Organizational Change in National Sport Organizations: Examining Capacity for Change

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Introduction

Capacity for change – or the competencies, capabilities, and resources used by an organization to manage the change process – is critical for the successful management of organizational change (e.g., Amis et al., 2004; Carnall, 2018; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Judge & Douglas, 2009; Legg et al., 2016). As conceptualized in the existing literature, capacity for change can be broken down into behavioural and technical components: leaders must mobilize a commitment to change by having a clear vision while also having the technical skills and expertise to successfully transition the organization to its new state (Amis et al., 2004).

As these criteria show, existing research on capacity for change has largely focused on the leaders in an organization as change agents. This perspective is problematic as change is an unpredictable process, where senior leaders – due to staff turnovers – are not always present during a change process (e.g., Thompson & Parent, in press). This is especially the case for National Sport Organizations (NSOs) that have recently experienced major personnel changes (see Parent et al., 2019). Thus, it becomes critical to better understand capacity for change by looking beyond leadership (i.e., human resource) aspects to other sources of capacity which sport organizations, such as NSOs, can use to increase their chances of successful change outcomes. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine various sources of capacity for change in NSOs and understand how these sources enable or constrain organizational change.

Theoretical Framework

This study used Hall et al.’s (2003) framework which outlined five main sources of organizational capacity: financial, human resources, relationship and network, infrastructure and process capacity, and planning, development, and research capacity. This framework has been useful when examining organizational capacity in sport (e.g., Misener & Doherty, 2009), and arguably, could also be useful for examining capacity for change by highlighting different sources of capacity accessible when one source (i.e., human resources) is not available or is weakened during the change process.

Methods

A comparative case study methodology was employed with six NSOs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff and Board members of each NSO. Documents (e.g., strategic plans, policies, etc.) were also collected and used to better understand the changes undergone and to corroborate the findings obtained from the interviews. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed following Braun et al.’s (2016) thematic analysis.

Preliminary Results

At the time of writing, interviews are ongoing. Preliminary results indicate financial capacity to be a constraint; however, NSOs rely on other sources of capacity to mitigate these financial constraints – mainly, their network and relationships with members of the sport system like the Canadian Olympic Committee and other NSOs.

Conclusions and Contributions

This study contributes to researchers’ understanding and conceptualization of capacity for change by expanding Greenwood and Hinings’ (1996) and Amis et al.’s (2004) original capacity for change framework beyond the human resources aspect. The practical contributions include illustrating how managers can leverage different sources of capacity for change when one source is not available in their specific change context.