

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE ON THE TOPIC

Our study explores the mobilization of social capital for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) within geographically isolated communities that are characterized by high-levels of trust and goodwill amongst community members. Despite high levels of trust amongst community members, and similar access to resources, locally established NGOs have very different levels of success in securing support from community members. The mobilization of social capital developed through the NGO's relationships with the community and local donors become the main sources through which local youth clubs survive and operate. Clubs representing large national NGOs can seek support from their national headquarters and granting agencies; however, locally established small nonprofit organizations are limited to donations from local governments, local residents, and local businesses. Thus local clubs compete with each other for the attention and commitment of supporters. Two of the key questions for clubs receiving less donor commitment than others are why is this so? And, is there anything that can be changed to increase support from the local community? Influenced by an overarching desire for research to be practitioner driven and focused, this study draws on key principles of action research; it brings together the knowledge of academics and practitioners and uses theory to provide new insights into existing real-world problems and then uses these insights to generate knowledge and potential solutions to those problems (Peters and Robinson, 1984; Cunningham, 1993; Oja and Smulyan, 1989; Argyris and Schon, 1991).

The paper therefore begins by using social capital as a lens to analyze the relationships and actions of two community clubs, one with higher levels of donor support (HDS) and one with lower levels of donor support (LDS). Specifically, we explore the actions through which NGOs are able to mobilize social capital into donor commitment and support in the form of

financial, material and volunteer time donations within a geographically isolated community. There is an assumption within the social capital literature that isolated communities are characterized with high levels of social capital that lead to high levels of community commitment and support for ventures that support the community (Graddy and Wang, 2009). Yet despite the high connectivity and high trust relationships that usually exist in such communities (for review see Lende, 2005), there is little explanation about how despite similarities in NGO characteristics (such as similar activities, similar sizes and membership levels) some NGOs are able to better access available social capital and receive significantly higher levels of donations and support for their activities. One reason for this is that there has so far been a lack of empirical research that has looked specifically at regionally isolated communities.

After developing an understanding of, and theorizing about, the actions which bring out higher levels of donor commitment from the local community, the paper then moves onto seeking practical relevance from these findings. This enables the study to develop a much closer link between theorizing and practice. This more specifically means looking at how a club operating in a geographically isolated community can change its practices to increase donor commitment from community members. In so doing, this study addresses a frequently acknowledged research-practice gap (Tsui, 2013; Hambrick, 1994; Hitt, 1998; Cunningham, 1993; Van de Ven, 2007; Cummings, 2007; DeNisi, 2010). Tsui (2013), for example, recently highlighted how the research-practice gap “is not only persisting but is widening and spreading globally” (p. 175). The community of scholars is facing increasing pressure to produce knowledge that is carefully validated by peer review (Huff, 2000: 288), while the application of such “scientific truth” may only occasionally be applied within a practical arena (Van Aken, 2005; Huff, 2000). For instance, although the knowledge of social capital has developed

considerably over the last decade or so (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Anderson & Jack, 2002; Schneider, 2009; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Coffe & Geys, 2007; Ivy, 2012), there has been little insight into whether such knowledge can actually make a difference to communities of practitioners. This paper addresses this problem through applying what Huff (2000) described as “mode 1.5 research,” and drawing upon the principles of action research to combine the knowledge of academicians and practitioners for both scientific rigor and practical value (Cunningham, 1993).

In the search for such a combination of scientific rigor and practical value in the study of social capital mobilization within NGO-donor relationships, we join Rasche and Behnam’s (2009) inquiry on how academic research can become relevant for practicing agents. Our study design centers on the assumption that to become relevant, the production of knowledge is apt to be case-specific as well as problem-specific (Weick, 1996). We have attempted to avoid the trap of assuming that knowledge transfer is linear, or “that knowledge *flows* from the domain of science to the one of practice” (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p. 245). Our aim is to produce knowledge derived from the intersection of science and practice. We attempt to catch the interest of practitioners and enable(s) organizations “to produce new alternatives for action to see things that have not been seen before” (Rasche & Behnam, 2009, p. 252). In so doing, we draw upon key tenets of action research. As Argyris and Schön (1991: p. 86) stated, “action research takes its cues—its questions, puzzles, and problems—from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts [...] it builds descriptions and theories within the practice of the context itself, and tests them there through intervention experiments ...”. The primary purpose of action research is “to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:2). Unlike the traditional structure of academic papers, we begin with the practitioners’ frame of reference and a real-world problem

which forms the basis for our research question: why are some clubs able to receive higher levels of donor commitment than others? Our paper then has three sections, which broadly follow a process of action research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988) in that it begins with a real-world question, through reflection provides a theoretical analysis of that problem, then finally returns to the real-world problem situation to work with practitioners on overcoming that problem. Part I of the paper is thus based on a qualitative study of social capital mobilization for two NGO clubs which operate within a geographically isolated community high in social capital. This part of the study leads to the development of a conceptual model of social capital mobilization within high-trust, geographically isolated communities. In Part II of our paper, we bring this knowledge back to practicing NGOs within the same community and test its ability to assist NGOs in gaining donor commitment and support. Finally, in Part III, we use the model to explore its relevance for helping to make changes within a club that currently experiences low levels of donor commitment. This is where we are able to substantiate our practice-focused implications.

Social Capital in NGO-Donor Relationships

“The concept of social capital seems to be a very compatible, useful, and important one for nonprofit organizations and their leaders” (King, 2004, p. 471). Social capital is defined as “relationships based in patterns of reciprocal, enforceable trust that enable people and organizations to gain access to resources like social services, volunteers, or funding”, and is described through dimensions of networks, norms, and trust (Schneider, 2009, p. 644). Social capital mobilization can lead to the acquisition and securing of resources, information, and elements (Burt, 1997; Cooke and Wills, 1999; Davidsson and Honig, 2003). Other benefits of social capital mobilization include survival and growth of IPOs, organizational performance (Fischer and Pollock, 2004; Oh et al., 2006), knowledge transfer, intellectual capital, work

flexibility, timely access to information, political influence, and access to financial capital (Leana and van Buren, 1999; Adler and Kwon, 2002; Florin et al., 2003; Inkpen and Tsang, 2005).

