Establishing Legitimacy in the Face of a Dominant Amateur Sport Organization: A Case Study of True Hockey

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

The context of sport is ripe with instances of change, despite the depiction of long-term stability (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Within amateur sport—in particular, youth sport—criticism of the increased standardization and underlying logics that govern it has never been greater. In most contexts, entrepreneurs can enter the marketplace with their own unique operations to serve dissatisfied consumers; however, doing so within an institutionalized sport system has been difficult (Legg et al., 2016). Indeed, powerful national and regional governing bodies rely on coercive pressures to ensure their member community sport organizations (CSOs) remain aligned with their organizational vision and values (Slack & Parent, 2006).

To date, little remains known about institutional entrepreneurship as a process of disruption in the amateur sport system, including how and why it develops and persists against significant resistance. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to develop understandings of how new sport organizations can successfully challenge dominant sport organizations, and how they can achieve their own legitimacy within a highly institutionalized system in order to diversify the range of opportunities available to youth participants. Theoretically, this study draws on an institutional work perspective, which explores the mechanisms that actors employ to create, maintain, and/or disrupt institutions (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Guided by an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995), this study explored the case of a minor hockey organization (i.e., True Hockey) in Ontario, Canada that has been successful at overcoming barriers to operate independently from the athlete development system established by the sport's national governing association (i.e., Hockey Canada). True Hockey is one of a few organizations to have provided youth an alternative to Hockey Canada's highly restrictive development programming (Garbutt, 2018; Radley, 2015). Following its development, True Hockey was identified as a problem by Hockey Canada that it needed to address. Historically, Hockey Canada has invoked a policy that labels organizations like True Hockey as "outlaw leagues" and prohibits participation by anyone associated with these rival organizations (Campbell, 2019). Additionally, Hockey Canada has also shown a tendency to adjust its organizational boundaries to absorb members of "outlaw leagues" to eliminate any threats to its dominance (Kalchman, 2010).

Data were collected via interviews with 20 stakeholders of True Hockey (i.e., executives, parents, coaches, managers). Additionally, data were also extracted from organizational documents, promotional materials, and media reports. Documents and interviews were analyzed using abductive reasoning (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Through an abductive approach, the researcher attempts to explain as much of the phenomenon (i.e., True Hockey's ability to develop as an organization and achieve legitimacy despite challenges from a dominant organization within the institutionalized sport system) as possible with existing theory while looking for anomalies in the data that may require new explanations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). It is through the consistent confronting of theory with the empirical world that a novel advancement of institutional work can be established (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). A relativist approach to trustworthiness was established in accordance with guidance provided by Smith and Caddick (2012).

Findings revealed that True Hockey's key actors have had to navigate four distinct phases of evolution in order to garner support and gain legitimacy within a field that lacks alternatives to program delivery. Specifically, the four phases of evolution that have contributed to the establishment of True Hockey include the *Building, Growth*, *Competition*, and *Stabilization* phases. Each phase is characterized by distinct actions and concepts reflective of the institutional work necessary to launch and maintain a new sport organization. Consistent with existing institutionalization literature, the most effective work performed by True Hockey's key actors involved the manipulation and control of the organization's boundaries, practices, and cognitions in order to put pressure on the dominant organizations in the field. Impressively, the embedded nature of Hockey Canada's logics throughout the hockey community provided the organization an institutional presence that could not be overcome. Thus, to secure the long-term viability of the organization, True Hockey executives and staff made the decision to abandon its success as an independent minor hockey organization to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada after 15 years. True Hockey executives and staff deemed the institutionalization process when the organization accepted Hockey Canada membership. Interestingly, the perceptions of both parents and coaches from within True Hockey suggest that the organization's work with regards to its pursuit of legitimacy remains incomplete. Parents and coaches have and will continue to gauge True Hockey's legitimacy through the evaluation of its *business processes*, *athlete development programming*, and *participant experiences*.

The evolution of True Hockey offers key insights into how a new CSO transitions from start-up organization to legitimate venture within the highly restrictive and regulated sport system. Considering the pressure that many governing bodies in a variety of sports are under to introduce updates to their development systems for youth, the lessons from this case are timely as they show that entrepreneurs are valuable to a sport system because they challenge and debate past ways of doing things in order to create better sport experiences.

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List of Abbreviations

AAU = American Athletic Union
AYHL = Alternative Youth Hockey League
BCHL = British Columbia Hockey League
CHI = College Hockey Inc.
CHL = Canadian Hockey League
CSO = Community Sport Organization
GTHL = Greater Toronto Hockey League
GOHL= Greater Ontario Hockey League
Jr. A = Junior A Hockey
LTAD = Long-Term Athlete Development Model
LTPD = Long-Term Player Development
NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association
NHL = National Hockey League
NSO = National Sport Organization
OHF = Ontario Hockey Federation
OHJL = Ontario Junior Hockey League
OHL = Ontario Hockey League
OSA = Ontario Soccer Association
PI = Principal Investigator
PSHL = Prep School Hockey League
P/TSO = Provincial/Territorial Sport Organization
RDT = Resource Dependence Theory
RBT = Resource-Based Theory
RBV = Resource-Based View
REB = Research Ethics Board
SWOHL = Southwestern Ontario Hockey League

Chapter 1: Introduction

Canadian amateur sport is governed by a complex and institutionalized system. Federally, Sport Canada is responsible for shaping the amateur sport landscape in the country. In recent decades, Sport Canada has relied on the Canadian Sport Policy (2002, 2012) to communicate its objectives and values and set expectations for all members of the amateur sport system. One of the main ways Sport Canada ensures the amateur sport system reflects the policy is by requiring National Sport Organizations (NSOs) to adopt the policy to receive funding. In Canada, recognized sports are governed by a NSO, who is responsible for setting policy, providing resources, establishing legitimacy, promoting sport, operating international and national championships, and offering pathways to elite level sport (Canadian Sport Policy, 2012). In turn, Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations (P/TSOs) establish policy consistent with national policy and adapt it to local conditions as needed, provide support to the local level, and manage provincial teams and championships. Following the direction of these organizations, community sport organizations (CSOs) are responsible for the delivery of sport programming. CSO programming predominantly services community members aged three to 18; thus, CSOs are often also referred to as youth sport organizations.

Another significant way Sport Canada brings the Canadian Sport Policy to life is through the Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD; Harvey, 2015). LTAD model was established in 2005 and is a seven-stage sport development program focused on guiding sport participants from the playground to lifelong participation and/or elite sport (Canadian Sport Centres, 2005). Further, the model is designed to introduce Canadians to sport, training, and competition based on development/maturation level rather than chronological age (Canadian

Sport Centres, 2005). Without question, the LTAD model is reflective of Canada's commitment to establishing a streamlined, athlete/participant-centred sport system (Thibault & Babiak, 2015). Programming at the youth sport level must be infused with elements of the LTAD. NSOs typically do so by first establishing a Long-term Player Development (LTPD) model consistent with their interpretation of the LTAD and their specific sport. Sport programming is then designed in ways that are consistent with a sport's LTPD model (MacIntosh, 2017; Thibault & Harvey, 2015).

Due to the top-down approach to governance in the sport system, CSOs are forced into making difficult programming decisions that may not be reflective of their core values or needs of their key constituents (Harvey, 2015; Sharpe, 2006). As a result, needs for specific types of sporting opportunities are going unmet. For example, in 2017 member organizations of the Greater Toronto Hockey League (GTHL) entered into a highly publicized dispute with Hockey Canada when they refused to implement Hockey Canada's mandated changes to entry-level programming (Campbell, 2017). The mandated programming changes required the GTHL member organizations to eliminate a unique entry-level program that allowed for highly skilled newcomers to hockey to be fast-tracked to more competitive programming (Strashin, 2017). The GTHL member organizations felt as if Hockey Canada was dismantling a key part of their identity as they had spent years building this successful program which served a unique need in Canada's largest hockey market (Strashin, 2017).

In most contexts entrepreneurs can fill unmet needs, however, doing so within an institutionalized sport system has been difficult. In some instances, CSOs who have been critical of the restrictions of the Canadian sport system have threatened to separate themselves in order to operate independently. However, decreased legitimacy and increased costs (e.g., insurance)

have prevented these threats from coming to fruition (Legg et al., 2016). Similarly, powerful national and regional governing bodies rely on coercive pressures to ensure their member CSOs remain aligned with their organizational vision and values. In particular, threatened discipline for a lack of compliance includes loss of funding allocation, loss of insurance coverage, and removal of membership (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Slack & Parent, 2006). Furthermore, cost, lack of funding, and legitimacy have acted as significant barriers to entrepreneurs interested in entering the sport system with their own unique operations. As the sport opportunities delivered by CSOs remain a significant contributor to children's development and wellbeing, there is a need to ensure that as many participants as possible experience sport in a positive manner. One way of doing so is ensuring that a diverse range of opportunities exist to meet various needs. Therefore, investigating newly established CSOs that, through their operations have directly challenged the traditional delivery of sport, offers key insights into how alternative sport experiences can be delivered to a broad population.

This dissertation will contribute to sport management literature as it will further understandings of systems that govern sport. Specifically, this study seeks to offer greater insights into the role and impact that entrepreneurs have within a highly institutionalized sport system. Furthering understandings of governance and entrepreneurship in sport will be accomplished through the analysis of how a new sport organization was created and able to achieve legitimacy while being outside of Canada's highly institutionalized sport system. Analyzing the reactions of dominant organizations within the sport system and their impact on the operations of the new sport organization provides details into how sport organizations either prevent, invoke, or adapt to change.

Background Information: Institutional Theory

Theoretically, this study is underpinned by institutional theory. Institutional theory has dominated organizational studies over the last 40 years (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Institutions consist of a particular pattern that evolves over time and is perceived as legitimate by stakeholders, members, and/or clients (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014). Further, institutions are explained as: "More-or-less taken-for-granted repetitive social behaviour that is underpinned by normative systems and cognitive understandings that give meaning to social exchange and thus enable self-reproducing social order" (Greenwood et al., 2017, p. 4-5). Institutions are primarily performed and maintained through the actions of individuals, organizations, and societies (Meyer et al., 1987; Scott, 2014). Organizations are deemed the most essential mechanism for the stability of institutions because they are considered identifiable social units endowed with interests that have the capacity to achieve goals beyond the reach of individuals (Meyer et al., 1987; Scott, 2014). Specifically, organizations offer cultural models that can be rapidly molded and replicated to organize and manage essential institutions that bring order to society (e.g., hospitals, schools) (Scott, 2014). It is important to note that institutions should not be considered a catch-all phase (Ocasio & Gai, 2020). Most individual organizations are not considered institutions because few ever achieve a sense of taken-for-grantedness where they become imbedded in social norms and actually influence behaviour (Selznick, 1949). In fact, institutions are needed for studying organizations (Ocasio & Gai, 2020).

