer. According to several participants, the nonprofit status of the club was critical for enabling it to offer a lower-cost program for families who could otherwise not afford the membership fees for their children to participate. The WGC was described as being dedicated to the part of the community in which it operates, which is considered a lower-income area of the city. As Nancy pointed out, "We are always talking about the community there and ensuring that those students have access." Several other participants discussed how everyone in the club was committed to the athletes. Rachel noted, "We don't have a situation where there's one particular parent or board member working only towards their particular gymnast, and from what I've seen, it seems that everybody is concerned with the club as a whole and the development of the athletes." Notably, the mutual values that emerged in this study are consistent with previous research on sport organizations which has shown that altruistic reasons such as serving the organization's members (specifically, "helping kids") and contributing toward a need in the community are significant factors in volunteer recruitment and satisfaction (Doherty, 2005a; Gumulka et al., 2005; Shibli et al., 1999).

Whereas a low level of professional expertise is often characteristic of grass-roots organizations (Sharpe, 2006), the findings from the WGC were somewhat unusual, as the qualities that individuals bring to this organization in terms of skills, knowledge, and attitudes were considered to be a strength for the WGC. When asked to describe the strengths of the club in terms of human resources capacity, Nancy noted:

I would say that they are very resourceful in terms of related knowledge to what we're doing. Knowledge of the sport, knowledge of other support resources in the community, they have quite a few skills. To run something like this, you need computer skills, all the organizational skills, so that would be it.

Participants felt that the club was fortunate to have members with strong skills in the areas of administration, leadership, and coaching. Other valued characteristics included taking initiative, willingness to give time, being supportive, and being well-educated. As Dave pointed out, "You know, we're all university-educated. It's a very professional board that we have which is great. It just means that they're motivated to get things done."

While human resources capacity was primarily discussed as a strength for the WGC, the need for more volunteers was noted as a challenge for the club. All interviewees felt that their positions take a considerable amount of effort and time. Because of these demands, the need for more volunteers in general to help out at events and be called upon for assistance with specific tasks was mentioned by several board members. Yvonne verbalized that, "it doesn't have to be the committee members doing it all. That's something we can work on." Dave also noted that "we really can't grow anymore until we build up some more people." The following quotation from Charlotte provides further evidence of this concern:

We need to involve other parents—not just us. We need some transitional processes. We need to recognize that not all the girls are going to be staying here, we're not all going to be staying here so we need to think of some way to integrate more involvement from more people, I think that's really, really important.

The need for more volunteers was identified as a critical human resources capacity issue in the nonprofit and voluntary organization sector in general (Hall et al., 2003) and has also been well-documented in the sport volunteer literature (e.g., Allison, 2001; Cuskelly, Hoyer, & Auld, 2006; Doherty, 2005b; Kim et al., 2007; Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2003; Sharpe, 2006; Taylor, 2004). Notably, community sport organizations are frequently challenged by a lack of secondary volunteer involvement; individuals who are more casually involved and assist with supplementary tasks and responsibilities, thus taking some of the load off executive board members and coaches (Sharpe, 2006). Most of the work is often done by a small group of overworked volunteers (Cuskelly, 2004; Doherty, 2005a, 2005b; Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2003; Taylor, 2004), as evidenced in the current CSO. Indeed, this group showed hesitation to take on more responsibilities as the workload was already, in some cases, more than initially expected. One further example of the impact of the shortage of volunteers was seen in the unfilled treasurer position, resulting in a lack of necessary financial management skills, and compromised financial capacity for the club.

