TITLE: The development of a framework to Capture Perceptions of Sport Organizations Legitimacy

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Abstract

In this manuscript, we use Bitektine's (2011) theory of organizational social judgments to develop a framework to Capture Perceptions of Organizational Legitimacy (CPOL). We outline a three-stage framework as a method to measure the perceived dimensions on which constituents scrutinize sport organizations legitimacy. In stage one of the framework, we defined the organizational context of a nonprofit sport organization in Sydney, Australia to establish the classification, purpose, and relationship of the focal entity to its constituents. In stage two, we distributed a qualitative questionnaire (N = 279) to identify the perceived dimensions on which constituents scrutinized organizational action. In stage 3 we distributed a quantitative questionnaire (N = 860) to test six perceived dimensions, which emerged during stage two of the CPOL framework. The six dimensions explained 63% of respondents' overall organizational judgment, providing support for the CPOL framework as a context-driven process to measure constituent perceptions of the legitimacy of sport organizations.

The development of a framework to Capture Perceptions of Sport Organizations Legitimacy

Organizations obtain legitimacy when constituents (i.e., audiences; Bitektine, 2011) perceive their actions to mimic accepted practices (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). In this sense, legitimacy emerges when organizational activities align with constituent expectations. Obtaining legitimacy is important for sport organizations as it leads to the accrual of constituent support (e.g., participants, consumers, coaches, volunteers, parents etc.) and resources (C. Johnson, Dowd, & Ridgeway, 2006; Massey, 2001; Suchman, 1995). For this reason, there is a considerable body of literature analyzing how organizations gain, maintain, or repair legitimacy (Beelitz & Merkl-Davies, 2012). Surprisingly, however, there is little research exploring how constituents evaluate the legitimacy of organizations (cf. Bitektine, 2011).

Coupled with the paucity of constituent focused research, there is also an absence of tools to measure organizational legitimacy (Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995). Previously, researchers have employed interpretive qualitative designs to explain legitimation practices (Elsbach, 1994; Massey, 2001) or drawn upon quantitative performance data to infer legitimacy from past performance (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Ruef & Scott, 1998). The absence of standardized measurement tools emanates from the social constructionist nature of organizational legitimacy (Dowling & Pfeffer, 1975). This point has prompted established authors in the field to propone the development of instruments to measure legitimacy in relation to specific organizational classifications or industries (Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995). Despite these calls, no context-driven instruments have emerged.

Providing a platform to develop a process-based framework to capture perceptions of legitimacy, Bitektine (2011) articulated a theory of organizational social judgment. He argued that legitimacy judgments stem from constituents observing perceived dimensions of organizational action (e.g., competition fairness; Soebbing & Mason, 2009). Once an action

is perceived, social judgments form based on congruence between an action (within a perceived dimension) and a constituent's expectations for appropriate practice. Bitektine's (2011) framework does not provide a basis to measure legitimacy directly; however, it does provide a formula to capture the perceived dimensions of organizational practice that lead to legitimacy judgments.

We use Bitektine's (2011) theory of organizational social judgment to frame our delineation and testing of a framework to Capture Perceptions of Organizational Legitimacy (CPOL) in relation to a nonprofit Community Sport Organization (CSO) in Sydney, Australia. Our purpose is to *develop a contextually driven, process-based framework to measure the perceived dimensions* (i.e., areas of sport organizations' practice) *on which constituents scrutinize the legitimacy of sport organizations*. The framework we advance during this manuscript provides sport organizations with a tool to inform strategic legitimation efforts in areas that matter to constituents.

The manuscript is presented in five sections. First, we define organizational legitimacy and articulate Bitektine's (2011) theory of organizational social judgments as our theoretical framework. Second, we justify and delineate the stages of the CPOL framework as a basis for the empirical study that follows. Third, we present the method and analysis used to test the CPOL framework. Fourth, we discuss the findings of the study in relation to extant work on organizational legitimacy and social judgment. Finally, we conclude the manuscript with theoretical and managerial implications.

Theoretical framework

Organizational legitimacy

The theoretical framework is presented in four parts. First, we define organizational legitimacy and distinguish it from reputation and status. Second, we outline how *perceived dimensions* of organizational practice relate to different *types of legitimacy* (procedural,

structural, consequential, personal, linkage, managerial, and technical). Third, we discuss constituent evaluations of the benefits diffused by sport organizations, which inform *cognitive* and *sociopolitical* legitimacy judgments. Fourth, we discuss specific issues with measuring legitimacy as a basis to introduce the CPOL framework.

Defining legitimacy. Suchman (1995, p. 574) defined organizational legitimacy as the extent to which the "actions of an entity are desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, and definitions". The linkage with social and cultural context places legitimacy in a complex nomological arena, alongside organizational reputation and status (Bitektine, 2011; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Washington & Zajac, 2005). Prior to reviewing literature on organizational legitimacy, we first differentiate the construct from reputation and status in terms of (1) the nature of the content evaluated, and (2) the orientation of the evaluation.

First, Suchman's (1995) definition focuses legitimacy judgments on the actions of one organization. In contrast, reputation and status evaluations involve two or more organizations. Washington and Zajac (2005) argued that reputation is an economically founded judgment, based on inter-organizational performance comparisons. Status, on the other hand, draws on sociological theorizing, which examines how the placement of an organization in a ranked order leads to social privilege or discrimination (Bitektine, 2011; Washington & Zajac, 2005). Therefore, the focus of legitimacy judgments on one organization provides the first distinction from reputation and status.

Second, the orientation (i.e., future performance, ranking, or current state) of judgment provides further differentiation (Bitektine, 2011). Reputation and status judgments inform predictions of future organizational performance relative to other organizations. Legitimacy judgments involve assessments of the appropriateness of prior organizational actions in relation to accepted practices associated with its *classification* (e.g., CSO)

(Suchman, 1995). Acknowledging the differences in evaluation and orientation, we focus on legitimacy within the following parameters: (1) it refers to social judgments of one organization that (2) operates in an environment exposed to socially constructed norms and constituent self-interest, which (3) informs evaluations of its legitimacy.

Perceived dimensions. Observing the organizational focus of previous work, Bitektine (2011) contributed a theory of evaluator social judgments of legitimacy, reputation, and status. During this manuscript, we focus on his conceptualization of legitimacy judgments (See Figure 1). We draw on this framework as it incorporates existing work from an organizational perspective into a social psychological framework that explains how constituents evaluate the legitimacy of organizations. Bitektine (2011) argued that legitimacy judgments stem from constituents perceiving specific organizational actions, which then inform evaluations. For example, previous work in sport management shows us that constituents scrutinize the draft policy or fairness of a competition (Soebbing & Mason, 2009), the viability of a ticketing market (Drayer & Martin, 2010), or the branding choices of national sport organizations (Phelps & Dickson, 2009). Scrutiny of each area of organizational practice informed legitimacy judgments in prior sport work.

The organizational actions that constituents scrutinize relate to different types of legitimacy: procedural, structural, consequential, personal, linkage, managerial, or technical (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995). These legitimacy types detail whether a specific action relates to processes, recurring organizational features, consequences or personnel. We define and provide examples of each of these legitimacy types in Table 1.

==========Insert Figure 1 about here==========

==========Insert Table 1 about here==========

Constituents reconcile perceptions of organizational actions in relation to legitimacy types. This perceptual process unfurls through individuals cognitively placing an organization

into a specific classification (e.g., a CSO; cf. Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). An organization's classification aligns it with a series of assumptions and heuristics that apply to other similar entities. Bitektine (2011) described this stage of his framework as analytical processing.

Analytical processing. Perceptions of organizational actions inform two processes of evaluation: cognitive and sociopolitical. Both relate to the extent that actions align with accepted practices in relation to the specific class or type to which an organization belongs. This evaluative process draws from institutional theorizing, which explores how organizations conform to accepted practices as a means to obtain, maintain, or repair legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Zucker, 1987). Meyer and Rowan (1977) argued that accepted practices (i.e., institutionalized) develop in relation to specific organizational fields or classifications. Therefore, the analytic processing stage involves constituents classifying organizations (e.g., professional basketball organization; nonprofit CSO) as a basis to make sense of their actions. In turn, this allows constituents to evaluate organizational practices in relation to a set of myths that apply to all organizations in a classification (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Santomier, 1979; Soebbing & Mason, 2009; Suchman, 1995; Washington & Patterson, 2011; Zucker, 1987).