Tracing the evolution of institutional theory reveals that it is rooted in the disciplines of economics, political science, and sociology (Scott, 2014). The wide application of institutional theory—in particular, throughout the 1980s—established the paradigm as a productive lens to understand organizational interactions with their environment (Greenwood et al., 2017). In

laying the foundation for institutional theory to become the dominant perspective it is today, scholars were called to show: the underlying motivations of institutional effects; pay greater attention to the variability of responses to conflicting institutional pressures; incorporate more agentic and political dimensions; and explicitly look at how institutions arise, change, and with what consequences (Greenwood et al., 2017). As a result, institutional research has come to be dominated by four research tenets: *legitimacy*, *isomorphism*, *institutional logic*, and *institutional work*.

These four research tenets have established detailed accounts of how institutions govern the actions of individuals, organizations, and societies in relation their respective field(s) (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Suddaby's (2015) analysis of the evolution of the theory suggested it has moved through three distinct phases, including structural determinism (i.e., DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), institutional agency (i.e., Oliver, 1991), and institutional change (i.e., Greenwood et al., 2002). Despite the overarching shifts in focus for institutional analysis, the contributions by institutionalists are dominated by explanations of organizational similarity based on institutional conditions (i.e., isomorphism) (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Washington & Patterson, 2011).

The frequent focus of institutionalists on isomorphism has left the other tenets of institutional research to be underserved. In particular, the tenet of institutional work remains underserved by researchers despite the concept being described several years ago as an "important new way to frame institutional analysis" (Micelotta & Washington, 2013, p. 1137). Specifically, institutional work explores the practical actions in which actors are able to *create*, *maintain*, and *disrupt institutions* (Lawrence et al., 2009). The concept of institutional work stems from conceptual work by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992), which signalled a

shift in the attention of institutional researchers toward the impact of individual and collective actors on the institutions that regulate the fields in which they operate (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Each of the three broad categories of institutional work consists of specific mechanisms that actors employ to accomplish the goals of their work, which are outlined in Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) foundational piece on the concept.

To this point, scholars considering the concept of institutional work have predominantly focused on institution creation (Scott, 2014) despite Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) suggestion that various forms of institutional work can co-exist in a setting. Both institutional maintenance and institutional disruption have been argued as routinely understudied topics by institutional scholars (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Trank & Washington, 2009). Specifically, Nite (2017) argued, "maintenance agents [across all organizations] would benefit from greater knowledge of preservation strategies, as this would provide greater insight into effective methods of defense" (p.2) against a threat to an institution.

Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) contended that literature on deinstitutionalization (e.g., Oliver, 1992; Zucker, 1988) is the foundation to understanding institutional disruption, yet scholars have consistently relied on institutional entrepreneurship and change to characterize institutional disruption. This gap in knowledge with regards to institutional work is further expanded due to a continued scholarly focus on elite organizations and actors (Scott, 2014). Institutionalists have been warned not to solely focus their research on the largest or most dominant organizations in a particular field because small, unconventionally operated organizations (e.g., CSOs) are maintained by highly strategic and unique processes (Scott, 2014; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Thus, this over-focus on particular types of organizations has limited theoretical development of the concept of institutional work. The context of localized

amateur sport organizations offers unique characteristics which could provide a nuanced development of institutional theory (Washington & Patterson, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2004). These unique attributes are discussed next.

Background Information: Institutional Theory and Sport

Sparked by the industrial revolution, sport has been highly institutionalized since the mid 19th century (Howell & Howell, 1985). As sport has evolved to become the formally standardized and bureaucratically influenced operation seen today, it has taken on the role of a tool to shape national or regional identity, as well as signal ideological dominance (Howell & Howell, 1985; Kidd, 1996). That is to say sport offers a context that is more influenced by the institutional environment than its technical environment (Washington & Patterson, 2011). For example, sport organizations have been at the visible forefront of important issues such as racial and gender equality, safety, and corporate social responsibility (Nite et al., 2019). Furthermore, sport organization offer a context that has an unmatched longevity and is seemingly resistant to institutional upheaval (Nite et al, 2019; Washington & Patterson, 2011). Therefore, sport is an ideal context to advance the central tenets of institutional theory— specifically, institutional work.

To this point, the central tenets of institutional theory have been applied extensively to the context of sport management (e.g., Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Kikulis, 2000; Nite, 2017; O'Brien & Slack, 2003; Riehl et al., 2019; Slack & Hinings, 1994) to confirm that sport organizations face similar institutional pressures to those outside the sport domain (Washington & Patterson, 2011). However, Washington and Patterson (2011) argued the application of institutional theory within sport management research is indicative of a "one way" relationship (p. 8). More specifically, to this point much of the institutional research that has

taken place within sport management has simply extended the scope for application rather than advance institutional theory (Washington & Patterson, 2011).

The limited advancement of institutional theory from sport management researchers caused Washington and Patterson (2011) to issue a warning that the discipline may be susceptible to a takeover by institutionalists. That is to say, due to the dominance that institutional theory holds within organizational studies literature—fields in which sport management researchers routinely borrow from—institutionalists could begin regularly publishing in sport management journals which could lead to the evolution of the field being defined by contributions to institutional theory (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Thus, it is essential that an institutional approach be employed within a sport context to address questions regarding the behaviour of managers within sport organizations not currently being addressed (Washington & Patterson, 2011).

In particular, the mechanisms and processes that help sport organizations achieve their unmatched longevity could offer significant advancements to the current understanding of institutional maintenance (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Investigating the stability of sport organizations is considered timely to institutionalists as the sport landscape is ripe with instances of change across all levels of competition (Washington & Patterson, 2011). As Nite (2017) noted, all maintenance agents would benefit from increased knowledge of preservation strategies and methods of defense against institutional threats. In addition to furthering theoretical understandings of mechanisms that maintain institutions, sport also offers an ideal context to advance theory on institutional disruption (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) noted that research on the disruption of institutions is lacking, therefore,

investigating the mechanisms that actors employ to disrupt historically stable sport organizations could offer significant theoretical contributions.

Therefore, not only will this dissertation develop sport management literature by furthering understandings of governance and entrepreneurship in sport, it will also facilitate the development of institutional theory. As mentioned, the establishment of new youth organizations is rare due to the strict rules, regulations, and boundaries enforced by powerful NSOs and P/TSOs (Kikulis, 2000). Further, youth sport organizations are an essential part of the sport industry, therefore, those in management positions within youth sport must challenge and debate past ways of doing things in order to create the best possible sport experiences (Snelgrove & Wigfield, 2019). Thus, investigating newly established youth sport organizations who through their operations have directly challenged the traditional delivery of sport is necessary for advancing the current understanding of institutional work mechanisms. The next section further discusses the study's objective.

Study Objective

This study employs the research tenant of institutional work to understanding the development of organizations within an institution. More specifically, the purpose of this doctoral research was to provide a better understanding of the mechanisms that new youth sport organizations use to successfully legitimize and maintain their operations within a highly institutionalized sport system in order to diversify the range of opportunities available to meet participant needs. To this point, much of the literature on institutional work has focused on organizations characterized by powerful actors, ample financial resources, and heightened media attention (Scott, 2014). Youth sport organizations warrant specific attention because many often share unique features (e.g., reliance on volunteerism, limited financial capacity, limited media

attention, tiered-governance structure) that distinguish their operating practices from other types of organizations like those focused on high-performance or in the public sector (Riehl et al., 2019). Furthermore, sport organizations have been found to be maintained over long periods of time despite facing public pressures and a variety of other challenges (Nite et al., 2019). For example, Hockey Canada has historically invoked a policy that labels organizations that do not adhere to its highly regulated development program as "outlaw" leagues and prohibits participation to anyone associated with these rival organizations (Campbell, 2019; Garbutt, 2018). Furthermore, Hockey Canada has shown a tendency to adjust its organizational boundaries to absorb members of "outlaw" leagues (Garbutt, 2018; Kalchman, 2010). To reiterate the position of Nite (2017) in a sport context, it would be highly beneficial for those tasked with maintaining youth sport organizations—newly established or old—to obtain an increased knowledge and practical understanding of defensive mechanisms to employ in the wake of institutional threats. Next, chapter two provides a detailed review of the theoretical foundations for this project (i.e., institutional work) and its application to sport management research.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Foundations & Review of Literature

This chapter details the theoretical foundations that underpin this study. To understand how a CSO establishes and legitimizes itself outside of the restrictive Canadian sport system this study relies on micro level theories like resource dependence theory (RDT) and resource-based theory (RBT), and macro level theories like institutional theory. Pettigrew (1990) explained that the evolution of an organization is messy rather than the often-preconceived notion that it is linear or straightforward. To understand how an organization evolves or changes requires its outer and inner contexts to be studied with interconnections to the construct of time. Therefore, by relying on a variety of theories to underpin this research an interconnected level analysis is achieved. For decades, management theorists have argued that using a single theoretical perspective to guide organizational behaviour research only provides a partial view of the organization(s) under study (Morgan, 1986; Slack & Hinings, 1992; Tolbert, 1985; Ulrich & Barney, 1984).

This chapter begins with a description of RDT followed by a discussion of sustained competitive advantage – the central concept of RBT. Second, two central concepts (i.e., institutions and legitimacy) of institutional theory are described. Third, a variety of institutional work mechanisms that help actors to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions are detailed. Fourth, the importance of studying institutional work as a process by noting the sequence of events and mechanisms utilized is discussed. The chapter closes with an explanation of how sport management research can be advanced through institutional analysis.

Resource Dependence Theory

No organization exists in isolation from other organizations in its environment. Resource-dependence theorists (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) have long suggested

that organizations are unable to generate the variety and number of resources (i.e., financial and material) they need to survive. Consequently, because organizations are unable to perform all the required activities necessary to become self-sustaining, they engage in transactions with the appropriate organizations within their environment to survive (Slack & Hinings, 1992; Slack & Parent, 2006). Therefore, the resource dependence perspective offers insight to understanding the impact of the environment on the structure and processes of different organizations.