The literature identifies two types of ties critical to the mobilization of social capital. These are bonding ties, which are associated with homogenous groups of similar people from similar backgrounds, and bridging ties, that entail links to heterogeneous networks of people from a variety of different backgrounds (Paxton, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Coffe & Geys, 2007). Within the NGO context, this distinction between bonding and bridging ties would resemble relationships internal to or external to the organization (Meyer & Hyde, 2004; Coffe & Geys, 2007). Through bonding and bridging ties, NGOs develop trust-based networks of individual or organizational supporters that they can lean on to further the goals of the organization (Schneider, 2009) and to enhance opportunity structures for individuals, organizations, and communities (Beyerlein & Hipp, 2005; Schneider, 2007). Based on the findings of extant research on the effectiveness of these two types of social capital ties (Marshall and Stolle, 2004), we would therefore expect that NGOs which focus only on donations from their existing supporters or membership, would experience significantly less donations than clubs which focus on developing ties to the wider community.

Bonding Ties and Social Capital of NGOs. The role of bonding ties for small local clubs is in fostering closure, reciprocity, and generalized trust within the organization (Leana & van Buren, 1997). Bonding ties allow NGOs to mobilize their existing social capital as a public good — such capital exists as “a resource reflecting the character of social relations ..., realized through members’ level of collective goal orientation and shared trust” (Leana & Van Buren, 1999, p. 540) and is built on the “configuration of a group’s members’ social relationships within the social structure..., as well as in the broader social structure of the organization to which the

group belongs” (Oh et al., 2004, p. 861). It becomes an “attribute of the collective, rather than the sum of individuals’ social connections” (Leana & van Buren, 1999, p. 541) that can be used by any member of a social unit (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Kostova & Roth, 2003). Thus, social capital as a public good provides NGOs with associability in the form of collective goals, collective actions, and trust (Leana & van Buren, 1997), goodwill and support (Ivanova, 2009), solidarity, loyalty (Akdere, 2005), and knowledge transfer (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005) among members of the organization.

Bridging Ties and Social Capital of NGOs. Small local clubs develop bridging ties with people and organizations that are external to the organization: this involves a slow, careful fostering of trusting relationships across groups (Schneider, 2009). As noted by Adler and Kwon, most social capital research emphasizes the importance of bridging ties and the resulting benefits for the actor: “... the actions of individuals and groups that can be greatly facilitated by their direct and indirect links to other actors in social networks” (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 19). While such ties might initially be associated with market or hierarchical relations between the actors, as they are repeated they give rise to social relations (Adler & Kwon, 2002) and lead to the development of a foundation for stakeholder engagement (Andriof & Waddock, 2002) and donor commitment (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2005). Granovetter (1983) and Burt (1992) describe bridging ties as being weak, but allowing the actor to span structural holes between actors, and establishing brokerage relationships (Burt, 2000). By developing such bridging ties, NGOs gain social capital as a private good (Leana & van Buren, 1999; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). This in turn provides them with direct benefits as an asset (Adler & Kwon, 2002), a resource (Bowey & Easton, 2007) and a competitive advantage (Burt, 2000).

Dimensions of Social Capital. Existing research widely accepts a view that social capital is described in terms of three dimensions. These are structural, cognitive and relational (c.f,

Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005; Ivy, 2012), which provide moderating variables for understanding how such capital actually works for nonprofit leaders (King, 2004). The *structural* dimension refers to the actor's ties in relation to the frequency, intensity, and configuration of the ties (Adler & Kwon, 2002), network configuration and stability (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005), or associational activity such as meeting attendance, membership in other associations, etc. (Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001). The *cognitive* dimension includes shared norms, sanctions, goals (Coleman, 1990; Putnam, 1995; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005), and shared meaning and understanding between the members of the network (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Grootaert & van Bastelaer, 2001; Fukuyama, 2001). Actors with high social capital within local networks, for example, are presumed to understand and share local values as well as accept the specific goals and norms of a particular network of donors. And the *relational* dimension, while closely related to the cognitive one, involves a more personal attachment between actors. Such personal relations serve to motivate donors to enhance their relationships with actors or participants in the organization (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Kostova & Ruth, 2003). Mutual obligations, expectations, identifications, and personal relations emphasize the relational dimension of social capital (Coleman, 1990; Burt, 1992; Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998; Nahapiet & Ghoshal 1998; Inkpen & Tsang, 2005). Actors with high levels of social capital in each dimension are expected to have personal relationships with members and within networks to which they belong.

Bonding Ties, Bridging Ties, and Social Capital Dimensions within a Geographically Isolated Community. The integrative view on bridging and bonding ties of a collective actor is widely accepted in the literature (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Meyer & Hyde, 2004; Coffee & Geys, 2007; Schneider, 2009). At the same time, the role and configuration of bridging vs. bonding ties in the social capital of organizations remains highly ambiguous (Coffe & Geys, 2007; Schneider,

2009). While Oh et al. (2004) and Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) believe that units with well-developed bridging ties are more effective and capable of securing resources, Burt (2000) notes that both forms of social capital have productive uses: brokering of network connections and structural holes adds value, while network closure is important for understanding what is embedded within structural holes.

The context of a geographically isolated community poses even greater ambiguity in understanding the role and configuration of bridging and bonding ties for NGOs. This is because the internal and external donors of clubs are interconnected, regardless of their membership in a particular organization. Naturally defined borders of these geographically isolated communities define the network of strong ties, where everybody relates to everybody else, which might diminish the role of the structural dimension of social relationships. The intersection of commonly accepted norms and values among members (e.g., norms of mutual help in the face of harsh Alaskan weather or limited resources for children) establishes a strong cognitive unity within the community. These same climate challenges and geographical isolation strengthen the relational dimension of the social environment, based on shared social identity, pride (e.g. “we” Alaskans) and belonging (Coleman, 1990; Akdere, 2005) to the community. Such a combination of structural, cognitive and relational dimensions of social capital within the community contributes to an environment of high trust and high connectivity, where social capital as a public good is available to all members (Lende, 2005), and where “I’ll do this for you without expecting anything immediately in return, because down the road you (or someone else) will reciprocate my goodwill” (Putnam & Goss 2002, p. 7). If all clubs are connected with community donors through community-wide bonding ties and have equal access to existing social capital as a public good in the community, then the difference between a LDS vs. HDS clubs’ social capital within

club-donor relationships should diminish, or else the way we understand these relationships should be revised.