A further challenge for the WGC in terms of human resources was the centrality or concentration of critical resources in one or two people. While each board member clearly had skills or knowledge to offer, most interviewees focused on the critical mass of two people within the board who hold the centrality of knowledge and access to other resources and networks. For example, these board members had personal connections with other gymnastics clubs and coaches, and were well-connected in the broader gymnastics community. As well, they tended to have knowledge of different grants for which the club could apply that were based on increasing physical activity and sport participation in the community. This strong reliance on a few key personnel was noted as a challenge for the club

since participants felt that this concentration of knowledge and resources could limit future growth. The impact of this centrality on group dynamics was observed by the active-member researcher at board meetings and other events:

The network that [she] brings to the club is of considerable importance and her background knowledge in the sport is a tremendous asset to the club. It seems that everyone recognizes that [she] is a huge asset to the club and therefore, no one wants to suggest that we move forward or put timelines on reports. The body language of some other board members suggests that moving forward is necessary in order to respect everyone's time, but I don't anticipate that anyone will verbalize this need because of this dynamic.

The idea that "much comes from a few" in terms of time and effort given is noted throughout the literature on nonprofit sport organizations (e.g., Doherty, 2005a; Gumulka et al., 2005; Leisure Industries Research Centre, 2003; Taylor, 2004). Yet, the notion that knowledge and/or skills are concentrated in a few also provides many challenges for organizations such as the WGC. In particular, this may result in difficult transitions when central volunteers or coaches leave the organization and need to be replaced (Cuskelly, Hoye, & Auld, 2006; Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008).

Overall, human resources capacity was identified as one of the greatest strengths related to goal achievement for the club. Positive group dynamics, or in Dave's words, "working well together," as well as the skills and mutual values people bring to the organization, were cited as primary factors in achieving the goals of the club. These findings are consistent with Hall et al.'s (2003) research showing that human resources capacity is the greatest strength in nonprofit and voluntary organizations in general in terms of the commitment and dedication of volunteers and staff, and their ability to work with limited resources.

## Financial Capacity

The WGC's sources of revenue were considered by all participants to be adequate and stable, whereas athlete registration fees composed the majority of the club's revenue. Other revenue sources included financial support from a provincial granting foundation and fundraising through merchandise sales. Gumulka et al. (2005) noted that sport and recreation organizations receive more of their revenues from earned income such as registration fees and gifts and donations, and less from government than is the case in the Canadian nonprofit and voluntary sector as a whole. According to Allison (2001), this relative lack of dependence on government for direct financial support makes sport clubs much more autonomous than other organizations in the voluntary sector.

When asked about the challenges related to financial capacity, participants identified several issues surrounding financial planning, management, and accountability. Several board members discussed the lack of, and need for, a long-range financial plan; both for basic operations, and as part of a long-range strategic plan.

I think if we're going to project what the future is going to look like, we have to project our revenues . . . having a financial plan in place, a plan for growth



... we haven't established, at least that I've seen, what our base costs are that we have to meet and determined whether the registration fees are going to cover that. (Rachel)

This theme parallels Allison's (2001) finding that "clubs are generally quite under-developed in terms of their finances and operate on a very basic income and expenditure account. Few have cash reserves or other assets that could be used for matching funding or longer-term investment and development of the club" (p. 7). Bowman (2007) suggested that an appropriate cushion of potential resources held in reserve is necessary for nonprofit organizations. Planning for these resources would allow organizations to adapt to internal pressures as well as initiate change in strategy—essential elements of nonprofit financial capacity (Bowman, 2007).

While there was a strong sense from five of the seven participants that the club had been very successful in its fundraising endeavors, several further noted that the club had not explicitly established a purpose for fundraising. The active-member researcher also noted that, "the group seemed to lack purpose and vision for fundraising. With the exception of the admission that they can always use more money, no target numbers have been set, and there has been no discussion about what the money will be used for." The desire to recruit corporate sponsors for the club was also mentioned by several participants; however, no plans or vision were discussed. The literature highlights the importance of a strategic approach to revenue generation, including fundraising and corporate sponsorship (e.g., Misener & Paraschak, 2006) which, in this case, was a neglected aspect of financial capacity.

