# A CASE OF INNOVATION IN COMMUNITY SPORT

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Sport Canada



Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada



#### Background

- Community sport clubs are a foundation of the Canadian sport system
- Grassroots programs support physical literacy through athletic excellence, for life
- Pressures from members, community stakeholders, and social policy mean a challenging and ever-changing environment facing community sport clubs
- Innovation may be an avenue for sustainability, revitalization, growth that supports nurturing excellence



### Innovation in Sport Organizations

- Innovation any initiative that is perceived as "new" to the organization; essential to compete and survive (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010)
- Innovation in sport (e.g., equipment, rules...)
- Research on innovation in nonprofit, voluntary community sport clubs (Frankish et al., 2012; Hoeber et al., 2015; Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012)
  - Attributes/types of innovation, determinants, outcomes
  - How does the process unfold? What can we learn from it?
    What are the implications for innovation in community sport?

### Examining the Innovation Process in Community Sport

- Case study in-depth investigation of two clubs
- Longitudinal design real-time investigation as phenomenon unfolds (18 months)
- Data collection and analysis
  - Multiple personal sources (personal interviews, focus groups)
  - Media sources (websites, press clippings, social media)
  - Factors affecting the process of innovation adoption and implementation considered

### Case 1 Synchro Swimming

- Need for elite competitive opportunity for girls
- Partnership to establish new club to host joint competitive team ("Burwood-Oakdale Synchro Swim Club")
- Perspective of one club Burwood
  - Radical, administrative, product innovation







# Case 1 Synchro Swimming

#### Initiation (7+ months)

- Head club coaches discuss
- Coach approaches board (at 6 mos.)
- Coach approaches board again (1 month)
- Coach lack of confidence –ve
- Social capital between coaches +ve
- Board champion for the initiative +ve

#### Adoption (2 weeks)

- Formal proposal to board and parents
- Inclusion of stakeholders +ve
- Board/club open to new ideas +ve
- Focus on needs of participants +ve
- Trust in coach +ve
- Concerns about coordination, retaining own club identity -ve

Implementation (2 months)

- New joint club formed
- Team selected
- Club established quickly; formal but "loose" arrangement
- New team identity

Discontinuation (after 9 months)

- Team competes at Nationals
- Club disbands
- Need no longer exists
- Outcomes:
- Expected met objective to provide competitive opportunity
- Unexpected team exceeded expectations, "incredibly positive" sport and social experience, social capital between clubs, minimal disruption to club, club seen as innovative

### Case 2 Hockey

- Need for competitive opportunity
- Creation of new competitive structure joining separate regional divisions (North-West, South-East)
- Naming partnership identity
  - Radical? administrative, product





## Case 2 Hockey

#### Initiation (2 years)

- "Rumblings" of need for restructuring
- Need for separate identity for new structure
- Chair pursues
  naming partner
- "initial conversations weren't smooth" –ve
- Board champion for the initiative prompts association level champions +ve

#### Adoption 1 and 2 (5 months)

- Restructuring in principle
- Naming partner falls through
- New naming partner confirmed
- New identity a concern (conflict) -ve
- Funding a concern –ve



- New structure rolls out
- Coaches appointed
- Tryouts smooth
- 1<sup>st</sup> season underway

#### Continuation (2+ years)

- Outcomes:
- Expected met objective to provide competitive opportunity; teams met competitive level expected; stakeholders satisfied
- Unexpected no unexpected outcomes by end of  $1^{st}$  year; appears relationship with naming partner is not active

#### Discussion

- Cases of new structure to enable competitive opportunities diminished by declining participation
- Radical innovation focuses on growth; implemented quite quickly, after extended consideration
- Dependent on full support from stakeholders, openness to change, trust in "idea champions" from different levels
- Concerns about new identity
- Multifaceted innovation (innovation extensions?)

### **Concluding Comments**

- Innovation can be an important mechanism for increasing the capacity of community sport clubs to achieve their goals
  - Clubs are moving beyond traditional ways of delivering sport
- Insight into the opportunities, conditions and challenges for clubs to be innovative
  - Implications for policy and strategy for change at the community sport level (e.g., gender equity, disability sport, LTAD, coaching development) that may be perceived as "new" and innovative to clubs



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