PART I: CONSTRUCTING THE MODEL

Method

The purpose of this stage of research is to explore the different ways in which LDS and HDS NGOs mobilize social capital in a geographically-isolated community. In order to achieve this, we first identified individuals who NGOs considered to be their donors, then we investigated the actions through which NGOs engaged with those donors and thereafter, we investigated community members' views of the NGO's actions and relationships with community members.

We followed Jack et al. (2008) and adopted the methodology of Coromina and Coenders (2006), who use the specific set of relationships entered by sampled respondents as their unit of analysis. We applied a case study methodology because of the need to examine the subject of social relationships within a real-life context, and because the boundaries between phenomena and context were not always clear (Koschmann & Isbell, 2009). Case studies permit a high level of conceptual validity for identifying causal indicators and contextual factors that is extremely difficult to achieve in statistical studies (George & Bennett, 2005). Case studies may also yield an "intensive investigation of developing patterns" (Larson, 1992: 79) and can potentially reveal scenarios that are beneficial or not beneficial to the case organization. In the search for such patterns or scenarios, we thus continually compare cases and return to the literature so that our findings are "informed by prior theoretical understanding, but which is not so determined or

constrained by this understanding that the potential for making novel insights is foregone” (Finch, 2002, p. 57).

Research Context. A small town in Southeast Alaska was selected as the research context for this study. The town is located in the Panhandle of Southeast Alaska and it is several hundreds of miles away from the closest metropolitan areas of Seattle and Anchorage. Geographically, this community is relatively isolated: there is no road access, and it can be reached only by air or water; the closest neighboring community is 40 miles away. The economy is based on government, tourism, mining and fishing. The federal, state and city government are the main employers as tourism is seasonal. Based on the US Census Bureau, the population is less than 30,000 people with 96% of persons of age 25+ being high-school graduate or higher, and 36% with bachelor degrees or higher, with median household income \$79,000, and with only 6% persons below poverty level. The pace of life is slow. Mean time to travel from home to work is 15 minutes. The community welcomes newcomers, but makes it clear that such a lifestyle is not for everybody with “you belong here or you don’t belong here” attitudes. Rainforest, mountains, and ocean define the climate in the area: the landscape is beautiful, but the area has 300 rainy days per year, and is relatively cold, while mild for Alaskan weather. Community members express value in their choice to live in such a place, emphasizing the importance of community support, embeddedness, cultural richness, natural beauty, and outdoor opportunities. The following citations from personal postings on Facebook represent life within this small community:

“If you are thinking it’s anything like living in the states....think again. First there is no road in or out [...], it’s a rain forest....and yes mam it rains.”

“Shopping is sad here. We have what is technically called a “mall” but it is more like a strip full of empty spaces and a few stores.”

“There is almost nothing for night life and malls if you are used to big city life.”

“Schools are strong, and a lot of things you can do as a family.”

“Good public transportation, nice people, everybody helps everybody.”

“On a beautiful, summer, sunny day SE AK is the most beautiful place on earth.”

Case Selection. Important to action research is that there is a trusted relationship between practitioners and academics. As one of the authors lived in this community and was actively involved in local club activities this provided an opportunity to gain access to club members and their activities in seeking donor support. Clubs were approached to gain agreement to participate in an action research project. After agreement was granted, members, coaches and the general public were approached verbally to ask for their permission for interviews and the researcher’s participation in club meetings. These cases were also chosen because they were within a geographically isolated community that was theoretically insightful (Eisenhardt, 1989). As such, communities have high levels of trust and close relationships with community members. The community had over 300 active NGO groups for community members (GuideStar.org), all of which appealed for community support in the forms of donations and volunteer hours.

In-depth interviews and observations of two youth sports clubs provide the data for Part I of our research. We chose locally established clubs with no external financial or marketing support. These clubs, designated Club LDS (Low Donor Support) and Club HDS (High Donor Support), were chosen on the basis of contrasting characteristics. This follows Mill’s methodology of agreement and difference (Copi & Cohen, 2001). This requires that cases in a study should be as similar as possible in many aspects, but at the same time should be different

in one key area. For our study, this key area was support of local donors. Clubs LDS and HDS both belong to the same community and have both been active for more than seven years. Both clubs rely solely on community donor support. They offer attractive but “disadvantaged” alternatives for youth activities, like jumping rope, synchronized swimming, figure skating, dancing and rhythmic gymnastics. Such activities do not tend to have media support, opportunity for university scholarship, and do not belong to school-supported sport activities. Each offers two programs: a recreational program available for everybody and a competitive program for which participants are required to qualify. Both clubs have awards at the regional, national and international levels. Both clubs rely purely on the dedication of volunteer coaches and parents, and on community support. Each club presents annual shows for the community.

Club LDS has a low level of support: the club has talented members and significant achievements, but has limited support from the community. The club’s receipts from resident and local business donors are less than \$500 a year (based on the five-year period 2002-2007). It receives no support from the city government, and recruiting new members and new volunteer coaches is difficult. Club HDS has a high level of donor support: it receives multiple donations from local businesses and from the local population (exceeding \$5000 a year). It also enjoys a high level of support from members and volunteer coaches and receives special attention from the city (e.g., grants and premium time for use of athletic facilities).

Research Procedure. To enable comparison of our observations between the two clubs, we considered two types of community support given to each club: donations (financial and material) from local residents and local businesses and volunteer activity. We explored the ways in which the clubs interacted with people directly involved in the club’s operations (board members, parents, and coaches) and with local community members (local businesses, local

residents, and local officials), and their views of the NGO's actions and relationships with community members. Table 1 provides a summary of data collection. The longest and most in-depth interviews were done with board members, parents, coaches and with the most active donors (identified by the clubs). The interviews varied in duration, ranging from 25 to 70 minutes. Most interviews were informal, taking place with no fixed outline or prearranged appointment. Sometimes during the interview, parents involved their children (athletes of the club) in the conversation and asked them to share stories about fundraising activities and events of club life.

Insert Table 1 here

Coding the Data. We categorized our data through a series of stages, in which we iterated between identifying themes from the data and returning to the literature, a process described in detail by Jack et al. (2010). During the process of data categorization, we followed the recommendations of Eisenhardt (1989), namely, to start the analysis by first sifting through all of the data, discarding that which were irrelevant and bringing together what seemed most important for the respondents and for the researcher. As per Wolcott (1990) and Jack et al. (2010), our study did not aim to incorporate all possible data. Instead, our goal was to identify and report the essence of the responses with enough context to facilitate the reader's understanding of the situations in which the individuals were immersed.