Financial management and accountability capacity also emerged as a theme when participants were asked about the challenges related to the finances of the club. In particular, the treasurer position, which was unfilled since the establishment of the reformed club, was raised by participants as an issue affecting financial capacity for the WGC. While the various tasks of this position were being covered by two board members, and the group trusted those individuals, there was a strong sense that this was organizationally inappropriate as well as ineffective for club growth. Board members recognized the need for responsible and accountable practices in the area of financial reporting. However, financial capacity was limited because of the lack of volunteer human resources, particularly, the lack of specialized knowledge required for this role. The need for specific financial management competencies or accounting skills for volunteer board members, which was lacking in this CSO, has been well-documented as a financial capacity issue affecting smaller nonprofit organizations (Hall et al., 2003; Hou et al., 2003; Scott, 2003; Sharpe, 2006).

The most pressing challenges reported for nonprofit and voluntary organizations in Hall et al.'s (2003) research were in the area of financial capacity. They found that many registered charities depended heavily on external funding from government and thus identified the need for "better," more flexible, and less restricted funding. In contrast, findings from the WGC showed that while there were several apparent challenges related to financial capacity in this study, board members and coaches of this club did not perceive financial capacity to be a critical factor in goal attainment. This may be because, in part, to the revenue base for the WGC which primarily consisted of membership registrations or athlete fees.

Elsewhere it has been noted that reliable revenue generated from athlete fees generally enables clubs to cover their main expenditures, including registration fees to their affiliated provincial or state sport organizations, coaching salaries, facility rental fees, and training equipment (e.g., Allison, 2001; Sharpe, 2006). It is further due to the fact that the club was at a critical juncture and was not well-established and thus did not have many expenses to date. Nonetheless, WGC growth may be impeded if expenditures were to increase (e.g., due to development work).

## Relationship and Network Capacity

Relationship and network connections between the CSO and external stakeholders or partners were very evident in this case and discussed as a strength for the WGC. It should be noted that the focus of this capacity dimension was on external relationships between the club and various parties in the community (i.e., outside of the relationships that exist among volunteers within the organization; cf. Doherty & Misener, 2008). Relationship and network connections identified by participants included those with the media, funding agencies, the local sport council, a lawyer, university researchers, equipment and merchandise suppliers, school principal, facility providers and other gymnastics clubs. Vail (2007) suggested that community-based sport programs can be enhanced by involving nontraditional partners and community leaders, who may not be recognized as part of the sport system but understand the needs of the community. This was an effective approach for the WGC, as one board member commented that, "the relationship with [the principal] is pretty good too, since he knows a lot of parents in that community and the difficulties they are facing. I know he promotes the club as well" (Lyndsay).

Benefits of partnerships and interorganizational linkages for sport and leisure organizations have historically centered on the exchange of services and facilities (Thibault et al., 1999). While these resources were an important basis of the club's partnerships, further social capital benefits were also mentioned by several participants in this case, including social support, reputation in the community, and reciprocity among partners:

When we are talking about relationships with the gymnastics community, we help each other all the time, we wash each others hands . . . we do references for each other. And it's just amazing, because it's so nice and so pleasant when you come to that competition and everybody hugs you, and says, "Hi, how's it going? What's happening in your club?" (Natalie)

I think they know us and know our club and tell everybody and maybe more kids will come to our club. (Yvonne)

I think it helps increase the appearance of stability in the club when you have certain logos and affiliations. People look at that and say "they may be around a bit longer" or "they must have some sort of credentials to get that funding". (Rachel)

The notion that social capital can be (re)produced in and through sport organizations has attracted recent attention in the sport literature (Doherty & Misener,

2008; Seippel, 2006; Sharpe, 2006). The central idea of social capital theory is that social networks have value (Putnam, 1995). However, while there appears to be potential for the generation of social capital in and through a CSO's network of stakeholders, evidence suggests the necessary type of relationship is not actually realized to any great extent in the sport system (e.g., Allison, 2001; Barnes et al., 2007; Cousens et al., 2006). The case of the WGC offers an example of a club where social capital has taken on an essential role in relationship and network capacity, perhaps helping to build other forms of capital such as human and financial resources (cf. Sharpe, 2006). This could be due to the shared values and beliefs underpinning these relationships (e.g., Cousens et al., 2006). Respect, trust, and openness were cited by several participants as key factors in building relationship and network capacity. The values of the club were thus shown to be a foundation from which the club builds external relationships.