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978), the extent to which an organization relies on another for resources is determined by three factors: (1) the importance of the resource or the extent to which the organization requires it for prolonged survival, (2) the extent to which the interest group has discretion over resource allocation and use, and (3) and the extent to which there are alternative sources. Indeed, where there is an exchange relationship between an organization and its environment, there is potential for the supplier of the desired resource(s) to wield control over the dependent organization (Armstrong-Doherty, 1996). This dependence on external resources creates uncertainty for organizations because "environments can change, new organizations enter and exist, and the supply of resources becomes more or less scarce" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 3). Thus, the most effective organization is one that can acquire necessary resources yet maintain relative autonomy within its environment (Yuchtman & Seashore, 1967).

In order to reduce uncertainties regarding resource supplies, managers of dependent organizations must enact their environment (Slack & Parent, 2006). Stated simply, managers of dependent organizations often respond to environmental changes by altering their organization's structure and practices to ensure that consistent flow of resources into the organization is maintained. Slack and Parent (2006) identified mergers, diversification, and joint ventures as common techniques that managers use to reduce uncertainty regarding resource supply. Mergers

and joint ventures assist in eliminating competition for resources while also allowing for financial capital and expertise to be shared across multiple organizations in the same field. Diversification stabilizes an organization as it prevents it from succumbing to drastic alterations in market trends and economic fluctuation. As Cunningham (2002) argued, resource dependence is essential to an organization's change process and overall evolution.

Within sport management literature, the resource dependence perspective has been employed in a limited number of research projects. Mainly, the resource dependence perspective has been used to understand how NSOs and CSOs dependence on various levels of government for financial support impacts their governance structure, decision-making, and program offerings (i.e., Slack & Hinings, 1992; Legg et al., 2016; Vos et al., 2011). Additionally, Armstrong-Doherty (1996) used the resource dependence to show how an athletic department is dependent on a variety of sources, especially central administration, for survival. Cunningham (2002) applied the resource dependence perspective to create an integrative model for examining organizational change.

Resource-Based Theory

The uncertainty within an organization's environment can be further limited through the establishment of a competitive advantage within the organizational field. The resource-based view (RBV) of the firm expands upon the work of resource-dependence theorists by directing attention to the role that internal organizational resources play in the lifeblood of the organization (Conner, 1991; Duncan et al., 1998; Hall, 1992). Rather than focus on external opportunities and threats that an organization may face, the RBT offers insight to how the attributes of intangible and tangible resources are leveraged by commercial organizations in order to establish superior performances within an organizational field (Barney, 1991; Duncan et al., 1998; Hall, 1992).

Stated simply, the RBT approach is based on the idea that a resource with the right traits can help secure, or at least contribute to, a long-term competitive advantage. The following subsections describe the concept of a competitive advantage and the firm resources that contribute to its establishment.

Competitive Advantage

Central to the RBV approach is the concept of a competitive advantage. According to Barney (1991), a firm can establish a competitive advantage when it is implementing a value creating strategy not simultaneously being implemented by any current or potential competitors. Consistent with the RBV approach, Barney's (1991) definition of competitive advantage is focused upon distinctive competencies managers employ to use the advantageous attributes of key resources within an organization rather than the factors that act upon an entire industry (Lado et al., 1992). Barney's (1991; 1995) work builds upon Porter's (1980; 1985) foundational work on organizational strategy that explained that industries do not consist of homogenous resources that are perfectly mobile between competing organizations, rather superior performances by individual firms can be established within individual firms through the activation of idiosyncratic competencies which can generate *sustainable competitive advantages*.

A sustainable competitive advantage is defined as a value creating strategy that is unable to be copied and continues to exist after efforts to duplicate the advantage have ended (Barney, 1991; Lippman & Rumelt, 1982). Thus, strategic management of an organization is regularly carried out with the overarching aim to achieve a position of sustainable competitive advantage (Amis et al., 1997). It is important to note that establishing a sustained competitive advantage does not mean that it will last forever. As Barney (1991) noted, unexpected changes to the

economic structure of an industry can alter the value of specific resources and eliminate a source of a sustained competitive advantage.

Firm Resources

The RBV states that enterprises are endowed with heterogeneous bundles of resources that contribute to a sustained competitive advantage. Specifically, in order for a resource to contribute to a sustained competitive advantage it must possess the following characteristics (Barney, 1991; 1995; Smart & Wolfe, 2000):

1. It must be *valuable* in the sense that it allows an organization to capitalize on opportunities or counter dangers. Valuable resources allow an organization to develop and/or implement methods that improve its efficiency.
2. It must be *rare* among existing and potential competitors. A resource that is shared or accessible to many organizations will not be a source of a competitive advantage.
3. It must be *imperfectly imitable* in the sense that establishing a duplicate of the resource or an adequate substitute for it would put competing businesses at a cost and/or quality disadvantage.

A number of organizational behaviourists have created lists of organizational resources that may contribute to the establishment of a competitive advantage; however, these lists can be summarized into three broad categories: *physical* capital resources, *human* capital resources, and *organizational* capital resources (Barney, 1991; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). The RBV suggests that sources of more enduring competitive advantages are often related to intangible resources because such resources are difficult to imitate and are likely imperfectly mobile (Barney, 1991, 1995; Hall, 1992; Mahoney, 1995; Peteraf, 1993). Therefore, intangible resources like organizational reputation, employee know-how, culture, and customer loyalty are essential to an

organization's performance within its given field because they often facilitate the acquisition of necessary tangible resources (e.g., money, personnel, equipment) for operation (Hall, 1992). In short, intangible resources have often defined the capability differentials within organizations that may ultimately result in a competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Hall, 1992). Interestingly, Alvarez and Busenitz (2001) highlight entrepreneurial cognition as a central resource for a firm that is often not discussed when applying RBT. Particularly, those with entrepreneurial cognition have the ability to recognize and facilitate the recognition of new opportunities as well as the assembling of resources for the venture that are above market standards; thus, contributing to a firm's competitive advantage and extended existence within its field (Alvarez & Busenitz, 2001). Within sport management, RBT has been applied to better understand how organizations can maximize the returns on their sponsorship investments (e.g., Amis et al., 1997; Cornwell et al, 2001; Walker & Kent, 2009), and used to understand the determinants of success within intercollegiate athletic programs (e.g., Smart & Wolfe, 2000).

Institutional Theory

Macro level analysis within this doctoral research is guided by institutional theory. Institutional theorists are motivated to understand the rationalization of the modern world through the analysis of social structures (i.e., organizations), and how they become established and adopted within institutions (Greenwood et al., 2017). Institutions have been studied in the social sciences dating back over a century and today institutional theory forms the dominant perspective in macro organizational theory (Greenwood et al., 2017; Scott, 2014). Contemporary institutional theory, also known as *neo-institutional theory*, was established in the late 1970s with the foundational works of Meyer and Rowan (1977), Zucker (1977), and DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Up until the introduction of neo-institutional theory, the field of organizational

studies had been dominated by theoretical perspectives that sought to examine how organizations established an appropriate fit within their environment through adaptive measures (e.g., resource dependence theory) (Greenwood et al., 2017). As such, these dominant theoretical perspectives reduced organizational behaviour to rational responses to economic pressure (Greenwood et al., 2017; Suddaby, 2015). Neo-institutional theorists, on the other hand, are united by the core belief that institutions and organizations are the product of *social* rather than economic pressures. Hence, neo-institutional theorists reject the notion that the human experience can be reduced to economic rationality (Suddaby, 2013, 2015). Thus, the central purpose of institutional theory is to offer a paradigm that is devoted to understanding how and why organizations behave in ways that defy economic sense or norms of rational behaviour (Suddaby, 2010, 2013).

Institutions

Despite evolving into a theory that is applied to explain a wide range of phenomena, institutionalists are regularly critiqued for failing to establish an agreed upon meaning for the central construct (Haveman & David, 2017). As institutional theory has evolved to its contemporary application and meaning it has been noted that the conceptual ambiguity of the term institution has led to confusion amongst theorists (Greenwood et al., 2017). Specifically, institutions exist at four levels: *individual* (e.g., a handshake in Western society), *organization* (e.g., employing formal accounting structures), *organizational field* (e.g., hierarchical status between organizations in a governance structure), and *societal level* (e.g., legal system) (Greenwood et al., 2017).

Most commonly, institutions are recognized for their capacity to control and constrain behaviour by identifying the legal, moral, and cultural boundaries that determine what is deemed to be acceptable and unacceptable behaviour (Scott, 2014). However, it is important to note that

any conception of an institution must recognize that an institution functions to provide stability and order while also providing support and empowerment for actors' activities (Scott, 2014). As noted in the opening chapter, organizations are deemed the most essential *mechanism* for the stability of institutions because they are considered identifiable social units endowed with interests that have the capacity to achieve goals beyond the reach of individuals (Meyer et al., 1987; Scott, 2014). Stated simply, organizations are not institutions; however, some organizations may have or will develop the power to alter institutionalized structures (Selznick; 1949). Furthermore, institutions are needed for studying organizations (Ocasio & Gai, 2020). In a stable social system, practices are observed and reinforced because they are taken for granted, normatively endorsed, and backed by authorized power (Scott, 2014). Therefore, institutions are best described as a particular pattern that evolves over time and is perceived as legitimate by stakeholders, members, and/or clients (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014).

Three Pillars of Institutions

As first identified by Scott (2014), regulative systems, normative systems, and cultural-cognitive systems are the essential elements supporting institutions. The three identified elements are recognized as the three pillars of institutions (Scott, 2014). Specifically, each element consists of its own underlying assumptions, mechanisms, and indicators that inform foundational processes within institutional research. Therefore, each pillar has been a useful paradigm for institutionalists from a variety of social science disciplines to investigate the construction, stability, and power of institutions (Scott, 2014). The following subsections detail the underlying assumptions, mechanisms, and indicators the make up the three pillars of institutions.

Regulative pillar. Institutionalists across all disciplines recognize in the broadest sense the regulative aspects of institutions. This prevailing view of institutions gives prominence to

explicit regulatory processes (i.e., rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities) that are designed to influence future behaviour (Scott, 2014). Scholars who subscribe to the regulative view of institutions perceive a stable social system to include sets of both formal and informal rules that are backed by surveillance and sanctioning power that directly impacts actors' interests (Scott, 2014). The strength of the regulative system is reflected in the feelings of fear, guilt, or innocence expressed by actors towards the system—in particular, the established surveillance and sanctioning mechanism (Scott, 2014). In short, the regulative pillar is reflective of coercion being taken up by powerful institutional actors as a control mechanism (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014).