Cognitive legitimacy evaluations occur when constituents place an organization in a classification that is taken-for-granted in society (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Existing knowledge of classification characteristics allow constituents to apply heuristics (i.e., rules of thumb associated with the classification) that apply to all organizations in the class (Suchman, 1995; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Then, constituents assume organizational legitimacy based on the taken-for-granted characteristics applied to all entities conforming to the classification.

Two sport management studies illustrate organizational attempts to obtain cognitive legitimacy. First, Drayer and Martin (2010) examined the cognitive legitimation practices of the National Football League's secondary ticket market. This market obtained legitimacy by

reclassification, achieved through partnerships with legitimate primary ticketing providers (i.e., Ticketmaster). Second, Phelps and Dickson (2009) explored cognitive legitimation practices through the isomorphic naming choice of the New Zealand Ice Hockey team. Instead of selecting a traditional Ice Hockey title, managers selected a name that conformed to other New Zealand sports (i.e., Ice Blacks). This strategy used symbolic isomorphism to conform to culturally accepted team names, instead of traditional Ice Hockey titles.

Sociopolitical legitimacy evaluations require more cognitive effort on behalf of the perceiver as they involve scrutiny of practices beyond placement of an entity within an organizational class. Constituents evaluate actions in relation to the prevailing social and cultural norms that apply to an organizational classification (Aldrich & Fiol, 1994). Placement in a classification provides constituents with a contextual frame of reference to judge actions (Ruef & Scott, 1998). For example, constituent evaluations of the legitimacy of professional and CSO draw on different criteria, which reflect rationalized practices that relate to each classification. The type of sociopolitical judgment that ensues relates to constituent perceptions of the benefits diffused by a focal organization.

Benefit diffusion. Bitektine (2011) split the sociopolitical process of legitimacy evaluation into pragmatic and moral paths, dependent on constituent perceptions of the benefits diffused by an organizational action. Pragmatic legitimacy refers to the extent that the actions of an organization (perceived within the types presented in Table 1) affect a constituent, or the groups to which he or she belongs. In this sense, evaluations of legitimacy ensue when organizational practices align with constituent interests. Illegitimacy occurs when practices violate constituent self-interests (Kates, 2004).

When constituents perceive the actions of an organization to diffuse benefits in alignment with the social and cultural norms associated with its classification, moral legitimacy judgments ensue (Suchman, 1995). Moral legitimacy judgments occur when

constituents perceive that organizations have ‘done the right thing’. Sport management researchers have explored efforts to obtain (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak, 2007) and repair moral legitimacy (Soebbing & Mason, 2009). Babiak (2007) found that a Canadian Sport Centre (CSC) formed relationships and partnerships to comply with accepted practices in its field (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Relationships and partnerships also enabled the CSC to obtain legitimacy from funding agencies through compliance with institutionalized practices. Babiak and Trendafilova (2011) found that organizations engaged in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and positive environmental practices to obtain moral legitimacy. Soebbing and Mason (2009) used institutional theory to examine the attempts of the National Basketball Association (NBA) to repair legitimacy following instances of teams losing games intentionally to improve draft picks. This created legitimacy issues for the NBA because it threatened two core values associated with its classification as a professional sport league: competitive balance and league integrity.

Aside from Bitektine (2011), existing work in management and sport management focuses on legitimacy from an organizational (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Babiak, 2007; Soebbing & Mason, 2009), or industrial standpoint (Drayer & Martin, 2010). Here, we extend prior work, presenting a framework to capture how constituents conceptualize and scrutinize organizational practices as a basis to understand what informs legitimacy judgment. Bitektine’s (2011) framework provides theoretical guidance for the cognitive processes underpinning all stages of the CPOL framework. Consequently, in the CPOL framework, we focus on eliciting the perceived dimensions that *inform the evaluation and judgment* of organizational legitimacy (i.e., attitude towards the sport organization). Applying this premise, we test one core hypothesis:

H1: Evaluations of the legitimacy of a sport organization’s actions, within perceived dimensions, positively influence constituents’ overall judgment of the focal organization.

Issues with measuring organizational legitimacy

The absence of measurement tools stems from two issues relating to the social construction of organizational legitimacy. First, standardized measurements of legitimacy exclude the social context from the measurement model (Elsbach, 1994; Suchman, 1995). Without attention to the organizational field, industry, and context of an organization, measurement emerges in a vacuum, detached from the defining aspects of legitimacy. This impairs the content and measurement validity of standardized instruments. For this reason, interpretive methodologies including: discourse (Beelitz & Merkl-Davies, 2012), media-content (Massey, 2001), in-depth interviews (Elsbach, 1994; Hannigan & Kueneman, 1977), and multi-method qualitative approaches (Babiak, 2007) represent the dominant data collection tools, to date. Second, the social experiences of individuals are diverse; hence, divergent accounts of organizational legitimacy often prevail (Lock & Filo, 2012). Capturing this diversity is difficult, and standardized measurement models ignore that people scrutinize actions, based on their personal and social experiences (cf. Berger & Luckman, 1966). Again, standardized instruments fail to acknowledge the complexity of individual experiences in constituent perceptions of organizational legitimacy.

Although measuring legitimacy is problematic for the reasons stipulated, Bitektine's (2011) framework outlines that judgments initiate from scrutiny of perceived dimensions of organizational action. Scrutiny of specific organizational actions informs evaluations of the benefits diffused to constituents, which in turn, leads to an overall legitimacy judgment. Therefore, capturing the perceived dimensions on which constituents scrutinize an organization's legitimacy provides a basis to understand the content used to inform overall judgments. Drawing on this logic, we present the CPOL framework, which sets out a process to develop contextually specific measurements of areas in which constituents scrutinize the appropriateness of a sport organization's actions. The CPOL framework consists of three

sequential stages: (1) defining the context, (2) capturing perceived dimensions, and (3) developing the measurement model.

Stage one: Defining the context. Responses to three two-part questions inform the definition of context. (1): ***What type of organization is under investigation*** (i.e., nonprofit/profit, public/private/voluntary)? ***How are the focal organization funded?*** Previous research illustrates that legitimacy evolves differently in public, nonprofit, and private contexts (Ashforth & Gibbs, 1991; Hannigan & Kueneman, 1977). Nonprofit organizations obtain legitimacy through conformity to the expectations of funding agencies and constituents (e.g., Babiak, 2007; Hannigan & Kueneman, 1977). For-profit organizations generate revenue and define practices with more autonomy than public or nonprofit entities. Therefore, external agencies play a lesser role in conferring what legitimate practice entails for profit-seeking organizations (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). As such, previous work details that organizational type influences the formation of legitimacy judgments.

(2): ***What is the focal organization's purpose? To which classification[s] does the focal organization belong?*** The purpose of an organization relates to the specific role it exists to satisfy; thus, it provides a perceptual basis for constituents to assess whether an entity delivers on its reason for existence – whatever that may be. Classification, on the other hand, provides a perceptual basis for constituents to assess whether an entity's actions align with norms and practices attributable to similar organizations (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995). For example, Soebbing and Mason (2009) found that constituents scrutinized the legitimacy of the NBA due to core competitive aspects of a mass-consumption professional sport product. Lock et al. (2013) found that constituents of a nonprofit CSO scrutinized the benefits that the organization delivered to its community. The aspects of legitimacy in each case reflected the role and classification of each organization (cf. Bitektine, 2011). Therefore,

delineating the purpose and classification of a sport organization is a crucial step in understanding the frame of reference for legitimacy judgments.

(3): ***Who are the constituents under investigation? How do the constituents relate to the focal organization?*** Previous studies highlight the pervasive influence funding relationships can have on constituent attitudes toward sport organizations (Lock & Filo, 2012). Furthermore, constituent groups maintain different relationships with organizations dependent on their type (e.g., sponsors will conceptualize legitimacy differently to consumers). Inevitably, this influences the perceived dimensions that inform evaluative judgments of legitimacy. This provides a crucial basis to obtain a tacit understanding of why constituents scrutinize the perceived dimensions that emerge during implementations of the CPOL framework.

Stage two: Capturing perceived dimensions. We position constituents as the key informants driving the development of definitions and language underpinning the perceived dimensions. This requirement aligns with the social construction of legitimacy and a methodological approach drawing on interpretive qualitative methodologies to develop the perceived dimensions. The choice of which qualitative method to relates to the size and accessibility of the constituent group and the study data requirements. In large, dispersed constituent groups (i.e., consumers, participants etc.) qualitative methods that capture response diversity are important (i.e., qualitative questionnaires; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). In small, homogeneous constituent groups (i.e., sponsors, club board-members etc.), in-depth interviews or focus groups methods are sufficient to define the perceived dimensions. In other circumstances, the complexity of constituent perceptions or issues of access may specify a requirement for multiple qualitative methods (e.g., observation of social media pages, qualitative questionnaire and interview designs, and netnographic work).