Human resources were identified as having a strong influence on developing relationship and network capacity. One of the board members had strong professional competencies in this area and her efforts were noted by four other members. The active-member researcher also observed that,

In terms of partnerships, [she] sent one of the club's calendars to the executive director of the provincial sport organization as well as one to the program manager who has been a contact for the club. She continues to emphasize that "good" partnerships will be a huge asset to the club over time.

The emphasis that the WGC has invested in maintaining positive relations with community partners was believed to have strengthened this capacity dimension.

The main challenge of relationship and network capacity was the time required to form and maintain relationships. Participants were conscious of the extensive commitment that was required for strategic relationships and thus chose to be selective about which relationships the club would pursue. The lack of a strategic plan was also noted as a weakness with regard to establishing and maintaining relationship and network capacity. While participants considered relationships to be beneficial for the club, there was an overall lack of strategic direction for this capacity dimension.

Several representatives of the WGC considered this dimension of capacity to be critical to goal achievement, impacting the overall stability, success, and impact of the club in the community. All participants viewed relationships with other organizations and stakeholders in the community to be beneficial for attaining required resources, whether human, technical, or material. There was evidence that members of the club had reflected on the limitations of the previous club and purposefully sought out partners and relationships that would be advantageous to, and compatible with, the new club.

Prior to this year, I would say that we didn't really think strategically at all about having partnerships—they didn't even exist. It only started this summer when we realized it was very important for growth to do that. (Charlotte)

The findings of this case are a sharp contrast to previous research, which found that clubs operate quite autonomously with only about one quarter having

links with such stakeholders as schools and other community organizations, while less than one fifth had relationships with commercial companies such as corporate sponsors (Allison, 2001). While there has been a growing recognition of the importance of developing and managing strategic partnerships in sport and recreation (e.g., Cousens et al., 2006; Thibault et al., 1999; Thibault & Harvey, 1997), establishing linkages is difficult and often not actually achieved (Cousens et al., 2006). Relationships were a priority for this club, were frequently established, and deemed to be critical to its success. The findings of the current case provide evidence of the positive impact of this dimension in one CSO.

### Infrastructure and Process Capacity

The internal, operational aspects of an organization are represented within infrastructure and process capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Several themes emerged when participants were asked to describe the strengths of the day-to-day operations, or "how work is done around here." One theme that emerged as a strength for the WGC was the frequent and open communication among board members. Communication within the club was primarily done through e-mail, at board meetings, and on an informal basis when parents were picking their children up from training sessions. The nature of communication among board members and coaches was described by Yvonne: "We keep using the internet and everybody gets the letters, not just me writing to you. If somebody sees something or writes something, all the board gets it. This is very good because everybody can answer when they want and they want everybody's opinion."

Another aspect that emerged as a strength was the strong desire for more formalized operations and processes within the club. This was evident through many participants' comments on the need to overcome their lack of formalized procedures and develop official club documents (e.g., policies, procedures, job descriptions, and contracts). While Allison (2001) found that management in sport clubs was typically based on trust and experience, rather than formal contracts and codes of practice, the participants in the current study felt that these documents needed to be developed to ensure consistency and reputability. The desire for more formal documentation was one indicator of a positive, forward-looking organizational culture where board members wanted to see the club grow. Taylor (2004) suggested that developing a culture that is consistent with a contemporary, formal organization will increase capacity and promote overall club development. The WGC appears to be moving in this direction.