The regulative conception of institutions is commonly taken up by economists, political scientists, and legal experts (North, 1990). Scholars within these disciplines regularly focus their work on the behaviour of individuals or organizations within competitive environments (Scott, 2014). It is within a competitive environment where contrasting interests are common, thus, explicit rules and referees are required to preserve order (Scott, 2014). Interestingly, North (1990) identified competitive team sport as an ideal conceptualization of a regulative institution. North (1990) contended that competitive sport properties could not formally function without the penalties (i.e., sanctions) assigned to athletes who break the formal written rules of the specific sport or the accompany informal unwritten rules of player conduct. Therefore, an essential part of a functioning institution is the costliness of rule violations and severity of punishment to deter behaviour (North, 1990).

Normative pillar. The second pillar that theorists view as supporting institutions is the normative pillar. Theorists who subscribe to the conception that institutions rest primarily on the normative pillar stress the importance of the stability and appropriateness that is established

within society by the normative systems that underpin institutions (Scott, 2014). Normative systems consist of both *norms* and *values* (Blake & Davis, 1964). Values are defined as "the enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or desired end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable" (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5). Norms are the shared expectation used to identify right and wrong, acceptable or unacceptable within a social world (Forsyth, 1994; Shaw, 1981). Overall, normative systems define objectives and designate the appropriate ways to achieve them (Blake & Davis, 1964). More specifically, normative systems are viewed as both imposing restraints on social behaviour while also empowering or enabling the social actions of specific actors (Scott, 2014). It is important to note that the values and norms that underpin normative system do not all apply to the collective of society (Scott, 2014). The functionality of many social worlds is reliant on actors upholding the normative expectations (i.e., social *roles*) that have been constructed for them by the normative institutions within society (Scott, 2014). Historically, organizations across all fields and political institutions (e.g., governing bodies, professional associations) are constructed in ways that make them heavily reliant on individuals adhering to the routine or roles outlined in the standard operating procedures (March & Olsen, 1989). Thus, the normative conception of institutions has been widely applied by early sociologists and political scientists who focus on organizational behaviour.

Normative mechanisms ensure that social roles are maintained by issuing licenses, mandates, accreditation, and certifications that grant privileges to specified actors for certain behaviours (Casile & Davis-Blake, 2002). Furthermore, normative mechanisms—similar to regulative mechanisms—are reliant on the emotions they invoke in actors. Specifically, since norms and values are often regarded as the fabric of society, (Parsons, 1990) behaviour that upholds normative systems are said to bring about a sense of honour to actors, while violating

norms is seen as bringing about a sense of shame (Scott, 2014). The emotions invoked by normative mechanisms establishes the sense that they are morally governed rather than legally enforced like regulative institutions (Scott, 2014; Stinchcombe, 1997). Theorists (e.g. Parsons, 1990; Stinchcombe, 1997) suggest that it is the sense of moral governance that allows normative mechanisms to behave as essential stabilizing mechanisms for social worlds.

Cultural-cognitive pillar. The most contemporary conceptualization of an institutional pillar is the cultural-cognitive pillar. The cultural-cognitive conceptualization is the distinguishing feature of neo-institutionalism as it emphasizes that institutions are products of social rather than economic pressures (Scott, 2014). Central to the cultural-cognitive pillar is the recognition of human existence and the cognitions that shape institutions (Scott, 2014). In particular, the cultural-cognitive pillar recognizes that the shape and stability of institutions are products of how humans perceive the culture in which they are entrenched. Cultures are considered to be unitary systems whose cognitive perception is consistent across groups and situations (Scott, 2014). However, cultural beliefs vary and are often contested, especially in times of social upheaval or disorganization (DiMaggio, 1997; Martin, 2002; Seo & Creed, 2002). Thus, even though institutions are considered stable constructs, they are still prone to change as the humans who are responsible for their creation and maintenance will have continually evolving cultural beliefs (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Indeed, the idea of institutional change is not widely addressed by those who subscribe to the regulative or normative pillar; instead, achieving and maintaining consistent social stability has dominated empirical work.

Even though it is recognized through the cultural-cognitive pillar that institutions can change according to the cultural beliefs of actors, achieving stability and compliance within a social world remains essential within this conceptualization. Similar to normative

institutionalists, theorists who subscribe to a cultural-cognitive conception of institutions recognize the power of templates or '*scripts*' for particular types of actors (Shank & Abelson, 1997). The major difference between the scripts applied here and the prescribed roles applied within a normative institution is that the scripts establish a sense of taken-for-grantedness or shared understanding whereas the prescribed roles form a social obligation or binding expectation (Scott, 2014).

Again, the difference between the two mechanisms for achieving institutional stability gives indication that only the cultural-cognitive conceptualization recognizes that human influence on institutions allows for both change and stability to co-exist. Effectively, it is through the cultural-cognitive pillar that actors who align with prevailing cultural beliefs are recognized as likely to feel a sense of competence and connection; while those who ignore, or contest cultural beliefs are often cast as clueless or crazy (Scott, 2014). The emphasis on culture and human interaction, and the construction of meaning has seen the cultural-cognitive conceptualization of institutions regularly subscribed to by anthropologists, contemporary sociologists, and organization behaviourists (Scott, 2014).

Blending institutional pillars. The three institutional pillars identified and described by Scott (2014) have continued to be useful paradigms for institutionalists from a variety of social science disciplines to investigate distinctive features and working modes of institutions. However, it is important to note that empirical observation of institutional forms has routinely found that elements reflective of all three institutional pillars make up institutions (Scott, 2014). Thus, while many institutionalists—as described here—have subscribed to one primary conceptualization of institutions because its elements best reflect characteristics at the centre of

the theorists' discipline, it is a disservice to institutional research to ignore the elements of the other paradigms.

Once again, Scott (2014) noted that in a stable social system, practices are observed and reinforced because they are taken-for-granted, normatively endorsed, and backed by authorized power. Powerful social systems are reliant on the pillars that make up their institutions to be working interdependently, as well as, mutually reinforcing each other. Of course, in some cases one of the pillars may operate alone or hold a position of primacy over the others to maintain social order; however, an institution's stability is heightened when the elements of all three pillars aligned (Scott, 2014). When there is misalignment, confusion and conflict are likely to take place between actors, which may ultimately lead to institutional change (Dacin et al., 2002; Kraatz & Block, 2008).

For the purposes of this research, it is recognized that the Canadian sport system is highly institutionalized and has been shaped mainly by elements reflective of both the normative and regulative pillar. Specifically, the basis of organized youth sport is delivered by CSOs who are accredited or licensed by NSOs and PSOs to deliver specific sporting opportunities to a defined jurisdiction. NSOs and PSOs set policies and rules that CSOs are expected to apply to the rules of play as well as their internal operations (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003; Harvey, 2015). Failure to comply with the rules and policies outlined by NSOs and CSOs will result in CSOs to face stiff sanctions or punishments (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Slack & Hinings, 1994; Slack & Parent, 2006). Ultimately, this reliance on mechanisms from normative and regulative systems by NSOs and PSOs is done to achieve a uniform delivery of sport across Canada.

Yet, as noted in in the opening chapter, certain actors are beginning to pushback against the traditional delivery of sport. Some of the reasons for the noted pushback include

disagreement with rule changes (i.e., Legg et al., 2016) and/or the belief that the traditional delivery of sport can no longer meet the localized demands for elite athletic development of youth (i.e., Strashin, 2017). Together, these reasons could be an indication of NSOs, PSOs, and CSOs losing touch with the changing culture of youth sport. Some institutionalists may equate the noted pushback against the traditional delivery of youth sport as indication that the cultural-cognitive pillar is absent from the Canadian sport system. However, the cultural-cognitive pillar is harder than the other pillars to see. Even though it has received less empirical attention than the other pillars (Riehl et al., 2019), it has been present within Canadian sport organizations as it is essential in maintaining conceptualizations of sport and shaping existing sport opportunities. In the following sections, legitimacy and institutional work are described along with their application within sport management literature. Legitimacy and institutional work are central tenets of institutional theory that form the theoretical foundation of this investigation into newly established youth sport organizations who are challenging the traditional delivery of sport through their unique operation practices.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy is an indication of social acceptance and credibility; therefore, it is considered the central concept of institutional analysis (Haveman & David, 2017; Scott, 2014). Suchman (1995) provided a detailed definition of the concept: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (p. 574). Scholars have recognized distinctions between external - mainly the focus of Suchman (1995) - and internal legitimacy (Drori & Honig, 2013). Internal legitimacy is "the acceptance or normative validation of an organizational strategy through the consensus of its participants, which acts as a tool that

reinforces organizational practices and mobilizes organizational members around a common ethical, strategic or ideological vision" (Drori & Honig, 2013, p. 347). Legitimacy is important because it is essential to the economic viability and overall survival of an organization (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Golant & Sillince, 2007; Leiter, 2005; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Suchman, 1995; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) explained that achieving and maintaining legitimacy involves conforming with the institutional context even if it conflicts with economic rationale (i.e., technical efficiency). Specifically, organizational legitimacy originates from the idea that there is acceptance of an organization's actions and/or managerial decisions (Edwards & Washington, 2015; Lehtonen, 2017; Lock et al., 2015; Phelps & Dickson, 2009; Sam, 2011) to meet consumers' goals. Bitektine and Haack (2015) stated,

> Legitimacy can be viewed as an asset "owned" by a certain actor – an individual, organization, or category of organizations – it still remains a social evaluation made by others. Those actors that confer legitimacy (hereafter evaluators) can be individuals or collective actors – namely, groups, organizations, or field-level actors, such as the media or regulators. Evaluators make judgments about the social properties of an organization or a category and, through their actions, generate positive (or negative) social, political, and economic outcomes. (p.50)

This acceptance is based on regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive frameworks that underpin institutions (Haveman & David, 2017, Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995). Indeed, societal views and expectations produce pressures that influence an organization (Tolbert, 1985). Bitektine (2011) suggests that legitimacy judgments, from constituents, are formed through specific organizational actions, which then inform evaluations of the organization. Thus,

legitimacy is "an anchor-point of a vastly expanded theoretical apparatus addressing the normative and cognitive forces that constrain, construct, and empower organizational actors" (Suchman, 1995, p. 571). Material resources, legal standing, and cultural status are all sources of legitimacy (Leiter, 2005).