The purpose of stage two is to elicit three specific aspects of the context. First, to elicit the perceived dimensions of organizational action that constituents scrutinize in terms of the legitimacy types specified. Second, to define whether sociopolitical evaluations reflect judgments founded on constituent self-interest (i.e., pragmatic legitimacy) or alignment with social and cultural norms (i.e., moral legitimacy). Third, to elicit key values, and cultural forces that inform constituent evaluations.

Stage three: Developing the measurement model. Measurement model development involves (a) defining each perceived dimension, (b) operationalizing it to the organizational context, and (c) constructing measurement items using key words and concepts defined by participants. This process draws on constituent perceptions of sport organizations actions and caters for the diversity of responses illustrated by previous studies in the area (e.g., Lock & Filo, 2012; Lock et al. 2013). The studies conducted by Lock and Filo (2012) and Lock et al. (2013) indicate that constituents can hold opposite perceptions of exactly the same organizational action due to different personal and social experiences. To reflect this diversity, we used semantic differential phrases, which incorporate bi-polar responses to cater for the presence of this diversity (e.g., I love ice cream - I hate ice-cream; Dickson & Albaum, 1977; Kelly & Stephenson, 1967).

Method

In alignment with our framework, we present the method in three stages. The perceived dimensions, which emerge through this test of the CPOL relate to the context investigated. As such, our primary aim is to advance a process for researchers and practitioners to measure the perceived dimensions informing evaluations of organizational legitimacy in other cases and contexts. Although the items and factors emerging from this test of the model may potentially apply to other contexts, the implementation of stages one and

two of the CPOL framework are prerequisite to determine item transferability (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Stage one: Clarifying the context

Organizational type. We sampled constituents of a nonprofit CSO in Sydney, Australia. In the terms defined by Blau and Scott (1962), the focal organization – Manly United Football (soccer) Club (MUFC) – is a nonprofit service organization, which operates in the catchment area of the Manly Warringah Football (soccer) Association (MWFA). MUFC fits the nonprofit organization classification as it (a) relies on voluntary work in key organizational positions (coaches and board members), (b) is nonprofit seeking, and (c) self-governs (Cuskelly, 2004). The MWFA is a member-funded nonprofit service organization that administers the sport of soccer to approximately 18,000 participants. Despite working closely together, the MWFA and MUFC are independent organizations. MUFC receives funding from player membership, local sponsorships, and an annual grant paid to the club by the MWFA.

Organizational role. MUFC exists to develop talented soccer players within the MWFA region as part of the re-launched Australian National Premier League (NPL). The NPL provides a pathway for the development of talented players from the grassroots of soccer in Australia to the A-League or beyond. Based on its classification as a NPL development organization, MUFC exists to implement procedures and structures to (a) identify, (b) recruit, and (c) develop the most talented players within the MWFA region. At the time of writing, MUFC fielded 14 teams from under 10s through to senior male and female teams.

Determining the audience. We examined *MWFA members'* evaluations of MUFC as a legitimate entity. Particularly, this study examined why MWFA members displayed a lack of support for MUFC, as the elite player development agency (EPDA) within the region (cf.

Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Previous research illustrates a distinct lack of support for MUFC from some MWFA constituents (Lock et al., 2013). The MWFA members in the sample included players, coaches, administrators, volunteers, spectators, and family members from the 17 clubs on the Northern Beaches and North Shore regions of Sydney. The 17 clubs deliver soccer to participants from the ages of six to over 35s at the community level. Every MWFA member pays an annual registration fee, which covers club, MWFA, Football New South Wales, and Football Federation Australia costs. The MWFA uses some of these registration fees to subsidize MUFC's elite player development activities to provide opportunities for talented players within its catchment.

Stage two method: Capturing constituent perceptions

We used a sequential mixed method research design, with equal emphasis on qualitative and quantitative methods (R. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). We captured constituent perceptions using a qualitative questionnaire, distributed to MWFA members with a registered email address (N ~ 10,000). Due to the population size, we applied a broadly distributable qualitative method as a basis to elicit a diverse range of perceptions about MUFC from MWFA members. This informed the development of context specific measurement items for stage three of the CPOL.

Participants and procedure. Participants were members of the MWFA's electronic database, which includes players, coaches, administrators, volunteers, spectators, and family members. The MWFA sent an email to request participation in a survey concerning member perceptions of MUFC. Participants (Age, M = 44.3, SD = 7.9) were players (n = 65, 22.8%), coaches (n = 40, 14.0%), administrators (n = 10, 3.5%), spectators (n = 12, 4.2%), family members (n = 139, 48.8%), or those that declared a form of involvement not specified (n = 16, 5.6%). Respondents from all 17 clubs in the MWFA (N = 279) completed the survey, of which, 172 were male (60.4%) and 107 female (37.5).

Instrument. The online questionnaire (distributed using Qualtrics online survey software) contained a statement on the ethics of the research, one qualitative response item, participation questions, and demographics. We informed participants of response anonymity in the approach script and, as such, did not gather participant names. During the presentation of results we refer to participants as Respondent 1, 2, 3… corresponding to the order in which constituents completed the instrument. This complied with the Australian Human Research Ethics Council standards for the management of participant anonymity and aligned with the ethical clearance granted by the lead researcher's university. Ethical clearance for this study required a letter of endorsement from the MWFA confirming that they would distribute the instrument to their database.

The qualitative question read; "please describe your attitude toward Manly United and any factors that have influenced it. Feel free to add anything that you feel is relevant." The statement asked MWFA members to explain perceptions of MUFC, therefore excluding comparisons or rankings relative to other organizations (i.e., status and reputation; Washington & Zajac, 2005). The use of the terms attitude, and factors that influenced the judgment specified a dependent variable for inclusion in stage three.

Analysis. After closing the online questionnaire in Qualtrics, we downloaded responses into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences 21 (SPSS) and, then, moved the 279 responses into NVIVO 10. Three members of the research team conducted an initial process of mid-range coding (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001). In this approach, data coding occurs within a theoretical framework deductively (i.e., Bitektine, 2011), while also allowing data to inform the development of theory inductively.

Due to the context specificity required, we applied elements of the grounded theory coding process to develop the perceived dimensions inductively (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Initially, we represented concepts emerging from the data as open codes. Following the open

coding stage, we drew together similar codes into axial code groups, which represented the perceived dimensions for the measurement model. After the open and axial coding process, the research team met to discuss theme titles and variations in coding structures. During this meeting, we arrived at agreement through a series of iterative discussions designed to enhance inter-coder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Following the axial coding process, we examined the perceived dimensions emerging from the qualitative data to place them within the legitimacy types specified in our theoretical framework (cf. Bitektine, 2011).

Stage two results: Generating perceived dimensions

The qualitative responses ranged from two to 339 words. We discuss the perceived dimensions in relation to the: (1) type of legitimacy, (2) evaluative process (i.e., cognitive → sociopolitical), benefits diffused (i.e., pragmatic → moral legitimacy), and (3) relevant values underpinning constituent judgments. Six perceived dimensions (discussed as themes) emerged from the inductive aspect of the coding process. The evaluations we discuss stem from MUFC's classification as a CSO and EPDA[1]. Table 2 provides an overview of the six themes.

==========Insert Table 2 about here==========

Role in community. Constituents evaluated the legitimacy of having an EPDA within the MWFA. This theme amalgamated two open codes: *appropriate investment* and *pathway value,* which related to the consequential legitimacy of investing in an EPDA. This classification framed evaluations of the appropriateness of MUFC's role within the MWFA. In addition to its classification, MUFC's relationship with the MWFA (i.e., the grant paid by the MWFA to MUFC) led to scrutiny of the benefits diffused to all MWFA members.

Scrutiny of MUFC's role in the community referred to the appropriateness of investing in the development of a few elite players, versus a broader cross-section of the MWFA participant base. This replicated the ongoing tension in Australia between investment

in elite and grassroots sport (Independent Sport Panel, 2009). Implying the inappropriateness of investment in a few talented players, Respondent 270 explained: "I believe that there is too much focus on Manly United by the MWFA and not enough attention paid to the thousands of other playing members that belong to the MWFA." Comments espousing illegitimacy on this perceived dimension, noted that investing in the development of elite players detracted from the potential benefits diffused to MWFA members across the 17 member clubs.

