Synch or Swim: Examining the Capacity of the Canadian University Artistic Swimming League

Alanna Harman, Wilfrid Laurier University
Nicole Vandermade, Wilfrid Laurier University
Lindsay Duncas, McGill University

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Females continue to participate in sport at a much lower rate than their male counterparts at all stages of life (Statistics Canada, 2013). By the time females enter adulthood only 16% report participating in a sport (Statistics Canada, 2013). Community sport organizations (CSOs) have been identified as critical to fulfilling public policy objectives, such as increasing female’s sport and physical activity participation (Canadian Heritage, 2012). However, voluntary organizations such as CSOs struggle to obtain the necessary organizational capital to achieve their program directives (Gumulka, Hay, & Lasby, 2006; Wicker & Breuer, 2011) and the subsequent broader government objectives.

Organizational capacity, which is a CSOs ability to acquire the necessary organizational recourses impacts their ability to achieve their mandate (Hall, 2003). Human resources and planning; and development capacity in particular have been found to be relatively more important in the ability of CSOs to achieve their goals (Misener & Doherty, 2009). However, volunteerism continues to decline (Breuer, Hoecckman, Nagel, & Werff, 2015) which is problematic for CSOs who rely almost exclusively on volunteers for both leadership (board members) and program delivery (volunteer coaches).

The Canadian University Artistic Swimming League (CUASL) is not affiliated with any of the Canadian University sport governing bodies, but rather exists a CSO with an arm’s length relationship with Canada Artistic Swimming (CAS). CUASL has been successful at engaging adult females both experienced and novice to the sport as well as engaging females in leadership positions, the Executive Board is exclusively comprised of females. While CUASL has been successful at engaging adult females in sport its growth has become stagnant. As such the purpose of this case study is to uncover the components of organizational capacity that have contributed to CUASL’s effective functioning and those that are limiting its goal of continued growth.

Each participating institution within the CUASL has a member representative who is granted voting privileges at the annual planning meeting (CUASL Rule Book, 2018). Member representatives were recruited through their publicly available email addresses to participate in a semi-structured interview (n = 15). Given the unique relationship between CAS and CUASL, two personnel from CAS with intimate knowledge of this relationship also participated in semi-structured interviews. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Data analysis is currently in progress beginning with a priori coding using Hall’s (2003) organizational capacity framework, which will be followed by emergent coding to inductively identify the specific content of the capacity dimensions. This process is being undertaken independently, followed by collaboratively amongst the researchers to enhance trustworthiness (Ballinger, 2006).

We anticipate that the findings of this case study will provide CUASL and CAS with insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the capacity of CUASL that may assist in future strategic planning.