Suchman (1995) identified three types of legitimacy: moral, cognitive, and pragmatic. Moral legitimacy is constructed by an audience's value system and reflects beliefs about whether an activity is socially acceptable. Cognitive legitimacy reflects "acceptance of the organization as necessary or inevitable based on some taken-for-granted cultural account" (Suchman, 1995, p. 582). Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interests of an organization's constituents (Bitektine, 2011) and on perceptions that an action or attribute of the organization will "yield tangible benefits for the organization and its stakeholders" (Thomas & Lamm, 2012, p. 193). Suchman's (1995) work has been expanded upon to provide greater context for understanding how actions within an organization ultimately shape acceptance by constituents. Specifically, Lock et al. (2015), and Bitektine (2011) identified several additional types of legitimacy: consequential, procedural, structural, personal, managerial, technical, and linkage; Table 1 provides a description of each type of legitimacy. It is important to note that multiple types of legitimacy can be pursued simultaneously within an organization (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

Table 1. *The Types of Legitimacy (Lock et al., 2015)*

Type of Legitimacy	**Definition**
Consequential	The consequences of the actions of an organization result in the benefits for the constituents, industry, and/or community that they serve.
Procedural	"Are an organization's processes and procedures appropriate in relation to social and cultural norms?" (Lock et al., 2015, p.364)

Personal	Personal legitimacy is "based on charisma of the organizations leaders" (Bitektine, 2011, p.157).
Structural	The reoccurring features of different organizational processes and structures that align with the social and cultural norms.
Linkage	The links that an organization is being associated with or has a partnership.
Managerial	Based on performance, is the organization operating efficiently and effectively in "relation to the normative expectations" (Lock et al., 2015, p.364).
Technical	Bitektine (2011) explained that, "Technical legitimacy is focused on such features as the core technology, quality of services, and qualifications of actors, whereas managerial legitimacy emphasizes features related to efficiency in management and operations" (p.156).

The process of becoming legitimate begins with acts or organizations becoming *locally* accepted as a valid social fact and then being adopted by actors in other local contexts (Scott, 2014). Meyer and Rowan (1977) noted that institutionalization is complete when the acts or processes take on a rule-like status in social thought and action. Legitimacy is required for the creation, transformation, and diffusion of institutions, whereby other alternatives are seen as less appropriate, desirable, or viable (Dacin et al., 2002). Deeds and colleagues (1997) argued that legitimacy should not be considered as dichotomous concept, instead legitimacy should be viewed as a continuous variable that ranges in value based on the actions of those pursuing and maintaining the legitimacy. Consistent with Deeds et al. (1997), Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002) explained, the process of requiring and retaining legitimacy is considered a complex causal

process requiring strategic actions that are context-specific. Therefore, efforts to create, maintain, disrupt, or change an institution could be classified as *legitimacy work* (Nite & Edwards, 2021).

To date, legitimacy has been both a focal point of sport management research (e.g., Nite & Hutchinson, 2018; Sam & Tore Ronglan, 2018; Sant & Mason, 2019; Stenling & Sam, 2017; Strittmatter et al., 2018) and has been included within other sport management institutional research (e.g., Edwards & Washington, 2015; Huml et al., 2018). However, much of the existing work on legitimacy involves the retrospective analysis of organizations whose success indicates that legitimacy is present. To date, Zimmerman and Zeitz's (2002) gap in understanding the importance and pursuit of legitimacy while an organization is in its infancy remains. Therefore, through the investigation of how a new CSO pursues and establishes legitimacy within a highly restrictive sport system, this study directly contributes to closing the gap in understanding the importance of legitimacy to new ventures. In the following section, institutional work and its various components are detailed.

Institutional Work

Institutional work is the central tenet of institutional theory that forms the theoretical foundation of this investigation into newly established youth sport organizations who are challenging the traditional delivery of sport through their unique operation practices. Neo-institutional analyses have employed the concept of institutional work to challenge the assumption of stability associated with institutions (Dowling & Smith, 2016). The concept of institutional work stems from theoretical pieces by DiMaggio (1988) and Oliver (1991; 1992), which signalled a shift in the attention of institutional researchers toward the impact of individual and collective actors on the institutions that regulate the fields in which they operate (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). From these early works an important tradition has emerged within

institutional theory that explores theoretically and empirically the ways in which actors are able to create, maintain, and disrupt institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2011). These pieces of research addressed the commonly cited critique that neo-institutional theory lacks an understanding of agency (DiMaggio, 1988; Suddaby, 2010).

Since the early 2000s, research has been conducted using institutional work (e.g., Battilana & D'Aunno, 2009; Currie 2012; Lawrence et al., 2011; Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Trank & Washington, 2009), however the concept remains relatively new within sport management research (e.g., Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Washington, 2015; Nite, 2017; Nite et al., 2019; Riehl et al., 2019). Specifically, Lawrence and colleagues (2011) summarized the concept of institutional work as:

> The efforts of individuals and collective actors to cope with, keep up with, shore up, tear down, tinker with, transform, or create anew the institutional structures within which they live, work, and play, and which give them their roles, relationships, resources, and routines. (p.53)

Building of the work of Lawrence et al. (2011), Micelotta and Washington (2013) suggested that "the concept of institutional work offers an important new way to frame institutional analysis" (p. 1137) while also providing important insight into the establishment and protection of institutional arrangements by organizations (Riehl et al., 2019). It is important to note that institutional work does not proceed in a linear fashion, instead, it involves all three activities (i.e., creation, maintenance, and disruption) co-existing and taking place during significant overlapping time periods (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009).

Prior to Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) foundational article on institutional work, analyses of institutions in management studies have focused on explaining the similarity between

organizations based on their institutional conditions (i.e., isomorphism). At the core of these analyses is the assumption that institutions are maintained by cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction while providing *stability* and *meaning* to social life (Scott, 2014). Furthermore, institutions define social relationships by defining the roles of various actors in relationships, guiding interactions, and providing sets of meaning to interpret actors' behaviour (Fligstein, 2001). Thus, actors within institutional analyses are often illustrated as "cultural dopes" because their perceptions are greatly impacted by the predominant structures of the institution (Giddens, 1979).

However, each category and form of institutional work highlights the concept of *embedded agency*, which is entrenched in institutions (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Holm, 1995; Nite et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Embedded agency is characterized as, "how actors whose thoughts and actions are constrained by institutions are nevertheless able to work to affect those institutions" (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010, p. 189). Thus, actors should not be considered cultural dopes because institutional work can be described as purposive and intelligent actions that is reflective of a skillful navigation of an organizational field (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Nite et al., 2019). Despite Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) explaining that various forms of institutional work co-exists and is based on actors' intentions, institution creation and change has garnered much of the scholarly attention (Agyemang et al., 2018; Scott, 2014). The following sections will discuss institutional entrepreneurship, including enabling conditions and process.

Institutional Creation

Institutional creation is derived from institutional entrepreneurship. Institutional entrepreneurship represents the "activities of actors who have an interest in particular

institutional arrangements and leverage resources to create new institutions or transform existing ones" (Maguire et al., 2004, p. 657). Institutional entrepreneurs can be organizations or groups of organizations (Garud, et al., 2002; Greenwood et al., 2002), or individuals or groups of individuals (Fligstein, 1997; Maguire et al., 2004). The conceptualization and examination of institutional entrepreneurship emphasizes the work of various forms of actors and their influence on institutional contexts; thus, studying this concept provides significant insight to understanding how institutions are created (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Battilana et al. (2009) offered an important extension of DiMaggio's (1988) definition and subsequent studies on institutional entrepreneurship. Specifically, Battilana et al. (2009) argued that actors must fulfill two conditions to be regarded as institutional entrepreneurs. First, actors must initiate divergent changes to the institution (Battilana et al., 2009). Divergent changes are those that break with the institutionalized logic for organizing within a given institutional context (Amis et al., 2004a; Battilana, 2006; D'Aunno et al., 2000; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Such changes might be initiated within the boundaries of an organization or within the broader institutional context, within which the actor is embedded (Battilana et al., 2009). Second, actors must actively participate in the implementation of the divergent changes through the mobilization of resources in order to be regarded as institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009).

Actors do not have to be successful in implementing change to be considered institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009). A common critique of institutional research is that scholars have positioned entrepreneurs as superheroes who are credited with every change, adaptation, or disruption that takes place within an institution (Suddaby, 2010). However, many changes to institutions come as a result of maintenance or repair work (i.e., changes that maintain the

existence or dominance of an existing institution), which is not a form of institutional entrepreneurship and will be detailed in a later section of this chapter. The following subsections describe the enabling conditions needed for institutional entrepreneurship to take place and be successful.

Enabling conditions of institutional entrepreneurship. The catalyst for institutional creation is based on the development and recognition of a reoccurring problem to which the existing institution(s) are deemed by stakeholders to be unable to provide a satisfactory response (Scott, 2001). Battilana et al. (2009) specify that both, field-level factors, and actors' social position are enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship. However, much of the literature that discusses the triggering conditions for institutional entrepreneurship is dominated by the various field-level conditions that actors face. Yet only some actors will choose to exploit field-level conditions to become institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009). Therefore, it is argued that institutional entrepreneurship is enabled by a combination of field-level factors and specific social characteristics of actors (Battilana et al., 2009; Maguire et al., 2004). The most commonly cited enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship are now briefly described.

Field-level conditions. There are many types of field-level conditions that can trigger institutional entrepreneurship. These conditions are not mutually exclusive and are often interrelated (Battilana et al. 2009). Common field-level conditions triggering institutional entrepreneurship includes crises, acute field-level problems, degree of heterogeneity, and degree of institutionalization.

Crises. Institutional entrepreneurship is triggered when a mature field experiences an exogenous shock or jolt (e.g., social upheaval, technological innovation or change in legislation) that disrupts the meaning of existing institutions and the stability of interactor networks (Maguire

et al., 2004; Meyer, Brooks, Goes, 1990). These conditions can also be triggers for various types of institutional maintenance work, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Acute field-level problems. Often the precursor to crises or environmental jolts, acute field-level problems can cause actors to migrate to new fields where they are likely introduce actions and behaviours that diverge from institutionalized templates (Durand & McGuire, 2005). A common example of an acute field-level problem is scarcity of resources (Battilana et al., 2009; Durand & McGuire, 2005).