Data analysis was conducted in two stages. The first stage involved identification of existing donor relationships for the two clubs. Within this stage we identified whom the clubs engage with and how. This revealed four different sets of donors: "*Core of the Club*",

“*Members*”, “*Our Donors*” and “*Community Residents*”. The second stage explored in more detail the characteristics of those relationships and identified themes relating to how the clubs interacted with those donors. Within this stage we identified four core themes. These themes were how the clubs communicate with its members and the community (“*Communications*”), how the club builds commitment and trust with internal members and the community (“*Engagement*”), how the club builds pride and belonging amongst members and the community (“*Belonging*”) and finally, how the club involves members and external actors in its everyday operations (“*Operations*”). We describe our findings in the section below.

FINDINGS

Whom the Clubs Engaged With

Four groups of community members emerged in the study, differentiating the nature of LDS vs. HDS clubs towards donors who are internal to the club and represented by parents, coaches, or members (“*Core of the Club*” and “*Members*”) and those donors who are external to the club who were typically local residents, community businesses or the local government (“*Our Donors*,” and “*Community Residents*”).

The “*Core of the Club*” comprises internal donors who are actively committed to the club. As citations of respondents (Table 2a) highlight, there is a different approach between the LDS and HDS clubs in terms of who are the core members. The LDS club’s approach to integrating into the community is more insular, the club is run mainly by the parents of two of the top athletes and it is very much focused on supporting the development of just a few ‘top athletes’. As the quotes in Table 2a highlight, Chris and Karen, who are the parents of one of the club’s top athletes, are seen by most club members as the ones responsible for bringing in donor

support. The HDS club, on the other hand, encourages a much broader participation and involves all its members and athletes in fundraising activities as well as administrative duties as demonstrated through the quotes. Portes (1998, p. 6) point to how the core members of clubs “secures clubs’ benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures” and in addition Adler and Kwon (2002, p. 23) point to how membership in social structures earns donors’ “goodwill available to individuals or groups” (Adler & Kwon, 2002, p. 23). The *membership in social networks* of the two clubs differs significantly, the LDS club is reliant heavily on the parents of the two top athletes and thus on *their* membership within social networks. The HDS club’s membership in social networks is much more widespread and involves a much greater number of people. As highlighted by Burt (2000), membership within a broader base of social networks has clear advantages; we see this here in how the HDS club’s membership is much more integrated into the local community. This has consequences on both clubs’ ability to achieve active donor commitment and sustainable support.

Insert Table 2a here

The expectations of the role of “*Members*” within the two clubs are very different, as Table 2b illustrates. Within the LDS club, different “*Members*” have clearly defined roles. This is evident from Chris’s comment in Table 2b. Indeed, we see these clearly defined roles emanating throughout the club and stemming from the way the club was run. As Terry mentioned, the club seemed to exist for the primary benefit of the top athletes, which discouraged other athlete members from getting involved other than for their weekly practice sessions. Most parents and athletes we spoke with were only interested in attending weekly practice, with little feeling of wider participation within the club’s activities. The HDS clubs

“Members”, however, gave a very different impression about their role within the club. Most athletes, parents, coaches saw their role not only as participating in the weekly practice sessions, but also playing a much more fundamental role within the club (as can be seen from the quotes in Table 2b) and this involves engaging with other local community members. The HDS club is thus much more able to be known and connected within the community; members can reach out to community residents that are external to the club about the club’s values and practices, which impacts on the clubs’ social capital within the community, regardless of donor intentions.

Insert Table 2b here

The ways that the two clubs work with “*Our Donors*”, by which we mean external donors who are actively committed to the club, are again very different, as can be seen from the examples in Table 3. The LDS club relies heavily on donors from friends and family of the athletes. We heard a number of stories in which they had tried to contact local businesses for support, but this proved to be quite difficult. Alex, a former athlete with LDS, commented how the activities of the LDS club in gaining donor support were very different to other clubs he had seen, he suggested that this was because other clubs were more committed to giving something back to the community. We see this reciprocity in the activities of the HDS club, where they are much more active in getting involved in, as well as organizing, activities for the community; they are able to build upon the bonds they already have with community members and this is reciprocated through donor support and commitment, as we can see from the examples in Table 2c.

Insert Table 2c here

The “*Community Residents*” group comprises external donors such as community residents and local businesses, see Table 2d for examples. The quotes demonstrate how “Community Residents” which support the LDS club are very much passively committed to supporting local clubs; by being passive we mean that they do not play an active role in the club or its activities. Reliance on passive donor commitment can be problematic as it is irregular and not predictably sustainable (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2005). In addition, as can also be seen from Table 2d, their goodwill is based on the perception of the immediate attractiveness of the actor as an appropriate member of the local network; sometimes it can depend on how many individuals they have had contact them within the last few days. Intrinsically, such passive commitment can be time consuming and needs constant maintenance; in addition it does not survive beyond beneficial, but unreciprocated, transactions between the actor and the donor (Leana & van Buren, 1999). For the HDS club, on the other hand, many of their donors are much more actively committed to the club. For example as we see in Table 2d, local residents often support the clubs in which they know more about the club’s activities and are keen to be more engaged. Our data suggests that although both clubs engaged in reaching out to “*Community Residents*” for donor support, the HDS club was much more proactive in engaging those residents in the activities of the club.

Insert Table 2d here

In the next stage of our findings, we revisited the data to look for themes in the actions and activities of the two clubs in how they engaged with the different groups of people that we identify above.

Actions for building NGO-Donor Relationships

In addition to identifying the different groups of people involved in the NGO-donor relationships, we also identify important actions through which these clubs engage with those different groups of people. Our data points to three important actions which influence the ability of the HDS and the LDS clubs when engaging with donors. First, actions to broaden understanding amongst members about potential donor support. Second, actions for extending donor commitment and engaging members in identifying and developing potential donors. Third, actions through which these clubs encourage members to widen donor support through tapping into existing social networks. Table 3 below provides a summary of the different actions through which the clubs engage with the different groups of people to encourage the broadening of donor support. We explain these actions further in the discussion thereafter.

Insert Table 3 here

The first action is the activities through which the clubs broaden understanding of the importance of continued donor support. Within the HDS club, the club actively promoted the advantages of extending donor commitment. As the quote from Hanna illustrates, the club built in games which enabled members to reflect on the importance of their donor's commitment to the club. This also provided a way for the club to think about what it gave back to those donors. The LDS club was much more insular. Its main donor support came through the core members, and since the club's activities largely focused around those core members there was an expectation that support from those parents would continue. As a consequence this left the LDS club in an exposed and vulnerable position.

