

Developing a typology of strategic approaches to membership growth in community sport

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Rationale & Background

Community sport organizations (CSOs) are nonprofit organizations that provide accessible and affordable opportunities for recreational and competitive sport participation (Doherty et al., 2014). As critical sites for social inclusion, cohesion, and equality, the role of CSOs in our communities is particularly important given the decline in sport participation across Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). A greater understanding and application of strategy is necessary so that CSOs can effectively grow their membership and meet their mandate of providing local sport programming opportunities.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to uncover: (1) the types of strategies that CSOs use to grow their membership, and (2) the strategic imperatives (i.e., elements that are important for organizations to consider when developing their strategies) that influence the types of strategies CSOs pursue.

Acknowledgements

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Research Method

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the President or Executive Director of fifteen CSOs that self-identified as having a strategic plan that sought to address membership growth, lasting approximately 80 minutes.
- Participating CSOs represented a range of sports and membership growth trends (declining vs. stable vs. increasing)
- Open-ended questions explored the clubs' strategic priorities, values, and response to societal or demographical trends and competition
- Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a multistep coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).
- Strategic plan documents were collected and analyzed alongside the transcripts.

Findings

- Four strategic approaches were identified as illustrative of the types of strategies that CSOs adopted to grow their membership base (see Figure 1)
 - (1) **Trailblazers:** Identify new market and program expansion opportunities
 - (2) **Enhancers:** Penetrate the youth market
 - (3) **Maintainers:** Optimize and market existing programs
 - (4) **Carers:** Build and leverage a values-based focus on community engagement to attract new members
- These approaches reflected the environment in which CSOs operate, which was represented by two dimensions, organizational readiness for growth and environmental competitiveness. Within each of these dimensions, several strategic imperatives that shaped the types of strategies that CSOs pursued were identified.

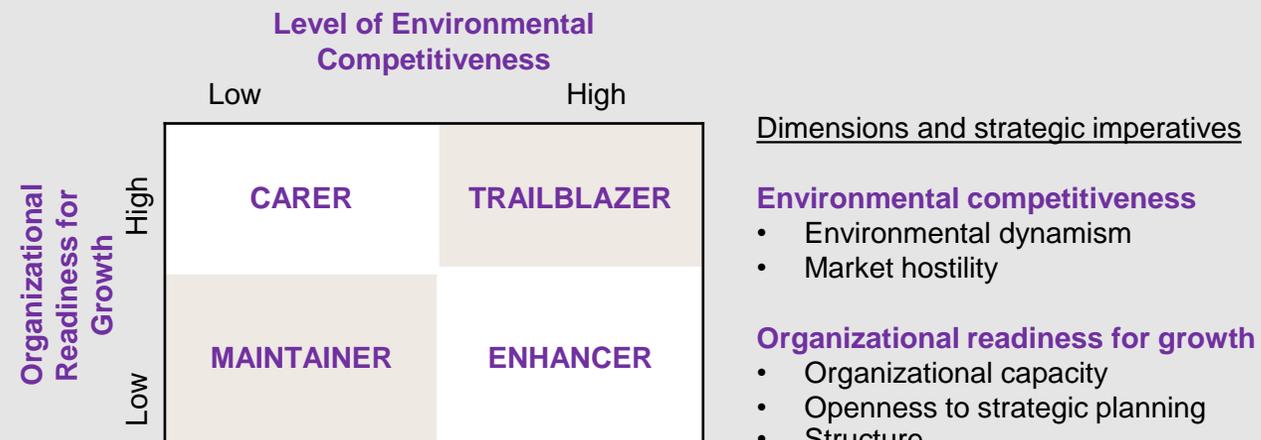


Figure 1. Strategic approaches for membership growth