Many other descriptions of the culture within the WGC centered on an inclusive, supportive environment for athletes and parents. For example, as Charlotte noted:

It's competitive but also a fairly friendly atmosphere between each other . . . they'll all help each other out, they care about each other. That's a very important thing to foster. Whereas if they were in hockey or some other sport, I find it's not necessarily the same.

Participants were proud of this caring atmosphere and shared stories during board meetings about how this culture was observed and admired at competitions by parents and coaches from other clubs. These findings parallel the work of

McKinsey and Company (2001) who claimed that culture is the “connective tissue” that brings together the capacity elements of an organization.

Several challenges within this dimension were also noted. The active-member researcher observed that the purpose and content of meetings was heavily focused on the day-to-day operations, with little attention and time given to broader concerns and direction for the club. Inglis, Alexander, and Weaver (1999) cautioned that when a nonprofit board continually focuses on the operational aspects of the organization, strategic activities and resource planning can be overlooked. They further suggested that to govern effectively, boards should assess the importance of these activities for their various constituent groups. Some participants also felt that the detail provided in reports was too lengthy and it was observed that this information would be more appropriate for a “parents’ night” meeting, rather than the monthly board meeting. Some concerns about the extensive number of agenda items and the resultant length of meetings were expressed.

I think that the biggest one would be time management. Let’s get to the point and stick to the agenda. It’s not that I don’t want to be social. I’m just stretched everywhere. I would say we need to stick to the decision that was made at the previous meeting. (Nancy)

Another challenge for the WGC was consistent access to facilities. This was notably a source of frustration for most board members and coaches. While some members felt that the club should be looking toward building its own facility, others felt that this would be too much of a financial burden and that the current pay-for-use arrangements with schools and other facilities in the city were adequate. Finding an appropriate training facility, where equipment could be stored, was a challenge that required human resources as well as relationship and network capacity. This issue has been previously identified in literature on community sport organizations (Allison, 2001; Sharpe, 2006). Access to facilities was the single greatest issue in ensuring both the sustainability and growth of sport clubs in Scotland (Allison, 2001). The lack of permanence that was evident in the perceptions of board members and coaches in this study is consistent among other CSOs: “A facility base that ‘feels like a home’ is a central element of how clubs define themselves and small features such as a storage cupboard or a noticeboard can make a major difference to a clubs’ sense of ownership” (Allison, 2001, p. 6). Notably, information technology, which was the most pressing issue in Hall et al.’s (2003) research, did not emerge as an issue in this study. This could be due, in part, to the small, informal nature of the reformed club and resulting lack of sophisticated technology, as well as the recognition that basic operations were essential at the critical juncture of the club, but sophisticated technology was not yet needed. While many issues related to infrastructure and processes were discussed, this capacity dimension was not noted by participants as having a strong impact on overall goal achievement for the club.

## Planning and Development Capacity

When participants were asked if they were aware of any planning that had been done in the club, most board members and coaches perceived that there had been

some short-term planning done regarding coach training and transitions. It was evident to the researchers, upon initial contact, that the club had no formal strategic plan but did have a strong desire to develop a new mission statement and core values, within a formal strategic plan. A further strength for the WGC was the recognition from all research participants of the need for, and purpose of, planning, which was consistently described in terms of stability for the club and future growth.