Connected with the appropriateness of investment, pathway value related to constituent perceptions that MUFC fulfilled an important and appropriate role within the MWFA. For some, the focal organization was taken-for-granted: "I value having Manly United representing our area/community. I feel it is very important for this area that Manly United exist" (Respondent 276). Some respondents felt an EPDA provided crucial opportunities for local players. Hence, MUFC obtained cognitive legitimacy from its classification as an EPDA. Respondent 167 explained that MUFC "provide a valuable path for talented players in the community to play at a higher level. Provide good coaching clinics and courses for local community coaches". Not only did the provision of elite development to higher levels of soccer in Australia bolster perceptions of the consequences of MUFC's actions; the knowledge shared by MUFC with MWFA club coaches legitimated the club in the eyes of some constituents.

Staff and organizational behavior. Staff and organizational behavior referred to interactions with club ambassadors that led to constituent scrutiny. This theme drew together three open codes: *Approachability*, *qualifications*, and *representation*. Emphasizing that multiple legitimacy types may relate to specific evaluations (Bitektine, 2011), constituents scrutinized technical (cf. Ruef & Scott, 1998), procedural, and personal aspects of the focal organization (cf. Suchman, 1995). The orientation of this perceived dimension related to the historical actions of the organization and its staff. The diffusion of benefits in this theme

concerned constituent self-interest (i.e., pragmatic legitimacy), which arose from service encounters or interpersonal communications with MUFC staff. The intertwining of perception and self-interest reflected scrutiny underpinning pragmatic judgments.

Responses focused on evaluations of procedural interactions with staff. Procedural interactions with staff also influenced constituent legitimacy evaluations. Staff approachability contributed to judgments of legitimacy, as Respondent 16 explained: "Nice club to be involved with, management, coaches, and all parents have a good approach about the players to play good football (soccer)". This comment illustrates a perception that MUFC had a 'good' approach to player development – gleaned from interactions with management and coaches, which suggests alignment between constituent expectation and performance. Another response highlighted perceptions that the coaching staff represented the organization well: "The coaches are excellent and very approachable" (Respondent 197). These comments alluded to procedural and personal interactions that constituents valued.

Exemplifying the perceived unapproachability of club staff as a form of pragmatic legitimacy, Respondent 157 explained: "coaches need to be more approachable for players and parents. Some coaches need to have a few lessons in communication and positive motivational skills." This quote draws on the negative experience of one constituent, which led to a negative perception of the manner in which coaches at MUFC interacted with parents. A previous affiliate of MUFC described staff behavior as inappropriate, citing a lack of qualifications: "Our experience was one of a club that entirely disregarded the opinions of its key stakeholders, and employed hugely inappropriate and under-qualified staff for the roles they were performing; "Inept" [emphasis added by respondent] would be the word that springs to mind" (Respondent 124). The assertion that coaches lacked sufficient qualifications – relative to normative expectations – aligned with Ruef and Scott's (1998) definition of technical legitimacy. Furthermore, Respondent 124 withdrew support from

MUFC following the interaction described, which emphasized the relevance of interactions with staff as a legitimacy concern (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990).

As ambassadors for the club, MWFA constituents also scrutinized the actions of board members perceived to represent the organization inappropriately. Respondent 78 felt that "the way the club operates is determined by officials who are focused on their own aggrandizement and/or a win at all cost attitude." Respondent 23 went further describing the organization as a "closed shop, [with] self-centered and egotistical board members and management." These comments challenged traditional definitions of personal legitimacy, which refer to the extent that ambassador charisma leads to constituents bestowing legitimacy on organizations (Suchman, 1995). Here, responses indicated that perceptions of 'egotistical' officials seen to focus on 'self-aggrandizement' contributed to legitimacy evaluations. The disparity of comments in the staff and organizational behavior theme indicated the complexity of managing legitimacy when actions involve the self-interest of constituents.

Valuing community. Valuing community referred to the extent to which constituents perceived MUFC to act as a part of the MWFA community. Two open codes fell within the valuing community theme: *prioritization* and *integration.* MUFC's classification as a CSO activated a series of expectations relating to rationalized myths prescribing the role and function of nonprofit CSOs (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Acknowledging the relatedness of procedural and structural types, participants described enduring characteristics of MUFC's community orientation, therefore aligning the theme with structural legitimacy (cf. Bitektine, 2011). The classification of MUFC as a CSO activated expectations that the organization should diffuse benefits to the local community, which represented a moral legitimacy judgment (cf. Suchman, 1995).

Accounts of MUFC's legitimacy extolled its integration as a part of the local region: "overall the feel of the club seems very community orientated and keen to be seen [as] a

strong club on the Northern Beaches" (Respondent 233). This quote indicated a perception that MUFC acted in alignment with rationalized expectations that CSOs act on behalf of the community in which they operate. Beyond procedures that focused on community benefit, Respondent 233 alluded to the recurring nature of MUFC's community orientation, indicating it represented a structural aspect of organizational practice. Respondent 95 continued: "Manly [United] is very much a part of the local community". The perception that MUFC prioritized the MWFA region represented one perspective on the structural orientation of the focal organization.

Perceptions of MUFC's illegitimacy described the reverse. For example, "[MUFC is] very secluded from the community. It is a community club, but you wouldn't know it…. People don't feel inclined to go to games, because they don't feel wanted… they don't feel part of a community" (Respondent 175). This comment articulated a perception that MUFC operated in detachment from the local community – an aspect of legitimacy research shown to breed constituent resistance (Suchman, 1995). Beyond articulating a perceived structural disconnection from the community, this response also linked MUFC's illegitimacy with a lack of constituent support (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). As Respondent 78 explained, "players in local teams pay a seasonal contribution toward the running costs of Manly United. Despite the support it receives from ratepayers (i.e., taxpayers) and local players; neither the association (MWFA), nor the club (MUFC) acts in the best interests of the community." The classification of MUFC as a CSO informed evaluations of this perceived dimension, while the grant paid by the MWFA to MUFC amplified expectations of community prioritization.

Development approach. Development approach included comments in relation to MUFC's player development practices. Two open codes combined to form this theme: *style* and *approach*. MUFC's classification as an EPDA associated the organization with rationalized myths in relation to prototypical player development styles (i.e., training

philosophies, practices etc.). As such, implementing the 'most effective' development approach was important. The orientation of this evaluation related to recurring procedural aspects of the organization's approach to player development (i.e., structural legitimacy). Furthermore, comments described scrutiny of the consequential legitimacy of MUFC, as, by implication, a sub-standard development approach would not lead to players reaching full potential. The nature of scrutiny in this theme indicated moral legitimacy concerns due to the implications of the development approach for MWFA constituents broadly.

Scrutiny of MUFC's development style drew on a set of competing values in Australian soccer. Following the dismantling of previous forms of soccer governance in 2003, the FFA revised national soccer development programs. During this process, the orthodoxy evolved from a British soccer style to the acceptance of a Dutch methodology to developing players (Lock, Darcy, & Taylor, 2009). This shift in ideology created a set of assumptions (for some constituents) that MUFC's practices should align with the evolving practices at a national level. Positive evaluations concentrated on structural aspects of the development approach. For example, Respondent 48 stated, "I think MUFC play football (soccer) in the right spirit of the game. They try to play attractive football (soccer) so it's enjoyable to watch." Respondent 48 illustrated a recurring orientation to the approach of MUFC. Furthermore, developing local players technically, aligned with core aspects of the EPDA classification.

Constituent accounts of illegitimacy described a value position that related to perceptions of antiquated approaches to soccer development; thus running counter to the changes to the national development framework. As explained by Respondent 157 "too many of the Manly coaches are too intent on winning at all costs despite what they tell parents about development!" Respondent 25 stated; "I feel that Manly United is very much old school in its approach to the development and performance of footballers through the ranks.

The emphasis on winning in the lower age groups, as opposed to development of the players is, I feel, detrimental to the players and the game". These comments specifically alluded to the perceived consequences of a recurring process of prioritizing victory over development. Perceptions of an old school approach and emphasis on success informed evaluations that scrutinized the recruitment of "players who develop physically quicker seem to get better treatment and players tend to worry about mistakes they may make, rather than taking [a] chance and enjoying playing" (Respondent 25). Such perceptions implied that MUFC recruited players based on physical maturity to achieve short-term success, instead of to develop the most talented players in the MWFA region. As an EPDA, MUFC existed to provide the best players with the best opportunities to develop. Scrutiny occurred when constituents perceived the consequences of development practices to contrast with 'best-practice' approaches associated with EPDAs.