Degree of heterogeneity. The heterogeneity of institutional arrangements – the variance in characteristics of different institutional arrangements in a particular field – can enable institutional entrepreneurship because it can give rise to institutional incompatibilities and contradictions (Battilana et al., 2009). Institutional contradictions produce unstable tensions as actors become more likely to question institutional arrangements and possibly diverge from them (Battilana et al., 2009; Blackburn, 1994).

Degree of institutionalization. The degree of institutionalization within a field can give rise to institutional entrepreneurship because it is directly related to the actors' agency (Tolbert & Zucker, 1996). Lower degrees of institutionalization are associated with higher degrees of uncertainty in the institutional order, thus, providing actors with opportunities to invoke strategic actions that lead to new ways of doing things (Battilana et al., 2009; DiMaggio, 1988; Fligstein, 1997; Phillips et al., 2000).

Actors' social positions. Accounting for the social positions of actors is important because it affects both the actors' perception of the field and their access to the resources necessary to engage with institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Bourdieu, 1977; Lawrence, 1999). Specifically, the *status of an organization*, an *organization's position across*

fields, and *individual actors' social position* are enabling conditions for institutional entrepreneurship.

Status of an organization. Many studies on institutional entrepreneurship (e.g., Garud, et al., 2002; Haveman & Rao, 1997; Hirsch, 1986; Kraatz & Zajac, 1996) have found that institutional entrepreneurship is most commonly initiated by organizations with a low status or on the fringe of their respective fields. However, more recent research argues that high status or dominant organizations seem to be consistent starting points for actions reflective of institutional entrepreneurship (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Greenwood et al., 2002; Sherer & Lee, 2002). Battilana and colleague (2009) suggest that this difference in findings is an indication that an organization's status *combined* with the level of heterogeneity or institutionalization within a particular field are characteristics that trigger institutional entrepreneurship.

Position across fields. Institutional entrepreneurship is likely to be triggered by intersections between organizational fields (Battilana et al., 2009). As ideas and strategies are exchanged and successfully applied in new contexts, actors are more likely to pursue institutional entrepreneurship by combining features from neighbouring fields (Phillips et al., 2000).

Individual actors' social position. As noted in earlier in this section, not all actors take advantage of field-level conditions to pursue institutional entrepreneurship. Previous research indicates that actors with formal positions and/or socially constructed legitimated identities across multiple fields are most likely to engage in institutional entrepreneurship (Cliff et al., 2006; Maguire et al., 2004; Sewell, 1992). An enhanced social position by an individual actor can make it easier to establish the support and resources necessary to make entrepreneurial efforts come to fruition. The next section describes the institutional entrepreneurship process.

Process of institutional creation. Supported by the enabling conditions, institutional entrepreneurs must embark on a specific process to see their new vision for an institutional arrangement come to fruition. Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) describe nine types of creation work, broken down into three categories: political work (advocacy, defining and vesting), reconfiguring belief systems (constructing identities, changing normative associations and constructing normative networks), and altering boundaries of meaning systems (mimicry, theorizing, and educating). Stated simply, the aforementioned actions produce proto-institutions, which are institutional arrangements (i.e., new practices, rules, or technologies) that are presented as solutions to a problem in the field and may become institutionalized if they are adopted by enough actors (Lawrence et al., 2002; Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). Similarly, Battilana et al. (2009) proposed that institutional entrepreneurship is a product of actors' ability to present a vision of divergent change and mobilize allies to support the vision. It is this vision of institutional entrepreneurship that is employed for this dissertation.

Creation of a vision for divergent change. Supported by conditions that enable, institutional entrepreneurs must craft a vision for divergent change in terms that appeal to the actors needed to implement (Battilana et al., 2009). Doing so can be challenging because the vision has to be crafted in the face of institutional pressures that seek to preserve the status quo while also promoting the need to break with practices taken-for-granted by other actors in the field (Battilana et al., 2009). Thus, institutional entrepreneurs must frame their visions in terms of the problems it helps resolve; as a preferred arrangement; and as motivated by a compelling reason (Rao et al., 2000). More specifically, institutional entrepreneurs must frame their visions in the following forms: *diagnostic framing*, *prognostic framing*, and *motivational framing* (Markowitz, 2007; Misangyi et al., 2008).

Diagnostic framing seeks to make explicit any failings of the current institutional arrangement while also assigning blame (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Prognostic framing promotes the new institutional vision as superior to the previous arrangement (Battilana et al., 2009). This is accomplished by the institutional entrepreneur de-legitimating existing institutional arrangements and those supported by opponents while working to legitimate allies for the new vision (Déjean et al., 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Lastly, motivational framing calls institutional entrepreneurs to provide compelling reasons to support their new vision by creatively relating to the interests of other actors (Fligstein, 1997; Misangyi et al., 2008). These three types of framing allow institutional entrepreneurs to generate a sense of urgency while presenting and promoting a vision for a proposed change (Battilana et al., 2009).

Mobilizing allies. In conjunction with creating and framing a vision for a new institution, institutional entrepreneurs must work to mobilize allies. Institutional entrepreneurship can rarely be implemented without support (Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood et al., 2002). Therefore, institutional entrepreneurs need to define the protagonists, antagonists, and other figures who will be important to their efforts (Scully & Creed, 2005). From this definition of roles, institutional entrepreneurs can create alliances and cooperation for their new institutional arrangements (Fligstein, 1997; Lawrence et al., 2002). Two strategies that can used to establish alliances are *controlling discourse* and *resource mobilization*.

Controlling discourse requires institutional entrepreneurs to establish rhetorical strategies that continue to promote their new institutional arrangement by connecting it to institutional logics that will resonate with the values and interests of potential allies (Battilana et al., 2009; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). Rhetorical strategies can take the form of symbolic stories, linking the new institutional arrangement to past events, and defining heroes or villains (Zilber,

2007). In addition to invoking rhetorical strategies to mobilize allies, institutional entrepreneurs can mobilize resources that will make it easier for potential allies to endorse their vision (Misangyi et al., 2008). In particular, financial resources and those indicative of the social position of the institutional entrepreneur (e.g., social capital) are essential for the successful implementation of the new institutional arrangement.

Interestingly, similar mobilizing tactics have been invoked by actors in efforts to maintain institutions in emerging fields (Battilana et al., 2009; Maguire et al., 2004; Nite et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Furthermore, it is important to note that much like the enabling conditions that trigger the process of institutional entrepreneurship, the strategies invoked by institutional entrepreneurs are impacted by field-level characteristics like degree of institutionalization (Battilana et al., 2009; Greenwood et al., 2002). Institutional entrepreneurship is inherently linked to institutional disruption as institutional entrepreneurs can invoke disruptive mechanisms to assist in accomplishing their goals (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). The link between institutional entrepreneurship and disruption is described in the next section.

Institutional Disruption

An important aspect of institutional work resides in the lack of boundaries between the three categories. To reiterate, institutional work does not proceed in a linear fashion, instead, it involves all three activities (i.e., creation, maintenance, and disruption) co-existing and taking place during significant overlapping time periods (Zietsma & McKnight, 2009). To this point, the overlap of mechanisms is most evident in literature focused on institutional creation and disruption (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For example, institutional entrepreneurship is triggered when a mature field experiences an exogenous shock (e.g., technological innovation or change in

legislation) that disrupts the meaning of existing institutions and the stability of interactor networks (Maguire et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 1990). Seo and Creed (2002) explained that exogenous shocks force institutional actors into a state of upheaval, which allows for entrepreneurs to identify and attack the parts of the institution that lack attention for maintenance. Therefore, disruption involves the strategic dismantling of the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive foundations of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This is consistent with Oliver's (1992) work that described institutional disruption as aprocess by which the legitimacy of an established or institutionalized organizational practice erodes or discontinues (i.e., deinstitutionalization). Specifically, three forms of institutional work – *disconnecting sanctions*, *disassociating moral foundations*, and *undermining assumptions and beliefs* – can be pursued by institutional actors to disrupt and begin the transformation of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Each of the aforementioned forms of institutional work are now described.

Disconnecting sanctions. Disconnecting sanctions is a form of coercive work which involves reconstituting actors and redefining relationships between actors through the redefining of sets of concepts (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Much of this work involves actors working through state bureaucracy to undermine or invalidate the technical definitions assumptions institutions are founded upon (e.g., Holm, 1995; Jones, 2001). This type of work is often associated with large-scale, revolutionary changes (Lawrence & Phillips, 2004) and may be best suited for situations where social upheaval is considered necessary by key stakeholders (e.g., war; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). When the disconnection of sanctions is being pursued by institutional actors, the judiciary is seen as the most powerful actor as this form of work is reflective of professions and state-actors working against each other (Jones, 2001; Lawrence &

Suddaby, 2006). For example, in one legal ruling the judiciary was able to disrupt a long-standing institution within the American film industry that provided certain production companies a competitive advantage over others (Jones, 2001). Currently, within the world of sport the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is facing attempts of disruption through disconnecting sanctions as the state of California's legislature works with the judiciary to uphold recently passed legislation that would allow collegiate athletes to be paid (Blinder, 2019).

Disassociating moral foundations. Rather than directly attacking the normative foundations of an institution, this form of work gradually undermines the moral foundations of an institution by invoking indirect practices (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For example, in order to combat a drastic economic downturn in Japan during the 1990s, many firms implemented hiring freezes as part of a process that eventually saw them abandon their commitment to the country's institution of offering permanent employment (Ahmadjian & Robinson, 2001). A defining feature of this form of work is that it is typically undertaken by the elites within a particular field (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006; Sherer & Lee, 2002). It is believed that from a privileged position an actor can establish and disseminate rationale for being different and ultimately morally coerce less powerful actors into reforming (Sherer & Lee, 2002).