We need to plan for the future of the club—the growth of the club. What's supposed to happen in the club and what do we want for the club? Do we want to increase recreational or are we looking at having a high class competitive team? And then we need the framework to put that all into place. (Rachel)

Another board member added:

[Planning] just makes us more prepared to deal with anything. And if we want the club to last at all . . . it's going to last if we plan. If not, it will just fall apart. (Yvonne)

Challenges in terms of planning and development were also present in the WGC. Consistent with the previous club, the nature of planning was considered by research participants to be reactionary and informal. With the exception of improving coaching credentials, no organizational development had been formally addressed (e.g., increasing the volunteer base, long-term facility planning). Further, while athlete fees and fundraising efforts were covering the basic expenses of the club, no financial provisions were being made, or funds set aside, for club development. Allison (2001) claimed that the willingness to consider the financial implications of planning and development is an important indicator of success for sport clubs. Participants recognized this as a weakness and, in response, spoke of planning needs in three areas: human resources (e.g., coaches, general volunteers, board members), business and financial planning (e.g., financial goals and management), and program planning (e.g., national-level program, training facilities). It was observed that a coherent strategic plan that has the support of the entire group was needed as there were many different opinions expressed among participants regarding how the various planning needs would be prioritized.

Planning and development capacity was one of the biggest factors influencing the achievement of the goals of the WGC. The findings of this case are consistent with previous literature which states that 58% of sport and recreation organizations had difficulty planning for the future (Gumulka et al., 2005). Community sport organizations tend to be informal in nature (Doherty, 2005b; Sharpe, 2006), and long-term success generally depends on how the day-to-day operations of the club are carried out (Allison, 2001). However, the findings of this study show that, given the need for community sport programs that are integrated within a broader sport system (Barnes et al., 2007), reactionary planning processes will no longer ensure that programs are meeting complex expectations of multiple stakeholders such as facility providers, suppliers, parents, and sport governing bodies (e.g., Sowa et al., 2004). Strategic planning is a common way to overcome these challenges (Eisinger, 2002) through minimizing uncertainty, while promoting stability and future growth (Thibault, Slack, & Hinings, 1993). McKinsey and Company



(2001) further emphasized that a new aspiration or strategy can only be transformative if it is then used to align the other elements of organizational capacity.

### **Connections Among the Capacity Dimensions**

Hall et al. (2003) suggested that there are many connections among the capacity dimensions, further highlighting the multidimensionality of organizational capacity. Evidence of connections among the dimensions is consistently noted throughout the findings. It was apparent that challenges related to insufficient human resources plus a lack of a long-range strategic plan influenced the ability of the organization to engage in financial planning and to strengthen its financial capacity. For example, opportunities to apply for grants were continually being brought to the attention of the board by those few members who were familiar with various agencies through their own occupations. The WGC devoted some time during each board meeting to review funding opportunities, yet most application processes for grants were seen as too extensive and, consistent with other research (Hall et al., 2003; Scott, 2003), the WGC did not have the personnel, skills, or strategic priorities established to pursue many of these opportunities. In addition, the vacant treasurer position resulted in a lack of necessary financial management competencies that compromised the financial capacity of the club.

Several of the club's capacity strengths were found to impact other dimensions. Relational skills, as a competency evident within the club's human resources capacity, enabled further development of relationship and network capacity. In Hall et al.'s (2003) research, the biggest challenges for nonprofit and voluntary organizations in the area of relationship and network capacity appeared to be with human resources in terms of lack of qualified staff with the skills required to build and maintain relationships (also Sharpe, 2006). This was not the case for the WGC board. It was helped by a board member with strong relational competencies who also encouraged the other members to invest in relationships and develop personal contacts as a key way to achieving the mission. However, the noted lack of planning limited the club's ability to further develop relationship and network capacity, as the findings showed a lack of strategic direction regarding which relationships were most critical for investment of limited time and resources.

Hall et al. (2003) noted that it is much easier for organizations that have access to staff, volunteers, and board members with the right skills to undertake strategic planning processes. Where insufficient relationship and network capacity has limited the ability of many nonprofit organizations to pursue organizational development, the WGC recognized the need for specialized knowledge on planning and development and approached the researchers to acquire these resources, thus using a stronger area of capacity (relationship and network capacity) to develop another area (planning and development capacity).