Local players. Local players related to a perception that MUFC recruited players for its development pathway from outside of the MWFA catchment. This theme combined two open codes. First, *recruiting non-locals* related to the action of selecting players for MUFC squads from outside of the MWFA region, which related to procedural legitimacy. Second, *facilitating/inhibiting local player development* related to scrutiny of the consequential legitimacy of MUFC, based on perceptions that the organization recruited players from outside of the MWFA catchment. Constituents referred to scrutiny that informed pragmatic and moral legitimacy evaluations.

MUFC's classification as an EPDA informed constituent perceptions that player recruitment should focus on talented players from the MWFA region. The grant paid by the MWFA to MUFC amplified constituent expectations that the club should recruit players from the local region. In these terms, some respondents provided accounts of the organization's procedural legitimacy. Respondent 89 explained a perception of an evolving focus on local

players: “I am very happy to see the club has really started to take an interest in the development of local talent, offering a pathway into the senior rep sides.” This comment also touched on the consequences of MUFC’s role in providing players a pathway to higher levels of soccer participation and performance.

Applying the same cultural assumption, other constituents perceived the club to be illegitimate based on different social experiences. Comments related to pragmatic and moral scrutiny. Respondent 118 explained: “My family has been loyal players/coaches and parents at Manly United. We do not like the ease of which local juniors are replaced with players out of the area”. This account explained a personal experience of the recruitment practices of MUFC (i.e., pragmatic legitimacy). However, this comment also related to the recruitment of local players representing the right thing for MUFC to do (i.e., moral legitimacy). Respondent 75 explained scrutiny of procedural and consequential legitimacy:

> It [MUFC] gives no preference to local players. It selects on its assessment of ability regardless of where the player comes from. The result is Warringah ratepayers (i.e., taxpayers) are paying for and maintaining a facility for the benefit of people from other parts of Sydney. Local players are paying money to the club, which it uses to pay senior players, most of which are not from the area.

Scrutiny of procedural legitimacy concentrated on processes for selecting non-local players. In turn, scrutiny of the consequential legitimacy of MUFC concentrated on the implications of recruiting non-local players for talented individuals in the MWFA. Classification as a CSO activated constituent expectations that MUFC should only develop players from the MWFA region.

Trialing procedures. The selection protocols of MUFC received further scrutiny in terms of the organization’s trialing procedure. This theme combined two open codes: *fairness* and *transparency.* The orientation of this evaluation concentrated on the procedural legitimacy of MUFC in relation to talent identification. MUFC’s classification as an EPDA informed evaluation of this action; however, participants concentrated on benefit diffusion

that violated constituent self-interest (i.e., pragmatic legitimacy). Recruiting the best players from the MWFA reflected a key aspect of MUFC's role in the community. However, constituents scrutinized the fairness of trials in cases of knowing a player not selected for an MUFC development team. For example, Respondent 86 argued that the trialing process was unfair:

> I think the way the selection process is handled, particularly at a junior level, has been, in some cases very unfair…. The word around [the local community] is the team is selected well before trials are held at Cromer Park and some great players simply don't bother attending. It's not how good you are it's who you know.

Evaluations of the procedural legitimacy of the trialing process also concerned perceptions of the transparency of the process, for example, the "grading and selection of players [is] not as transparent as it should be" (Respondent 218). Other constituents scrutinized the extent that the trialing procedure actually sought to recruit new players: "Trials are perceived as a waste of time as you have often selected your team in advance or have decided not to make any changes. The trials are to appease the community and to make it look like you are having a [sic] fair trial when really you are not" (Respondent 114). MUFC's classification as a CSO and EPDA informed expectations that processes should recruit the most talented players (EPDA) from the local community (CSO).

Stage three method: Developing the measurement model

Following the qualitative analysis of stage two data, we designed quantitative items to test the study hypothesis. The stage two data analysis allowed us to focus the initial hypothesis statement as follows:

H1: The perceived dimensions (a) role in community, (b) staff and organizational behavior, (c) valuing community, (d) development approach, (e) local players, and (f) trialing procedures positively influence constituents' overall judgment of the focal organization.

Participants and procedure. The MWFA distributed the quantitative instrument to its electronic mailing list in August 2012, one year after the qualitative study. Distribution followed the stage two procedure. Due to the quantitative nature of the instrument, the sample

size increased (N = 860). To maximize response rates, the MWFA distributed reminder emails to their member database after seven and 14 days (Dillman, 2007). The stage three sample included players (n = 367, 41.4%), referees (n = 16, 1.8%), administrators (n = 38, 3.8%), coaches (n = 90, 10.2%), family members (n = 337, 38%), spectators (n = 15, 1.7%), or a form of involvement not specified (n = 23, 2.3%). The respondents participated across the 17 MWFA clubs. The sample group included 507 male (59%) and 353 (41%) female respondents with an average age of 42 years (SD = 10.57).

We distributed the quantitative questionnaire via the MWFA's online member database, using Qualtrics Survey Software. As distribution using online databases includes emails (a) not delivered, (b) not opened, or (c) discarded, we were unable to establish an accurate response rate. In the absence of an accurate response rate, we conducted nonresponse analysis to test the representativeness of the quantitative sample. The application of nonresponse analysis drew on arguments that participants who complete surveys toward the end of a distribution display similar characteristics to non-responders (Jordan, Walker, Kent, & Inoue, 2011). We developed a categorical variable, which reflected the distribution wave in which participants completed the survey. This led to the creation of three groups corresponding to waves one (days 1-7), two (days 8-14), and three (days 15-21). We then tested the null hypothesis that there was no difference in the seven latent constructs based on completion wave. We ran a Multiple Analysis of Variance with the categorical completion variable as an independent variable and the averages of the seven latent factors tested in the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) as dependent variables. The test revealed a main effect for completion wave (F(14, 1756) = 2.02, p =.03). We examined the post-hoc tests, which indicated that the valuing community factor displayed a nonresponse bias F(2, 857) = 4.42, p = .02. Participants completing the survey in wave one (M = 3.27, SD = 0.94) displayed significantly lower (p < .05) ratings for this dimension than respondents in waves two (M =

3.44, *SD* = 0.81) and three (*M* = 3.47, *SD* = 0.81). No other dimensions displayed a nonresponse bias based on completion wave.

Instrument. We met to discuss the thematic structure of the qualitative analysis as a basis to develop the semantic differential phrases. The Appendix displays the full list of items tested. We measured trialing procedures and valuing community with six items, and local players, role in community, development approach, and staff with five items. Following the recommendations of Fabrigar, Wegener, MacCallum, and Strahan (1999) we included at least five observed variables to measure each latent construct. We measured organizational attitude using an adapted version of Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell's (2000) semantic differential instrument, which included three items.

Analysis. We analyzed the quantitative data in three stages using the SPSS 21 (Descriptive statistics and nonresponse analyses), and AMOS 21 (CFA and path analysis). First, we used a CFA to test the structural properties of the six legitimacy dimensions and the organizational attitude factor. This model measured the hypothesized relationships among the six perceived dimensions and overall organizational judgment (attitude). We assessed model fit using multiple indices – in line with previous suggestions (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). We assessed the absolute fit of the model based on a χ^2/df ratio < 3 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012) and Root Mean Error Approximation (RMSEA) values of < .05 (Klein, 2011). Then, we examined the residual fit of the model using the Standardized Root Mean-square Residual (SRMR), which should not exceed .07 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012). For the incremental fit of the model, we used the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), which should each exceed .95.

Second, to test that the model structure, factor loadings, and intercepts of observed variables were reliable, we created two random subsamples to examine model invariance (Horn & McArdle, 1992; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). The subsamples allowed us to

test configural, metric, and scalar invariance using a series of increasingly constrained, nested models. Configural invariance examines whether model structure varies in different sample groups or data collections (i.e., the pattern of nonzero loadings are equivalent in each sample; Horn & McArdle, 1992). The metric invariance test examines whether the pattern of factor loadings are equivalent in different groups. Finally, we tested for scalar invariance to assess whether the means and intercepts for each observed variable were equivalent in the two subsamples. We interpreted Chi Square difference tests ($\Delta\chi^2$) between unconstrained and constrained nested models to examine invariance at each level.

Finally, we constructed a path model regressing organizational attitudes on the six legitimacy dimensions. The direction of causality in the regression model derived from the structure of the open-ended qualitative-item used to frame stage two. We assessed the fit of the path model using the same fit requirements as stated for the CFA (cf. Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).