The second action is the way the clubs encouraged members to engage with potential donors and extend donor commitment through already established ties within community. The HDS club actively encouraged all its members to engage with the community; it has regular internal activities to remind “members” and “core club members” about the importance of donor commitment. It also hosted external activities with the wider community. In doing so, these actions strengthened the bonding relationships and the goodwill of the club. In turn, this in turn helped to extend the “*Core of the Club*” to a broader base of community members. The LDS club, on the other hand, focused its efforts primarily on the “*Core of the Club*” who already provided extensive donor support; it rarely extended its focus beyond this central group of people. This narrow view, again, leaves the LDS club vulnerable as well as limiting its position in terms of building donor relationships.

The final action is the way the clubs encourage connections to a wider community of donor support. The HDS club actively promotes committed members to establish a larger circle of donors with personal attachment to the club. As we see in the examples from Carol, she actively brings on board her own network within the community; this allows the HDS club to extend its circle of devoted and engaged stakeholders, as well as bringing in valued financial and human support. This also made community fundraising events much more effective in that many members of the community were already actively engaged in the club’s activities. The LDS club, on the other hand, did not encourage or help members to outreach new donors, while focused predominantly on the support of its core members and their own networks of contacts; this made the LDS club much less effective than the HDS club in engaging the wider networks and increasing support from across the community.

Combined these three actions demonstrate the different ways in which the two clubs engage with different members of the community. In so doing, it also points to differences in the

way the two club build relationships with the community thus enabling them to generate support for their activities.

Four Key Themes of NGO-Donor Relationships

The previous two sections established the groups of community members and the actions they take in building NGO-donor relationships. In this section, we take a step back to reflect on the foundations underpinning those relationships and in particular how these link to the mobilization of social capital. In so doing, we identify four key themes: communication, engagement, belonging and operations. Table 4 below summarizes these four themes and we discuss them in more detail below.

Insert Table 4 here

Communication

The development and maintenance of communication plays a key role in being able to mobilize social capital within the community. For this, relationships were clearly very important. From Table 4 and our previous findings, the LDS club was quite insular in its approach to developing relationships with community members; in particular it focused much of its activity predominantly around the club’s key athletes and looked to their parents for club support. As such there was a tight knit bond between those club members as well as a heavy reliance on “*Core of the Club*” for the continuation of the club; as such there was less need for formal communication processes.. The HDS club, on the other hand, was actively engaged in developing much wider channels of communication, using their existing bonding relationships as

well as developing bridging relationships to communicate their activities to the wider community. Through actively communicating the activities of the HDS club, it was able to more actively engage with the community. As Val, a coach from the HDS club commented, “Our athletes keep our donors updated about what we do, for instance some of them send regular achievement reports to their sponsors”. In so doing, the HDS club was able to rely on the community’s support for the continuation of the club as well as being less reliant on the club members themselves. As one state official highlighted, the HDS club was a resource for “our city, for our children and for our club”.

In terms of mobilizing social capital, the LDS club’s ability to close informational holes (Burt, 2000) was thus limited to the bonding relationships of the “Core of the Club”, whereas the HDS club through its much broader activities was able to more actively facilitate the closing of informational holes across a much wider base of the community. The HDS club was thus at an advantage as it was able to facilitate cross-unit linkages which contributed to resource exchange (Tsai & Ghoshal, 1998); in turn this became the main input for developing the clubs’ cooperative network, and thus converting passive into more active support from the wider community.

Belonging

Nahapiet & Ghoshal (1998, p. 256) comment that “identification is the process whereby individuals see themselves as one with another person or group of people”. Such identification, or belonging, is recognized as an important foundation for social capital. What we see in this particular study is how such belonging is not only the identification members feel to the club, but also how the club interacts with the community and in doing so creates a sense of belonging for the club within the community. Building bonding relationships stimulates pride among members about the achievements of the club’s teams. The main focus of internal relationships is the pride

of belonging to something distinctive, as well as pride regarding one's own contribution. LaMothe (2003) demonstrates that individual and communal pride both emerge from a system of hierarchical valuation, stories and rituals within a group. The LDS club focused primarily on the achievements of the two core athletes, which limited the means through which it was able to engage with other club "Members" or the wider community. The HDS club, on the other hand, was much more forthcoming in sharing stories through which it was able to create a sense of pride and belonging amongst its members and donors. Through these stories the HDS club was able to establish an overall impression on those external to the club (Scott & Lane, 2000). This created a sense of belonging of the club to the community. The HDS club actively appealed to the "us, Alaskan" identity in their donor outreach activities and is thus able to add an emotional "us" hook that attracts donor attention: "I love the Annual Shows of this club -- this is like a great entertainment and a good example for my kids, who are still little, what they can achieve even in such a small town as ours. So, we donate during the show. Each my kid handles a check for \$15, and it made them so proud" (Local resident). The community is thus much more actively engaged in supporting the HDS club because there is a sense that it is doing something right and that it is bringing value (joy) to the community. The HDS club was thus in a much stronger position to gain the support from community members.

Engagement

Engagement brings about obligations. "Obligations represent commitment or duty to undertake some activity in the future" (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 255) and hence operate as a "credit slip" held by A to be redeemed for some action(s) of B (Coleman, 1990). Engagement plays an important role in underpinning the ability to mobilize social capital. Engagement is underpinned by members feeling personally attached to the club and responsible for its

continuation. For Club HDS, each member feels an obligation to be involved in its operations and to actively engage with the community. Like Hanna, a former athlete from HDS club explains, “I knew that I had to bring \$350 in donations – everybody had to. My mom told me that her role was to pay regular fees, and my role to contribute with this part. So I planned to go around the community every Saturday after my practice during the fundraising season, and to my mom’s office during the teachers-in-service off day in school.” For HDS members, such expectations regarding engagement are clearly defined, as we have seen in the previous sections which demonstrate how members were committed to such activities. In response, the community feels obligations to support those who asked: “Sure, I help if they ask. These are our kids” (Local resident, an owner of the local drug store). In Club LDS, the obligation fell to two parents who were the “*Core of the Club*” and who played a key role in its operation. For other members, engagement was more limited and rarely extended beyond the payment of annual fees: “There was not pressure to get a particular amount of donation from each athlete, and no incentive to do so. So, we tried first, and then just returned the package as it” (Terry, parent, LDS club).