### **Conclusions and Future Research**

The multidimensional examination of organizational capacity in the WGC provides a comprehensive picture of the nature of each dimension and their relative importance to goal achievement. The current study extends the body of research on CSOs from its predominant consideration of human resource issues and rela-

tionship and network capacity to a broader focus where multiple dimensions are considered. Hall et al.'s (2003) framework contends that human resources is the most important dimension of nonprofit organizational capacity, and that the various dimensions interact to impact goal achievement. These contentions were verified in the context of the CSO examined here, thus providing support for the framework and its use in future research on organizational capacity in other nonprofit settings. Differences in capacity by organizational context may be expected, and several findings that appear to be unique to the community sport setting of the current study were revealed. Further, the findings provide additional insight into the nature and impact of the interactions among the dimensions in this particular nonprofit context.

Human resources capacity was perceived by participants to be the most critical factor influencing goal attainment for the club. This is consistent with the work of Hall et al. (2003) and Sharpe (2006). This dimension was characterized by positive group dynamics, mutual values, and skills and knowledge, yet was limited by a lack of sufficient volunteers. In contrast to Hall et al. (2003), the participants in the current study reported that financial capacity was not a significant issue related to goal attainment. However, challenges with regard to financial planning and management may become more critical and require more attention as the club grows and more people become involved. While the club was limited by the amount of time that board members could devote to developing relationship and network capacity, the impact of this dimension was reported to be critical to overall goal achievement as it enabled further development of resources. Planning and development capacity was also found to have a strong impact on goal achievement as the club recognized the importance of a long-range strategic plan. Contrastingly, infrastructure and process capacity was not perceived to have a strong impact on overall goal achievement for the club. In addition, several connections among the capacity dimensions were noted. Specifically, the impact of financial capacity and relationship and network capacity on goal achievement was reportedly influenced by human resources, whereas a lack of planning was shown to affect both the club's financial capacity and relationship and network capacity.

The findings have several strategic implications for the WGC, centered on the use of organizational capacity as a framework for holistic organizational development. Specifically, expanding the volunteer base for the club and implementing a succession plan will ensure that the quality of the program does not decline with the departure of key volunteers, who have carried excessive loads. A succession plan that is framed by the club's strategic goals and human resource needs should enable smooth transitions of leadership positions (Taylor et al., 2008). The WGC can also learn from, and implement, strategies based on the connections among capacity dimensions evidenced in this study. The club can develop its finances through fundraising by building on its existing relationship and network capacity to engage in purposeful approaches to donor and sponsor identification and development (e.g., Misener & Paraschak, 2006). Further, identifying financial objectives, and developing a long-range strategic plan will give purpose and direction to further development of other capacity areas of the club.

The present study represents an initial examination of multidimensional capacity in the context of one community sport organization. As such, this research can be located in the broader nonprofit organizational capacity literature which

has argued for the use of holistic, capacity-based studies as an effective means of organizational analysis (Hou et al., 2003). The use of an active-member researcher approach, alongside interviews, revealed greater insight into the factors that impact goal achievement than a single data source would allow. This method also revealed important insights into researcher positionality and transparency when studying organizational issues. Being cognizant of our assumptions as researchers and our position in relation to research participants is essential in building trust as well as critically examining data from multiple viewpoints.

While case-specific examples have been highlighted in this study, a broader investigation would help to identify the nature and impact of organizational capacity in the population of CSOs. By continuing to move away from generating merely descriptive lists of capacity characteristics (Eisinger, 2002), and investigating capacity through various research methods (Wing, 2004), future research can continue to explore the relationship between various dimensions of organizational capacity and goal achievement in sport organizations.

## Notes

1. The terms *nonprofit organizations* and *nonprofit and voluntary organizations* are used throughout this paper to collectively refer to service-providing organizations that are nongovernmental, nonprofit distributing, self-governing, voluntary (i.e., benefit to some degree from voluntary contributions of time or money), and may or may not be formally incorporated or registered under specific legislation (Hall et al., 2004).

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