Stage three results: Measuring legitimacy

The hypothesized model including all items displayed an unacceptable fit to the observed data: $\chi^2/(df) = 2559.38/(539) = 4.75$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .07, $P_{close} < .001$, GFI = .84, TLI = .93 and CFI = .93). The modification indices displayed problems with residual covariances, which inflated the absolute fit of the model. Initially, we allowed problematic residual covariances to correlate in the model. Next, we deleted items with residual covariances that displayed the highest modification value. We deleted eleven items based on the criteria specified. The final model contained 22-items that exhibited good absolute: $\chi^2/(df) = 442.16/(188) = 2.35$, $p < .05$, RMSEA = .04, $P_{close} = 1.00$; residual: SRMR = .02; and incremental fit: CFI = .99, TLI = .98, NFI = .98. Table 3 displays item-level statistics for central tendency, dispersion, and normality. The factor loadings and item-to-total correlations

exceeded suggested levels (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012), and all paths from latent to observed variables were significantly different to zero.

==========Insert Table 3 about here==========

Table 4 displays factor level statistics for the stage three model. Cronbach's Alpha for each dimension exceeded .70. We established discriminant validity as the AVE for each factor exceeded the squared correlation between each pair of dimensions (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Furthermore, the AVE exceeded .50 for each factor, supporting the convergent validity of the model. We conducted the model invariance tests on two randomly created subsamples, which each comprised 430 cases. The model fit was invariant at configural, metric, and scalar levels, which supported the model and factor structure in different groups (Horn & McArdle, 1992; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998). Table 5 displays the results of the invariance testing.

==========Insert Table 4 about here==========

==========Insert Table 5 about here==========

The final stage in the quantitative analysis tested the stated hypothesis. The hypothesized model fit the observed data well (χ^2/(df) = 442.16/(188) = 2.35, $p < .05$, RMSEA = .04, P_{close} = 1.00, SRMR = .02, CFI = .99, TLI = .98, NFI = .98). We supported the positive relationships hypothesized for H1 for (a-d) role in community (β = .31), staff and organizational behavior (β = .26), valuing community (β = .14), and development approach (β = .10). Although positive, we rejected H1 (e-f) for local players (β = .09) and trialing procedures (β = .05) as the paths were not significantly different to zero. In total, the hypothesized model explained 63% of the variance in organizational attitude (Adjusted R^2 = .63).

Discussion

Managing perceptions of legitimacy represents a challenging and complex domain for sport organizations. The diversity of responses the items that we included in this test of the CPOL framework indicates that constituents do not evaluate the actions of sport organizations homogeneously (Lock et al., 2013). Rather, constituents judge the organization that they observe, based on unique experiences, and specific contextual understanding. Acknowledging this complexity, we have advanced previous methodological approaches to study constituent perceptions of sport organizations legitimacy through the statement and testing of the CPOL framework. The CPOL framework provides academics and practitioners with a process to measure the perceived dimensions that inform constituent evaluations of organizational legitimacy. Our contribution provides empirical support for Bitektine's (2011) theory of evaluator social judgments. It also expands on the prevailing organizational focus of existing research.

The six dimensions, which emerged during this study (role in community, staff and organizational behavior, valuing community, development approach, local players, and trialing procedures) displayed robust statistical properties in a confirmatory model. Furthermore, the cumulative effect of the perceived dimensions on overall organizational judgment supported our study hypothesis and provided initial support for the CPOL framework. When regressed on organizational judgment, only four of the six dimensions (i.e., role in community, staff and organizational behavior, valuing community, and development approach) displayed significant effects on overall judgment. Therefore, while important to the evaluative processes of some constituents, not all perceived dimensions emerging from the CPOL framework, in this test, displayed a significant positive relationship with organizational judgment.

Defining the context

Two classifications influenced evaluations of the focal organization in this study: CSO and EPDA. The CSO classification evoked assumptions of community consequences (i.e., role in community), and prioritization and integration (i.e., valuing community and local players). Classification as an EPDA activated scrutiny in relation to the legitimacy of actions in terms of structures (i.e., development approach) and procedures (i.e., trialing procedures). Our findings in relation to scrutiny by classification extended work demonstrating how organizations conform to the expectations of funding agencies (Babiak, 2007; Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Hannigan & Kueneman, 1977) by showing the effect of a funding relationship on constituent judgments of a sport organization. Taken together, the classification of the focal organization and its contextual funding arrangements provided tacit understanding of why constituents scrutinized the perceived dimensions that emerged during this application of the CPOL framework.

Generating perceived dimensions

Following the definition of context, the qualitative stage of the CPOL framework extracted the perceived dimensions that informed the hypothesized measurement model. The use of a mid-range coding scheme (Denis et al., 2001) provided a basis to understand the orientation of constituent perceptions and the type of legitimacy scrutinized (cf. Bitektine, 2011). In terms defined by Bitektine, constituents scrutinized procedural, structural, consequential, personal, and technical legitimacy types, although in other contexts; linkage and managerial forms may also play a role in the judgment process. The classification of sport organizations into specific types acts as an important precursor informing attempts to conform to myths (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It also activates a series of expectations that constituents draw upon when judging the legitimacy of organizational actions.

Scrutiny of personal legitimacy in this study provided impetus to broaden previous definitions (e.g., Suchman, 1995). In normal terms, personal legitimacy refers to the bestowal of legitimacy upon an organization due to the charisma of its leaders or ambassadors. Here, we found that constituents questioned the legitimacy of the focal organization due to interpersonal interactions with staff that violated their own self-interests (Bitektine, 2011; Kates, 2004; Suchman, 1995). Therefore, beyond charismatic leaders or ambassadors, staff perceived to be 'egotistical', or 'self-aggrandizing' ran counter to expectations for appropriate staff behavior in a CSO. This indicated that as charismatic staff members obtain legitimacy for organizations (cf. Suchman, 1995), ambassadors perceived to behave negatively create scrutiny of personal legitimacy in the reverse scenario.

Evaluations of the two perceived dimensions: role in community and development approach drew on broader cultural arguments relating to the focal organization's classification as an EPDA. First, tensions in relation to elite versus community sport funding (Independent Sport Panel, 2009) acted as a shaping force, invoking judgments of both legitimacy and illegitimacy. Second, evaluations of the focal organization's development approach drew on broader arguments purveyed by the national governing body and sections of the Australian sport media. This finding invoked the importance of understanding how the cultural environment influences the way in which constituents evaluate and judge the legitimacy of organizations (cf. Holt & Cameron, 2010).

Capturing perceived dimensions

Our results illustrate that through empowering constituents to drive the definitions and concepts included in context-driven measurement models, we were able to explain more than 60% of the total variance in constituent judgments of a sport organization. By adopting this approach, sport organizations can determine the perceived dimensions that exert the strongest influence on overall judgments. Role in community exhibited the strongest influence on

overall attitudinal judgment of the focal organization. This dimension represented a form of consequential legitimacy, which also related to cultural assumptions about ideal distributions of funding in the sport industry. In addition, staff and organizational behavior also explained a significant proportion of variance; however, this perceived dimension related to pragmatic concerns about the procedural conduct of staff and their technical qualifications (Ruef & Scott, 1998). Of note, the type of legitimacy underscoring the evaluations discussed did not consistently explain a stronger or weaker effect on organizational judgment. Instead, the perceived dimensions that related to the different types cumulatively explained constituents' overall organizational legitimacy judgment.

We specified that the dimensions, which emerged during this study, refer to one sport organization. However, from a pragmatic standpoint, it seems reasonable to suggest that scrutiny of the dimensions, which emerged during this study, may apply to multiple organizations. To this end, we advocate for the application of Miles and Huberman's (1994) qualitative concept of transferability to ascertain how well the outcomes of any given application of the CPOL framework translate to other contexts. Practically, the perceived dimensions of legitimacy emerging during this study provide a starting point for a repository of items that capture areas in which constituents scrutinize the legitimacy of sport organizations. However, the perceived dimensions that emerged during this study represent time-bound evaluations. As such, there is a need for organizations and researchers applying the CPOL framework to acknowledge that disruptions in the social and cultural environment (Holt & Cameron, 2010) can influence the context and, as a result, constituent expectations of legitimate action.

Conclusion

Contribution to theory and practice

The sequential process underpinning the CPOL framework extends theorizing on organizational legitimacy, and recent work on social judgments, in two ways. First, we have forged understanding of the process through which constituents evaluate the practices of sport organizations. Previous research has displayed an overwhelming concentration on organizational efforts to obtain legitimacy. Acknowledging that constituents bestow legitimacy upon organizations, we focused on exploring the perceived dimensions on which constituents scrutinized actions. As hypothesized, the perceived dimensions that emerged from stage two of the CPOL framework displayed a significant, positive relationship with overall organizational judgment.