Operations

Our analysis of the findings reveals how consistency in operations plays a central role in accumulating social capital from within the community. Consistency in operations builds on the important messages played through the other themes of this analysis. As Whitener et al (1998, p. 516) observed, “...consistency between managers’ words and deeds and make attributions about their integrity, honesty, and moral character”. In a similar way, consistency in the actions and activities of the clubs plays an important role in building a picture of their role within the community. The clear policies and operations of the HDS club means that everyday decisions by board members and head coaches about participants’ (competitors’) qualifications, rewards,

promotions, hiring, firing, etc., are consistent with the club's espoused values and build on the sense of belonging of members, as well as the commitment of donors. When dealing with community members the HDS club continually and routinely follows through with promises, an important aspect of social capital highlighted by Robinson & Rousseau (1994). If the club assures the city that its membership will grow by 10%, it demonstrates 10% growth; if the club promises parents that their children will be on a team, the children will be on the team: "When we asked for pledges to do 200 push-ups for the money they donated, we made sure to keep track of how many of them we did. It was a special "open-door" practice, when everybody could come and verify that we kept our promises" (Hanna, former athlete, HDS club). Such predictable, positive behaviors strengthen the level of trust in relationships (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995); likewise, doing what has been promised in the interest of each party lays the groundwork for such trust (Dasgupta, 2005). In turn, this trust increases the willingness of donors to repeatedly support the club. The LDS club, however, in its focus on activities which support the continued success of its two leading athletes, does so at the expense of consistent and integrated policies that integrate the community into the club. As one of the parents shared her concern, "My girl had to hang out at the corner of the pool during the half of the practice until I challenged the coach" (Terry, parent, LDS club), and another was surprised when the tuition for the "novice" group raised, while the amount of practices did not, and no explanation was provided. Thus, the LDS clubs goals are focused on the "core of the club" and change according to their needs, rather than on serving the community. The LDS club is thus unable to demonstrate clearly to the community how its goals are achieved and how it benefits the community in so doing.

Figure 2 provides an overview of NGO-donor outreach, specifically highlighting the key elements of NGO-donor relationships that are relevant for NGO efforts to establish consistent donor commitment and support.

Figure 2 is about here

These findings underscore the applicability of social capital within sustainable NGO donor relationships. In so doing, the study reveals important characteristics which underpin how social capital is activated within a community of high-trust relationships (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Adler & Kwon, 2002). Figure 2 provides an explanation of the characteristics underpinning HDS club behavior and their ability to activate social capital and build relationships with different donors. Therefore, this study also reveals particular characteristics important to bridging and bonding NGO-donor relationships: relationships, belonging, obligation, and consistency. Whilst the values related to the wellbeing of local children are strong in this isolated community, this study highlights how activating the social capital which already exists plays an important role in building sustainable donor relationships.

PART II: TESTING THE MODEL IN SEARCH FOR PRACTICAL RELEVANCE

Inspired by the opportunity to help local nonprofit clubs with soliciting donor support, and to contribute to the community by translating the conceptually justified assumptions on NGO expertise, we contacted several other local clubs and offered them the opportunity to evaluate their actions for developing donor commitment and to receive recommendations on how they could improve this process. We also used this opportunity to strengthen the relevance of the model, which had to be institutionalized and legitimized within the practice of real-life organizations (Cunningham, 1993).

Sharing the Model with Practitioners

Four additional clubs participated in the process of testing the relevance of our model. All four clubs matched the criteria used for the case selection of the original LDS and HDS clubs: (1) all were local nonprofit organizations from the same community; (2) all targeted similar groups of internal and external donors, and had no outside-of-community financial or marketing support; (3) all offered a similar level of value for members (e.g., the opportunity for scholarships was low), and (4) their activities had similar (low) levels of recognition outside the community. In interviewing coaches and board members for these organizations, we applied findings from our original research on the NGO-donor relationships (Figure 1). In order to determine how the dimensions of the model serve as independent variables for the HDS or LDS ability to gain donor support and implement the notion “that knowledge should inform action; and that action becomes knowable if we understand better the underlying principles that link cause and effect” (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p. S6).

The results support the assumption that HDS clubs pay special attention to building social capital and that they develop NGOs’ social capital through extending the core of committed actors. The newly selected HDS clubs confirmed that they, in fact, based their relationships with external donors on a strong foundation of active commitment by internal donors and only then extended the established zone of bonding and commitment towards external donors. As described by one of the board members from the HDS club, they “stretched a blanket of love”. A coach from another club mentioned that they “kept donors busy” with involvement in the clubs’ bonding ties by sharing clubs’ issues, pride in their achievements and plans for community outreach.

Four dimensions (*communications, engagement, belonging, operations*) seemed to resonate with the experience of NGO practitioners as an adequate framework to describe

conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for donor commitment. These four dimensions of social capital, however, vary in their degree of presence. These four components are interrelated and each can, to a degree, compensate for another area's weaknesses in establishing and gaining social capital for sport clubs: a strong emotional component can compensate for deficiencies in the structural component; a strong behavioral component can compensate for weak emotional elements, etc. For example, donors with strong feelings of obligation might not be involved in cross-linkages, or might not derive much joy in the club's success, but nonetheless would demonstrate active commitment. Clubs with high status and a positive image could gain social capital more easily, even if ties within its network were not too frequent or too intense.

In addition to the feedback we received from testing our model, another important outcome of this theory-informed intervention was that the clubs received our input, based on our findings about their current practices and recommendations for how to systematically develop bridging and bonding ties, strengthen NGOs' social capital, and establish donor commitment. The NGO leaders agreed that they should rely on their "*Core of the Club*" in developing relationships of active commitment within bonding ties. They accepted that activating commitment of passive "*Members*" by cross-club linkage, obligation to the club, pride, and consistency in operations (Figure 2) should become their primary goal in extending the zone of sustainable support. The "*Core of the Club*" zone of active commitment should also be extended with clubs' bridging ties towards the "*Our Donors*" group of donors, gradually extending the zone of active commitment within the local population. Finally, the NGO leaders learned that they should be aware of opportunities and limitations of bridging relationships with passively committed "*Community Residents*." The higher the volume of bridging and instrumental ties, the greater the individual donations received by the club. Because of the social connectedness and

engagement in geographically isolated communities, residents are likely to contribute only to the extent of their belief about the club's contribution to the well-being of their community. For a single instance of donor support (passive and unsustainable donor commitment) clubs can simply go into the community and ask for donations. However, in this scenario, consistent, repeated pleas are not sustainable. The extent of support based on such ties is financial only, the amount of each donation is minimal and considerable time and effort are necessary to get significant contributions.