Undermining assumptions and beliefs. For a disruption to be deemed successful, actors are required to displace prevailing norms, initiate new ones, and then ensure that new practices become institutionalized (i.e., institutional entrepreneurship; Battilana et al., 2009). Scott (2014) assumed that the amount of effort and risks associated with differentiating from already institutionalized practices are key factors in maintaining an institution's stability. Thus, actors hoping to disrupt an institution should focus their work on decreasing the perceived risks or

"costs" of differentiating (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This form of disruptive institutional work is the least understood, however, two specific forms of work have been identified (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

First, actors can approach disruption by developing and offering an innovation that is geared towards breaking existing institutional assumptions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). This particular form of disruptive work is exemplified by Leblebici and colleagues' (1991) analysis of how independent radio stations across the United States revolutionized spot advertising in an effort to combat the highly regulated funding mechanisms they were forced to employ (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Second, actors can disrupt an institution by taking part in practices that gradually undermine the foundational assumptions and beliefs (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). An example of the gradual undermining of an institution's foundational assumptions and beliefs can be seen in the context of youth soccer (Legg et al., 2016). Specifically, in 2014 after the Ontario Soccer Association (OSA) overhauled its youth programming some local member associations continued to operate competitions with modified rules that reflected the previous forms of programming (Legg et al., 2016).

Together, the various forms of disruptive and entrepreneurial work described here emphasize two reoccurring themes within this discussion of institutional work. First, institutional actors are not cultural dopes. As discussed in an earlier section, institutional work is considered purposive and intelligent actions that are reflective of a skillful navigation of an organizational field (Lawrence et al., 2011; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Nite et al., 2019). Disruptive and entrepreneurial work may be the most sophisticated form of institutional work because actors are required to work in highly original and counter-cultural ways, which cannot be accomplished

without an in depth understanding institutional meanings and boundaries (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Second, the establishment and control of boundaries is crucial for the lifespan of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Nite et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). The most effective work done by actors hoping to disrupt, transform, and/or create institutions comes from "redefining, recategorizing, reconfiguring, abstracting, problematizing and, generally, manipulating the social and symbolic boundaries that constitute institutions" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 238). Next, institutional entrepreneurship and disruption are discussed as they have been applied in sport management research.

Institutional Entrepreneurship and Disruption in Sport

As much as institutional creation has garnered much of the attention of management scholars, it remains an understudied topic in sport management. Kikulis (2000) was first to call for more investigations into the evolution and changes of the institutional structures that make up sport organizations. Kikulis (2000) noted that too often sport management researchers focused on the impact of the institutional environment on the organization rather than the institutional structures. Washington and Patterson (2011) reiterated Kikulis' (2000) call in their comprehensive review of the application of institutional theory within the sport management discipline. More recently, Andersen and Ronglan (2015) investigated the role of institutional entrepreneurship in Nordic elite sport systems, however, they noted that the concept remains largely ignored in the field of sport management. Furthermore, consistent with other research that has applied institutional theory within a sport management context, the studies that have investigated the concept of institutional entrepreneurship (i.e., Andersen & Ronglan, 2015; Kikulis, 2000) have used elite organizations (i.e., NSOs) as subjects. Thus, much remains to be

investigated with regards to institutional entrepreneurship in sport organizations and fields with low profiles.

Similarly, institutional disruption remains the most understudied tenet of institutional theory within sport management. This occurrence is interesting because arguably most high-profile sport organizations have been embroiled in legitimacy crises (e.g., Wagner, 2011), scandals (e.g., Bacon, 2015), or contradictorily logics (Southall et al., 2008). Indeed, many of the world's most prolific sport associations have or continue to face instances that should result in self-destruction (Garud et al., 2002). Additionally, within amateur sport there continues to be mounting criticism and dissatisfaction with the traditional delivery of sport participation opportunities (Legg et al., 2016; Riehl et al., 2019; Torres & Hagger, 2007). Thus, the current state of the sport environment seems to be ripe with opportunities to further the understanding of institutional disruption, entrepreneurship, and the connection between the two concepts. The next section of this chapter details how institutions are maintained through attempts of disruption and change.

Preventing Institutional Change

Following their creation, institutions must go through ongoing work to ensure that institutional stability is achieved (Scott, 2008). Foundational pieces of institutional theory (i.e., Berger & Luckmann, 1967) originally characterized maintenance work as the silent, unproblematic, and taken-for-granted reproduction of existing social norms (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Although institutions are associated with automatic mechanisms of social control that lead to institutions being self-reproducing (Jepperson, 1991), "relatively few institutions have such powerful reproductive mechanisms that no on-going maintenance is necessary (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 229). As discussed previously, the conception of

institutional work challenges the notion of inherent stability associated with institutions. In particular, the concept of institutional maintenance recognizes the importance of individual actors and organizations in sustaining or maintaining the institution through specific actions, policies, and/or decisions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Trank and Washington (2009) described institutional maintenance as "the active process of institutions to maintain their status and power in the field" (p. 39). More specifically, Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) characterized institutional maintenance as work that supported, repaired, or recreated the social mechanisms that ensure compliance. Thus, even the most highly institutionalized phenomena (e.g., democracy) requires plenty of institutional work to be maintained (Jepperson, 1991; Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Despite its importance, institutional maintenance remains understudied by institutional scholars (Ageyemang et al., 2018; Scott, 2014). A reason cited for the lack of scholarly attention paid to institutional maintenance is that maintenance work is most often performed by non-elite actors (Lawrence et al., 2013; Scott, 2014). This is to say, within institutions there often exists a group of constituents deemed to be custodians who deal with the potential breakdowns of mechanisms on a daily occurrence (Dacin & Dacin, 2008). Assuredly, some forms of institutional work are dramatic and highly visible, but most can be characterized as mundane day-to-day adjustments, adaptations, and compromises of actors attempting to maintain institutional arrangements (Lawrence et al., 2009).

Maintenance work is often triggered by a threat to the institutional status quo (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Nite, 2017). Additionally, incumbents who are advantaged by the existing institutional arrangements will resist any change to the institutional status quo (Hardy & Maguire, 2008; Jepperson, 1991). Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) identified five mechanisms that facilitate the maintenance of institutions, including *enabling work; policing; deterring,*

valorizing and demonizing; mythologizing; and *embedding and routinizing.* These mechanisms are reflective of the underlying coercive, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of institutions (Scott, 2014). Enabling, policing, and deterring can be described as coercive mechanisms that primarily address the maintenance of institutions through ensuring adherence to rule systems (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The latter three (i.e., valorizing/demonizing, mythologizing and embedding and routinizing) are considered normative and cognitive mechanisms, which focus maintenance efforts on reproducing existing norms and belief systems (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). The five maintenance mechanisms identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) are now described.

Enabling work. This mechanism refers to the creation and utilization of rules that support institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For example, this can involve the use of authorizing agents or roles dedicated to sustaining routines and utilizing resources to support the institution. Enabling work is also accomplished by introducing "constitutive rules" for membership or status within an association in order to form and reproduce shared meanings (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Enabling work is often seen in the maintenance of sport governing bodies (Riehl et al., 2019). Specifically, sport governing bodies at the national and/or regional level maintain their institutions through localized member organizations by instituting constitutive rules that provide legitimacy and promotion of a sport (Riehl et al., 2019). Edwards and Washington (2015) used institutional work to gain an understanding of the forces, actions, and events that led to the creation and maintenance of College Hockey Inc. (CHI). This organization was developed as a means of establishing the legitimacy of the NCAA Division I male hockey against the Canadian Hockey League (CHL), and to be able to recruit the most talented Canadian hockey players (Edwards & Washington, 2015).

Policing. Institutions can be maintained by policing because it ensures "compliance through enforcement, auditing and monitoring" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 231). Policing takes the form of both sanctions and inducements to drive behaviors (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). For example, Dacin, Munir, and Tracey (2010) reported that breakdowns in the institutionalized ritual of formal dining at Cambridge University caused by students departing from protocol triggered immediate corrective disciplinary responses by university personnel. Organizational rituals are highly policed because even from their micro-level position, they play an integral role in the maintenance of higher-level institutions (e.g., British class system) (Dacin et al., 2010). Again, sport offers an interesting example of institutional maintenance as national and regional governing bodies provide member organizations with insurance, which would otherwise be costly, in exchange for compliance (Misener & Doherty, 2013). In some cases, the mere act of auditing or monitoring may be enough to ensure compliance (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006).

Deterrence. The last coercive maintenance mechanism is deterrence. Similar to policing, deterrence "involves the threat of coercion to inculcate the conscious obedience of institutional actors" (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 232). The effectiveness of this mechanism is contingent upon the legitimate authority of the agent to deliver the deterrence (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). A commonly cited example of the deterrence mechanism is Trank and Washington's (2009) documentation of how the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) redefined its own membership criteria in order to maintain its own legitimacy as a legitimating organization in the field of business education. Another common form of deterrence—especially, within sport— is coercing constituents into specific decisions or business structures by threatening to withhold financial resources (e.g., Slack & Hinings, 1994).

Valorizing and demonizing. This type of maintenance work shapes public perception through both positive and negative examples that highlight the normative foundations of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). More specifically, actors are called to "evaluate the moral status of participants in the field, both as an enactment of institutionalized beliefs and as a way of maintaining the power of those beliefs (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 232). The medium in which these values get presented vary based on organization and actors (Riehl et al., 2019; Trank & Washington, 2009). Trank and Washington's (2009) examination of the AACSB found the organization used explicit valorizing and implicit demonizing in messaging to members seeking to reinforce the legitimacy of its accreditation.

Mythologizing. A significant way in which actors are able to preserve the normative underpinnings of institutions is by mythologizing their history (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Thus, mythologizing focuses on the past instead of the present and can help maintain institutions (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Similar to valorizing and demonizing, mythologizing can take a number of forms such as telling stories about significant events or leaders in an organization's history that emphasize key tenets of the culture and expected behaviour (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Riehl and colleagues (2019) explained that mythologizing is common practice in sport organizations as significant games, inspiring coaches, and prominent athletes are commonly referenced in stories that emphasize specific attributes that are to be normalized.

Embedding and routinizing. The final maintenance mechanism identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) "involves actively infusing the normative foundations of an institution into the participants' day-to-day routines and organizational practices" (p. 233). Examples of embedded routines and repetitive practices that provide stability to an institution, include: "training, education, hiring and certification routines and ceremonies of celebration" (Lawrence

& Suddaby, p. 233). This particular mechanism is the most understudied in institutional literature (Lawrence et al., 2013).