Second, we have extended existing methodological approaches available to study organizational legitimacy. Our contribution provides an opportunity to diversify extant methodological approaches for future studies of legitimacy, supplementing extant qualitative (Babiak, 2007; Beelitz & Merkl-Davies, 2012; Elsbach, 1994) and quantitative methods (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Ruef & Scott, 1998). We have contributed a structured framework for academics and practitioners to develop contextually grounded measures of areas in which constituents scrutinize organizational actions. This approach fits with the social constructionist nature of legitimacy and incorporates the contextual nuances of classification, location, and environment into the resultant measurement model. It also empowers constituents to define the perceived dimensions of organizational action that should comprise the resultant measurement model.

The CPOL framework offers two practical benefits. First, understanding how individuals evaluate and scrutinize the perceived dimensions that contribute to legitimacy judgments allows sport organizations to measure performance in areas that matter to

constituents. This provides relevant feedback for sport organizations on the key areas of practice, structure, and consequence that inform constituent evaluations and judgments of their legitimacy. Second, and stemming from point one, applying the CPOL framework provides a basis for strategic attempts to obtain, maintain, or repair legitimacy (cf. Ashforth & Gibbs, 1990). Through the dimensions that emerge from applications of the CPOL framework, sport organizations can focus effort into areas of practice (i.e., the perceived dimensions) that matter to constituents and, consequently, influence legitimacy evaluations.

Limitations

Prior to concluding the manuscript and articulating some avenues for future model applications and development, we acknowledge the following research limitations. First, we tested the CPOL framework using a sample of constituents from one Australian nonprofit CSO; hence, we did not test the model in other cases and contexts. Second, we chose to apply a qualitative questionnaire method, which lacks the richness of an in-depth interview approach. The lack of an in-depth qualitative method meant that we could not probe participants or ask follow up questions. Third, the valuing community dimension tested displayed a nonresponse bias, which we note as a limitation of the study. Fourth, as we sought to develop a process to measure constituent evaluations of organizational legitimacy, we did not explore differences between groups of constituents through a process of selective coding in stage two, or through conducting between group tests during stage three of the CPOL framework (i.e., players, spectators, parents, or administrators). Although this existed beyond the purpose of our study, we acknowledge it as a limitation. Fifth, we acknowledge the inclusion of a double-barreled question in stage two as a weakness of the study, which may have influenced constituent response.

Future research

Future work is required to elaborate upon this test of the CPOL framework. First, there is scope to broaden the focus of the CPOL framework to include reputation and status judgments – as specified in Bitektine's (2011) complete model. Second, although many legitimacy-based research problems suit qualitative research designs (e.g., media content analysis, small or localized industrial situations); the CPOL framework provides researchers and practitioners with a process to tackle research problems that qualitative designs are poorly equipped to challenge. On this note, multi-level modeling techniques provide opportunities to examine how membership of subgroups influences participant responses to specific legitimacy dimensions. In terms of the current study, this would provide the focal organization with additional content to identify problematic relationships with some clubs and design strategic approaches to repair relationships.

Concluding comment

We have presented a framework to measure organizational legitimacy, which places the social context and experiences of constituents at the center of understanding evaluations of sport organizations. This contributes to the existing body of work in the field of legitimacy scholarship. It also builds on recent calls for a greater focus dedicated to how individuals conceptualize legitimacy; thus extending work into the perceptional domain of constituents, which provides a new basis for organizations to design strategies to gain, maintain or repair support.

[1] The data presented involves the social reality of constituents in relation to the focal organization. As such, the content does not necessarily reflect the procedures, structures, consequences, personas etc. of MUFC.

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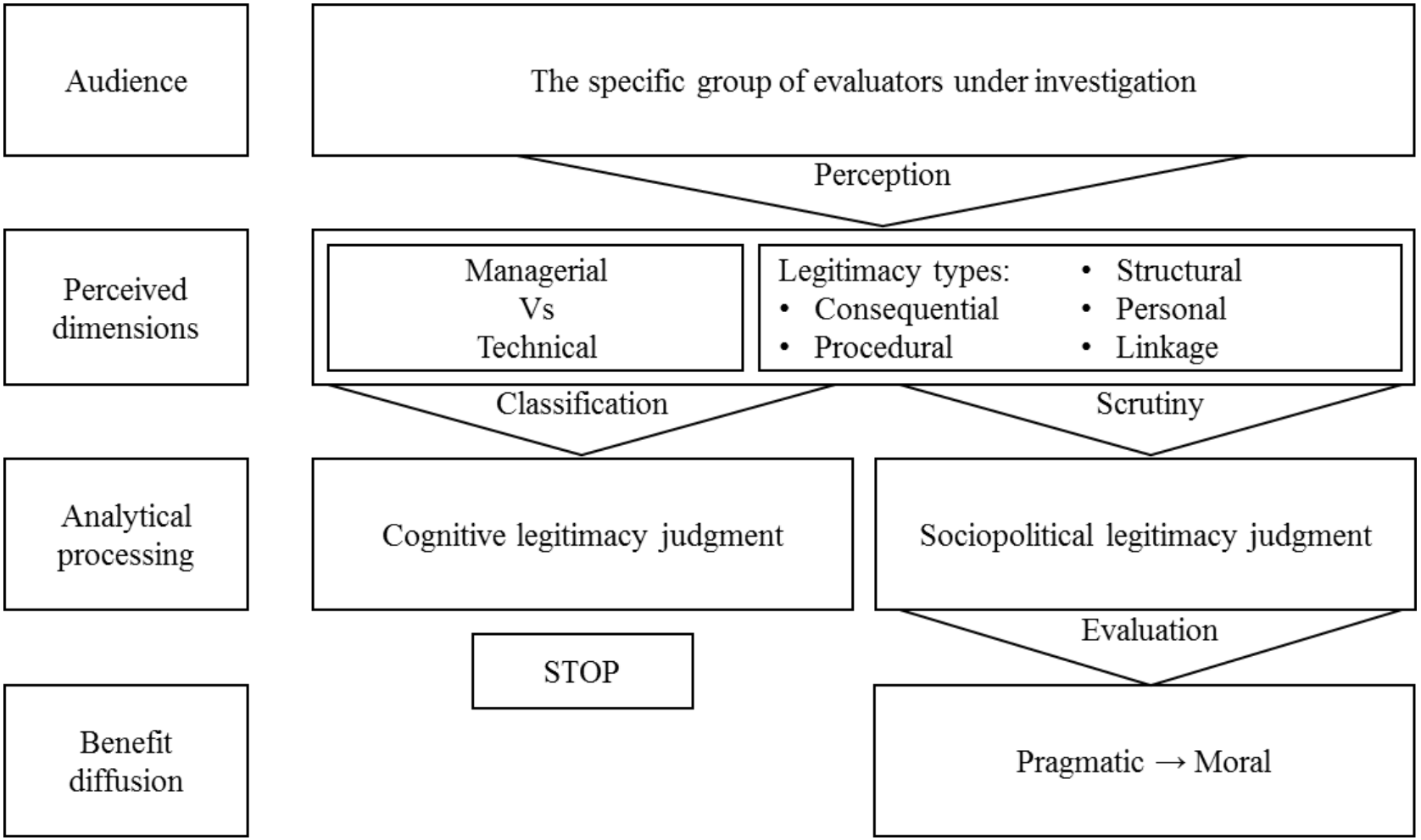

Figure 1: Conceptual framework for legitimacy judgment (Bitektine, 2011)

Table 1

Types of Legitimacy Informing Constituent Evaluations

Legitimacy types	Evaluation	Focus
Consequential	How do the consequences of an organization's actions diffuse benefit to constituents and the industry or community it serves?	Post-action evaluation in relation to the perceived outcomes and benefits of organizational actions.
Procedural	Are an organization's processes and procedures appropriate in relation to social and cultural norms?	Evaluation of specific organizational procedures in comparison with salient social and cultural norms.
Structural	Do the recurring features of organizational processes align with social and cultural norms?	Evaluation of procedures subsumed as recurring features of a broader organizational system.
Personal	Are the leaders and ambassadors of an organization charismatic?	Evaluation of leader charisma relative to social and cultural expectations.
Linkage	Does an organization maintain links with legitimate actors in its social environment?	Evaluation of the extent that an organization retains links with legitimate social actors.
Managerial	Does the organization perform efficiently and effectively in relation to normative expectations?	Evaluation of effectiveness and efficiency of organizational practices in relation to normative expectations.
Technical	Are the core technologies, services, and qualifications of staff appropriate relative to institutionalized norms?	Evaluation of core technologies, services, and qualifications in relation to rationalized standards.