PART III. PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF THE MODEL

In our final section, we describe what happened after we worked with one of the LDS clubs to implement recommendations for strengthening NGO-donor relationships and increase donor commitment and support based on the model that we had developed and tested. In order to do this, from June 2007 through to June 2008, the lead researcher volunteered to serve as a board member and president of one of the LDS clubs, to engage other members in understanding the insights gained from Part I of our research and to implement the recommendations suggested above.

Inside-club efforts included building cross-system linkages of committees and communication channels, developing a sense of obligation for the success of a particular committee and of the entire club (*communications*" and *engagement* in relationships with insiders). Each parent was expected to choose one committee to participate in, to involve their children in and to be proactive for, in order for that committee to succeed. The main message to donors was: "if we don't do this, our kids will not have it". Special attention was focused on the issue of trust—the dyadic trust that exists "between two parties who have direct knowledge of

one another” (Leana & van Buren, 1999, p. 543) and the generalized trust towards the club and anyone or anything related to the club. The process was initiated by openly discussing old misunderstandings and perceptions of unfair behavior and stimulated the development of club policies that would set clear expectations toward every member and his/her parent. Special effort was devoted to fun-related events, as well as to establishing a feeling of pride for being affiliated with the particular sport and particular club (*belonging*). “Senior” members shared stories related to the history and achievements of the club, and described challenges of the most complicated technical sport elements. A “Fun and Family Events” committee incorporated these stories into panel games/quizzes, and involved the children in working on these during club parties (that had not existed before). The aim was to cultivate pride in the complexity of this sport and the achievement of those who were capable of learning the technical elements associated with the sport. The board and the team of coaches worked on policies for decision-making in the club, and codified operational routines. These policies and routines are now routinely and consistently implemented (*operations*).

Outside-club efforts mostly concerned the planning of two yearly fundraising events. Club members were advised to build their own and focused networks of donors (*communications*) and to strengthen donors’ identification with the club via personal relationships, personal invitations to the fundraising events, or the sharing of club pictures and stories (*engagement*). One of the annual events was organized as a theme-related and fun show (*belonging*). Club members sent personally attached “I am waiting for you to come” invitations and “you helped me perform better” notes, recognized donors during the show, demonstrated the club’s contributions to the health and success of local children and established relationships with city administration (*operations*).

The efforts led to striking outcomes. Within twelve months (June 2007-May 2008), the club experienced a threefold increase in recruitment of new members and volunteer assistant coaches who were willing to serve the club at least twice a week. Financial support from external donors increased tenfold and the club received several offers of non-financial support from external donors, including media support, free website design, web support services, free accounting audit and grant-writing services. Previously, these were all nonexistent. Within one year, members and volunteer coaches had started planning new initiatives for club-community relations (such as bringing international meets and/or performances to this remote area) that would bring additional enjoyment to the community and promote club activities as being a healthy pastime for the long, rainy and dark winter months. However, it may be that the applicability of the model works in tandem with the social resource set of the individuals involved. It should also be noted that these clubs were from the same community; therefore it would be interesting if the application of this model was extended to other communities and contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

Civic engagement, as observed by Alexis de Tocqueville in his seminal *Democracy in America* (1935), provides the support system for new businesses to succeed and communities to sustain, even in hard times. While the notion of “social capital” – social networks “that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” – has been bandied about for decades, Robert Putnam (1995) popularized the term and called for public policy changes to stem its decline. Putnam described the reduction in all the forms of in-person social interactions upon which Americans used to found, educate, and enrich the fabric of their social lives. Social capital

becomes a scarce resource and competitive advantage for those agents who possess it. Despite the well documented trend in the literature saying social capital is in decline, geographically isolated communities set the precedent when social capital maintains its strong presence in community life. Furthermore, because in situations like the one reported here it is a public good, it is available to each member of the community. It also leaves practicing agents in such communities with no conceptually justified recommendations of how to distinguish their efforts at the competitive market of stakeholder support and investments.

This paper highlights a relevance-centered approach to the study of social capital, in which focus is shifted from the study of social capital variables to one that emphasizes the practicing agents acting in a particular environment and their needs. To date, a gap persists in the literature between a discussion of theoretical concepts and the practical needs of managers of not-for-profit organizations, despite extensive study of the importance of social capital for organizations. Previous studies describe what social capital is and how things happen, but do not provide specific recommendations regarding *what to do* to gain commitment and increase social capital. Within this study, we have found that the following parameters were critical for linking academically justified concepts and the needs of the practitioners; case-study and case selection centered on variables that are relevant for practitioners, nonlinear production of knowledge, attention to specifics of the context within which agents operate and transfer of knowledge through the practitioners' framework of reference.

First, case-study and case selection based on observable donor commitment— the variable accepted among practicing NGOs as relevant and valuable for their operation— became a center in our study design. Selecting case studies with observable success—clubs' ability to solicit donor support —and observing these clubs' actions over time, allows us to observe causation (Ragin, 2000) and explore relationships between the academic focus on how club

members behaved in their relationships with donors and the application focus on the outcomes of such behavior. It also gave us confidence in the relevance of the concept of social capital for understanding NGO-donor relationships and donor commitment. Clearly, the initial costs of donor acquisition are higher for first-time donors than for committed givers; the latter are less likely to lapse and therefore offer substantially higher value over time (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2005). While we initially challenged the role of the social capital of actors within an isolated community, our findings reveal that such capital is, in fact, important for local NGOs whose proactive position and ability to develop donor commitment becomes their main resource for getting the support they need. Constructs such as trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), volition (Pritchard, Havitz, & Howard, 1999), social relations (Gundlach, Achrol, & Mentzer, 1995), shared beliefs, emotional attachment and feelings of obligations (Allen & Meyer, 1990), existence of personal relations (Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987) and consistency of interaction (Gundlach et al., 1995) describe the rationale of donors' commitment to the NGOs of their choice, all of which emphasize the value of social relationships for nonprofit organizations.

The second insight revealed is that a non-linear knowledge chain based on the tenets of action research allows social capital researchers to construct the context-sensitive process of knowledge production of NGO-donor relationships, where the "knowledge informs action, and that action becomes knowable if we understand better the underlying principles that link cause and effect" (Starkey & Madan, 2001, p.S6). The constant interplay between practice and science served to balance the inductive reasoning behind the field research and practitioners' needs, with the deductive reasoning based on an in-depth review of the literature. Such a knowledge chain allowed us make not only relevant, but also academically justified contributions in understanding actors rationale and dimensions of NGO-donor social relationships in a high-trust environment. For instance, we found that the four groups of donors that emerged from this study contributed to

awareness of the structure of opportunities in NGO-donor relationships, where the “*Core of the Club*” and the “*Community Residents*” appear to be opposite in the scale of their individual involvement and commitment to the clubs. Just as fragile trust differs from resilient trust, and dyadic trust differs from generalized trust (Leana & van Buren, 1999), the fragile and dyadic commitment of external and passively involved donors differed from the resilient and generalized commitment of internal and actively involved donors. Another observation is that the dimensions “internal donors vs. external donors” and “active commitment vs. passive commitment” in donor descriptions exist concurrently, combining locations of the donors that NGOs involve in their operation and the level of donor involvement. This frames a cyclical process of NGO-donor relationships which first shapes the focus of the NGO’s actions, then defines the nature of interactions, and finally provides feedback on the effectiveness of NGO actions in gaining donor support.

We also revealed that a social capital view framed with structural (*communications*), relational (*engagement*), emotional (*belonging*) and behavioral (*operations*) dimensions, provides a framework for making practicing agents aware of their mistakes and of the means for developing donor relationships in a geographically isolated community. While the structural and relational dimensions seem to be immune to the context of agents’ operation, the emotional and behavioral social capital dimensions emerged in the environment where “If you live there I know your name” (Lende, 2005); but opportunities for resources and entertainment are scarce. Such a high-trust and high-connectivity environment frames a special dynamic of NGO-donor relationships: NGOs base their relationships with the community on a strong foundation of actively committed internal donors, and then extend the established zone of commitment towards external donors, involving them with the “blanket of love.” With the purpose of extending the “blanket of love,” NGOs refer to donors’ personal, relational and collective identity to strengthen

their belonging to the NGO as “our” club. They consistently fulfil obligations towards club members and community residents through excellence in operations and constant verification of their contributions to the geographically isolated community.

Finally, this study has addressed the issue of knowledge transfer. In the process of constructing a model of NGO-donor relationships, we referred to the idea proposed by Rasche and Behman (2009) that knowledge transferred from the domain of science to that of practice is often not perceived as valid and relevant by practitioners. One of the key principles of action research is that it engages both academics and practitioners throughout the process, thus helping to overcome such challenges (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). At the same time, however, shifting the focus of the study from conceptual issues to the reality of specific organizations runs the risk of leaning towards over-simplification (for the sake of proposing recommendations), or towards over-complication (for the sake of establishing the model’s validity). Relevance cannot mean that we can come up with “theory-free” solutions to complex practical problems (Rasche & Behman, 2009), instead relevance must address the complexity of the application. Thus, to be conceptually strong and useful to practitioners, the social capital model must not only cover the level of the social activity of clubs, but also connect them with the outcomes of NGO operation. In attempting to communicate the model, we have found that practitioners can become overwhelmed by a complex model. We have learned that consistency in terminology has helped us keep the model relatively simple and easy to remember, while cause-effect relationships described in the model served to retain practitioners’ interest. That is why reference to active vs. passive commitment of donors is consistent throughout this model as the major contributor to sustainable vs. unsustainable donor support (the desirable outcome for practitioners) and the four dimensions of NGO-donor relationship — *communications, engagement, belonging, and*

operations — are consistent as bidirectional social interactions that are focused around a practicing agent.

Limitations and Future Research

We have examined an isolated area in Alaska that has a harsh climate, no road access, and where geographically isolated communities establish a distinct environment for the operations of local clubs. The competition for community support in such communities is intense, yet social capital is higher than in a large metropolitan area. Future research should examine how the social capital of the community as a whole affects the local clubs' social capital and compare the strategies that similar clubs have used to gain their communities' support in a geographically isolated community and in a larger metropolitan area. This would help establish whether the findings of this study can be generalized to other types of communities.

Beyond understanding the potential impact of a community's social capital on an NGOs' social capital, it would also be interesting to study the opposite effect—the influence of such capital on the social capital of their referent communities. Because local NGOs play such a significant role in small, closely-knit communities, the activities of club members in cultivating and sustaining social capital has a noticeable influence on the community, at least through the involvement of residents in philanthropic activities. The endeavors of NGOs that are successful in developing internal social relations and donor commitment also provide benchmarks for other clubs by indirectly propagating social capital as a public good. Future research should also examine the correlation between such endeavors and changes in social capital throughout various communities.

The relationship between the meso level (organizational) and micro level (individual) of social capital is an additional direction for future research. Some studies (Leana & van Buren,

1999; Kostova & Roth, 2003) verify that the social capital of particular individuals affects the social capital of the organizations to which they belong. Thus, coaches, board members, or athletes with high personal social capital within the community would undoubtedly attract significant community support for their club. At the same time, organizational social capital of the club as a public good that is available to all members remains a priority. Incorporation of individual social capital into the model for developing the clubs' social capital would yield valuable insight into the relative importance of personal attraction and community benefit. Unraveling the relationships between the social capital of coaches and the social capital of the clubs, or the social capital of board members and the social capital of the club, etc. would illuminate the extent to which these variables contribute to the sustainability of donor commitment.

Finally, we also addressed the issue of sustainability of knowledge transference. We learned the importance of balancing the conceptual validity vs. the simplicity of the model, and also the academic mindset vs. the practitioner mindset. In our case, one of the researchers served as a bridge between the academically justified knowledge and everyday operations. This individual was highly motivated to implement the model, communicate it to other board members and learn about the outcomes of the theory-guided intervention. Since 2007 the club participating in the practical application of the model had a number of different presidents and board members, some of whom were willing to follow the recommendation based on the study results and our model of NGO-donor relationships, and some of them were not. Further research will be necessary to investigate motivational and cognitive characteristics of practitioners, and to consider other factors that shape the effectiveness and sustainability of academically-informed practice.

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