Source: Adapted from Bitektine (2011) and Suchman (1995).

Table 2

Operationalized Themes and Key Terms from Study One

Theme (Axial)	Type	Benefit diffusion	Dimension definition	Key terms
Role in community [Role]	Consequential	Moral	The extent to which constituents perceived MUFC to diffuse benefits to MWFA constituents.	Important to community; elite focus; Valuable pathway
Staff and organizational behavior [Staff]	Procedural Technical	Pragmatic Moral	The extent to which constituents perceived MUFC's coaches and staff to be suitably qualified and approachable.	[Un]approachable,; [Poor] communication; [In]appropriate qualifications
Valuing community [Comm]	Procedural Structural	Moral	The extent to which constituents perceived MUFC to share the values of MWFA members (i.e., act in the best interests of the community).	[Not] Part of the local community; Community focused
Development approach [Approach]	Structural Consequential	Moral	The extent to which constituents perceived MUFC to develop players in alignment with the socially constructed expectations of MWFA constituents.	Old school approach; Technical development; Focus on winning
Local players [Players]	Consequential	Moral Pragmatic	The extent to which constituents perceived MUFC to mainly develop players from the local area.	Local players/talent; Preference to locals; Opportunities
Trialing procedures [Trials]	Procedural	Pragmatic	The extent to which MUFC used suitable trialing procedures to identify talented players for development.	Unfair; Not transparent; Who you know

Table 3

Item Descriptives, Factor Loadings and Parameter Estimates

Dimension	Item	*M*	*SD*	Skewness	Kurtosis	λ	Item-total *r*	Residual	*t*-value
Role	Role 2	3.71	0.99	-0.29	-0.33	0.93	0.88	0.14	1.00
	Role 3	3.81	0.97	-0.35	-0.32	0.91	0.88	0.15	46.17*
	Role 4	3.70	1.00	-0.33	-0.27	0.91	0.86	0.18	44.13*
Staff	Staff 2	3.27	0.80	0.29	1.25	0.82	0.73	0.21	1.00
	Staff 4	3.20	0.85	0.19	1.01	0.80	0.73	0.26	26.79*
	Staff 5	3.05	0.81	-0.06	1.70	0.82	0.73	0.22	27.11*
Comm	Comm 3	3.29	0.90	-0.04	0.40	0.92	0.86	0.13	1.00
	Comm 4	3.37	0.88	-0.07	0.43	0.95	0.86	0.08	46.58*
	Comm 5	3.22	1.03	-0.16	-0.20	0.82	0.79	0.35	34.07*
Approach	Approach 2	3.16	0.89	0.10	0.79	0.82	0.77	0.26	1.00
	Approach 3	3.13	0.91	0.06	0.68	0.90	0.84	0.16	32.70*
	Approach4	3.05	1.01	-0.07	0.08	0.81	0.77	0.34	28.04*
	Approach 5	3.21	0.96	0.00	0.32	0.87	0.82	0.22	31.11*
Players	Player 2	3.20	0.76	0.39	1.40	0.73	0.67	0.28	1.00
	Player 4	3.13	0.84	0.05	1.21	0.87	0.78	0.17	24.89*
	Player 5	3.17	0.83	0.10	1.24	0.89	0.79	0.15	25.26*
Trials	Trial 3	3.13	0.87	0.07	0.99	0.86	0.79	0.19	1.00
	Trial 4	3.34	0.90	0.14	0.44	0.79	0.74	0.31	28.39*
	Trial 6	3.16	0.92	0.06	0.66	0.92	0.83	0.13	36.30*
Attitude	Attitude 1	3.49	0.84	0.19	0.28	0.93	0.90	0.09	1.00
	Attitude 2	3.57	0.85	0.12	-0.06	0.93	0.89	0.11	49.27*
	Attitude 3	3.53	0.89	-0.14	0.26	0.93	0.89	0.11	49.65*

* Path is significantly different to zero i.e., $p < .05$

Table 4

Factor Means, Std. Dev., Cronbach's Alpha (α), AVE, and Correlation Matrix

Dimension	Trials	Players	Comm	Role	Approach	Staff	Attitude	AVE	α	M	SD
Trials	1.00							0.74	0.89	3.21	0.81
Players	0.78	1.00						0.69	0.87	3.17	0.72
Comm	0.59	0.62	1.00					0.80	0.92	3.29	0.87
Role	0.47	0.53	0.63	1.00				0.84	0.94	3.74	0.93
Approach	0.66	0.67	0.64	0.55	1.00			0.72	0.91	3.14	0.84
Staff	0.71	0.69	0.66	0.58	0.80	1.00		0.67	0.86	3.17	0.73
Attitude	0.59	0.62	0.65	0.67	0.66	0.70	1.00	0.86	0.95	3.53	0.82

Table 5

Measurement Invariance Tests

	Baseline	Configural	Metric	Scalar
$\chi^2_{(df)}$	796.45 (376)	803.11 (383)	815.85(398)	840.21 (420)
$\Delta\chi^2_{(df)}$		6.66 (7)	19.39(22)	43.76(44)
p of $\Delta\chi2$		.47	.62	.48
CFI	.98	.98	.98	.98
RMSEA	.04	.04	.04	.03

Appendix 1
List of Stage Three Measurement Items

Item	Semantic differential phrase	1	2	3	4	5	
Role 1	Does not play an important role in the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Plays an important role in the MWFA region
Role 2	Does not serve a purpose in the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Serves a purpose within the MWFA region
Role 3	Does not have a place in the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Has a place in the MWFA region
Role 4	Is not valuable to the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Is valuable to the MWFA region
Role 5	Is bad for the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Is good for the MWFA region
Staff 1	Coaches are unapproachable	□	□	□	□	□	Coaches are approachable
Staff 2	Staff are not well qualified	□	□	□	□	□	Staff are well qualified
Staff 3	Board members are unapprochable	□	□	□	□	□	Board members are approachable
Staff 4	Coaches communicate poorly	□	□	□	□	□	Coaches communicate well
Staff 5	Staff do not listen to the views of MWFA members	□	□	□	□	□	Staff listen to the views of MWFA members
Comm 1	Does not value the local community	□	□	□	□	□	Values the local community
Comm 2	Is not focused on the local community	□	□	□	□	□	Is focused on the local community
Comm 3	Is not driven by community values	□	□	□	□	□	Is driven by community values
Comm 4	Does not share community values	□	□	□	□	□	Shares community values
Comm 5	Is not engaged with the local community	□	□	□	□	□	Is engaged with the local community
Comm 6	Is not part of the local community	□	□	□	□	□	Is part of the local community
DevApp 1	Does not work with local clubs to develop players	□	□	□	□	□	Works with local clubs to develop players
DevApp 2	Emphasises winning matches	□	□	□	□	□	Emphasises player development
DevApp 3	Has an 'old school' approach to player development	□	□	□	□	□	Has a progressive approach to player development
DevApp 4	Does not provide a clear development pathway in MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Provides a clear development pathway in the MWFA region
DevApp 5	Does not encourage the technical development of players	□	□	□	□	□	Encourages the technical development of players
Player 1	Does not show preference to local players	□	□	□	□	□	Shows preference to local players
Player 2	Does not recruit players from the MWFA region	□	□	□	□	□	Recruits players from the MWFA region
Player 3	Provides opportunities for outsiders	□	□	□	□	□	Provides opportunities for locals
Player 4	Does not give opportunities to locals that deserve a chance	□	□	□	□	□	Gives opportunities to locals that deserve a chance
Player 5	Has a negative influence on local players	□	□	□	□	□	Has a positive influence on local players
Trial 1	Trialling processes are not transparent	□	□	□	□	□	Trialling processes are transparent
Trial 2	Players are selected based on 'who they know'	□	□	□	□	□	Players are selected based on their ability
Trial 3	Trials are unfair	□	□	□	□	□	Trials are fair
Trial 4	At trials players are not treated with respect	□	□	□	□	□	At trials players are treated with respect
Trial 5	Trials are poorly organised	□	□	□	□	□	Trials are well organised
Trial 6	The trialling process is unacceptable	□	□	□	□	□	The trialling process is acceptable