As scholarly literature on institutional maintenance continues to evolve, much of the work has relied on Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) maintenance mechanisms as a foundation (Lok & de Rond, 2013). The maintenance mechanisms identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006) suggests that change within institutions is preventable and disruptions are avoidable with actors engaging in appropriate counterforce actions to external threats (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). However, institutional scholars have acknowledged that preventing change within an institution is difficult because there are "regular instances in which institutionalized practices break down and begin to diverge from highly institutionalized scripts" (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p. 185). This is particularly true for sport organizations who routinely face a variety of pressures, scandals, and upheaval; yet, they have been able to be maintained for long periods of time (Nite et al., 2019). Thus, institutional maintenance can involve mechanisms that sustain the status quo and/or mechanisms that sustain the institution by adapting to environmental pressures (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Suddaby & Greenwood 2005; Trank & Washington, 2009). This conceptualization of institutional maintenance is consistent with Yanow and Tsoukas' (2009) argument that different types of breakdowns elicit different responses from practitioners (i.e., containment or restoration work), and that these responses escalate over time. Both, containment and restoration work are described in the following sections.

Containment Work

In their analysis of the highly institutionalized practices within the Cambridge University Boat Club, Lok and de Rond (2013) built on Barley's (2008) argument that institutional maintenance is a multilayered process. Specifically, Barley (2008) argued that institutional

maintenance is not solely explained by the mechanisms identified by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). The described mechanisms are labelled as custodial work as they emphasize that institutions are preserved by the intentional engagement of actors in rule creation, socialization, and enforcement activities (Dacin & Dacin, 2008; Lok & de Rond, 2013). Barley (2008) acknowledged that custodial work is vital in the preservation of institutions, however, he proposed that *negotiation* and *reflexive normalization* work also play a role in the maintenance of institutions. Negotiation work, which is underpinned by negotiated order theory, suggests that rather than norms or rules (i.e., order) being established by the work of institutional custodians they are a product of constant ongoing negotiations conducted by organizational members (Day & Day, 1977). Reflexive normalization work explains that for as long as possible people tend to account for unexpected interactions in terms of a general background of knowledge and expectancies in such a way that it normalizes these interactions (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Therefore, reflexive normalization work accounts for actors' ability to temporarily contain disruptions with responses considered to lack consciousness or intent (Lok & de Rond, 2013).

Thus, Lok and de Rond (2013) conceptualized that institutional maintenance takes the form of either *containment* or *restoration* work. This conceptualization was believed to accurately address the fact that institutions exist in a fluid social environment meaning they are susceptible to being disrupted by macro-level external threats, as well as, the behaviour of individual actors (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Specifically, minor breakdowns to institutionalized practices can be addressed with containment work to ensure institutional practices are not altered permanently (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Specifically, "small tears in the institutional script can be temporarily patched up" (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p. 186) by

normalizing and smoothing over small divergences with actions like: *ignoring*, *tolerating*, and *reinforcing*. Each of these containment mechanisms are now discussed.

Ignoring. This mechanism consists of acting as if "a departure from institutional expectations did not happen and/or is immaterial or unimportant" (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p. 197). Ignoring constitutes a form of reflexive normative work (Lok & de Rond, 2013). The example that Lok and de Rond (2013) used to explain this mechanism is when members of the Cambridge University Boat Club refused to acknowledge and support one rower actively blaming the coach for his own poor performance. Club members admitted that they did not want to cause a rift between the rowers and coaching staff by showing support for either side, therefore, allowing the situation to dissipate with little acknowledgement was the best course of action to maintain the status quo within the club (Lok & de Rond, 2013).

Tolerating. Tolerating is a form of negotiating work that is invoked in order to maintain the services and/or commitment of an actor who is seen as vital to the institution (Lok & de Rond, 2013). More specifically, this mechanism is defined as "allowing someone to continue to behave contrary to institutional expectations for the sake of getting on with things by keeping him or her on board" (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p.197). An example of the tolerating mechanism in action is when coaches allow an athlete to pursue multiple sports at a high level of competition. Indeed, high performance coaches would prefer that their athletes focus on a single sport but instead of losing an athlete's services all together, coaches will allow multiple sports to be pursued (Hyman, 2009).

Reinforcing. The reinforcing mechanism is characterized as a form of custodial work (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Similar to the policing and deterring maintenance mechanisms described earlier, reinforcing involves reminding actors, either explicitly or implicitly, of

institutional expectations (Lok & de Rond, 2013). The reinforcing mechanism is relied on when a minor breakdown of an institutional practice has escalated to the point where if it goes unaddressed permanent damage to the institution could be the result (Lok & de Rond, 2013).

Restoration Work

In contrast to the minor breakdowns to an institutional arrangement that invoke containment work as a response by institutional actors, major disruptions to an institutional practice cannot be simply contained (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Therefore, restoration work is necessary for actors to invoke in order to preserve an institution after a major disruption. Restoration work resolves breakdowns by "realigning the institutionalized script with actual practice" (Lok & de Rond, 2013, p. 203). Restoration work takes the form of either temporarily "stretching" the institutional script or enacting some type of corrective or disciplinary action (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Specific forms of restoration work include: *excepting*, *reversing*, *self-correcting*, and *formally disciplining*. Each mechanism that makes up restoration work is now described.

Excepting and coopting. These maintenance mechanisms are considered a form of temporarily "stretching" the institutional script (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Specifically, these actions involve framing threats to particular institutional principles as necessary exceptions due to unique circumstances (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Notably, exceptions to institutional principles must be able to be justified by the overarching institutional imperative (i.e., coopting) (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Furthermore, excepting and coopting are forms are reflexive normative work (Lok & de Rond, 2013). For example, rowing team members from Cambridge University were able to except a team member's unsportsmanlike behaviour from punishment in order to preserve the team's chances of winning their race (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Despite the team's behavioural

norms being infringed upon, the overarching institutional imperative for Cambridge University's rowing team is to win races, therefore, excepting an athlete from punishment in order to win a race is a justifiable form of institutional maintenance (Lok & de Rond, 2013).

Reversing. This mechanism is characterized as a form of corrective restoration work (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Stated simply, reversing is explained as actions in direct violation of institutional rules are undone through negotiation work (Lok & de Rond, 2013). The process of reversing regularly requires that the high emotions of actors be deescalated and convincing the actors infringing upon the institutional rules that their actions are unnecessary and harmful to the stability of the entire institution (Lok & de Rond, 2013). Lok and de Rond (2013) noted that the process undertaken by the Cambridge University's Boat Club's administration to convince an athlete to return to the club shortly after quitting in the middle of the season best depicts the mechanism of reversing.

Self-correcting. Another form of corrective restoration work is self-correcting. This particular mechanism is explained as a form of custodial work that sees institutional inhabitants self-policing institutional rules and implementing self-corrective actions for rule violations (Lok & de Rond, 2013). The idea that popular professional sports (i.e. basketball, baseball, hockey, and football) are policed by both referees and the athletes themselves is an example of self-correcting. Specifically, athletes from opposing teams are often considered to be on the lookout for infractions (e.g., an overly aggressive body check in hockey) that go undetected by referees (McIndoe, 2010). This lookout behaviour is done to ensure that the "guilty" competitor faces retribution (e.g., fighting team enforcer) at a later point in the game (McIndoe, 2010). The retribution or self-corrective actions imposed by athletes on each other may or may not be within the rules of their respective sports (McIndoe, 2010).

Formal disciplining. Very similar to the policing maintenance mechanism described by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006), formal disciplining involves punishing people whose behaviors undermine the institution (Lok & de Rond, 2013). This is the most visible form of custodial work and requires a high level of comprehensibility by the actors invoking this type of maintenance mechanism (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Dacin and colleagues' (2010) depicted the formal disciplining mechanism when they discussed how actors who violate Cambridge University's formal dining rituals are disciplined for their defections from expected behaviour.

Lok and de Rond's (2013) work advanced the understanding of institutional maintenance to be considered an active process rather than simply reinforcing institutional foundations when they are under duress. This work built on Currie and colleagues' (2012) explanation that institutional maintenance is best described as the "(re)generating and (re)creating" (p. 958) of institutional arrangements through active and creative responses to divergences from institutional norms. Micelotta and Washington (2013) termed the active process of institutional maintenance as "repair work." Additionally, Micelotta and Washington (2013) raised concerns about the contingent nature of institutional maintenance described by preceding research (e.g., Currie et al., 2012; Dacin et al., 2010; Lok & de Rond, 2013). Specifically, maintenance is contingent on actors' willingness and ability to invoke a mechanism that maintains or adapts the institution in question (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Micelotta & Washington, 2013). As Micelotta and Washington (2013) described, in some extreme cases actors lack the willingness or are not provided the opportunity to maintain the institution in which they belong. Therefore, actors must invoke powerful repair mechanisms to return institutional order to the status quo (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). The mechanisms that repair fractured institutions are described next.

Repair Work

The stability of institutions can be under threat by functional, political, and social pressures (Oliver, 1992). In some instances, these pressures unexpectedly provide a "jolt" or "exogenous shock" that destabilizes highly institutionalized practices (e.g., professional associations) resulting in incumbent actors losing their established benefits (e.g., power) within the existing social arrangement (Maguire et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 1990; Micelotta & Washington, 2013). These instances of destabilization will cause incumbents to implement maintenance mechanisms to preserve the status quo and more importantly the benefits they receive from the existing social arrangement (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Nite, 2017). Actors are able to adapt institutional arrangements to reflect the unexpected change in some cases. More specifically, incumbents may be able to use their social position and power to actively shape the change in their favour (Currie et al., 2012). However, when the disruption is a result of a regulative force (i.e., political) incumbents may lose their autonomy and opportunity to maintain the institutions they have established (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Adapting to a disruption is not an option when incumbent actors' autonomy and ability to maintain their own institutions is lost, therefore, the institution must be repaired by reversing the imposed change(s) (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

Using Italian professional associations as context, Micelotta and Washington (2013) studied the reactions of this group to an unexpected reform by the national government that profoundly impacted the professions by effectively limiting their autonomy and ability to self-regulate. Thus, losing these longstanding benefits meant that adapting to the imposed changes was unacceptable for the Italian professional associations (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). In

short, Micelotta and Washington proposed that repairing an institution is a process that is characterized by three things:

> (1) is *triggered* by a disruption in existing institutional arrangements that is critical and alters institutional arrangements at the core; (2) is *enabled* by the social position of incumbents, who need to have both the opportunity and the willingness to creatively respond to the disruption; and (3) is *contingent upon* the criticality of the disruption, thus urging incumbents to reject adaptation as a solution and instead actively work to restore the status quo (p. 1157).

Furthermore, the repair process consists of actors restoring institutional order by *re-asserting norms of interaction*, *re-establishing power balances*, *re-gaining leadership positions*, and ultimately *re-institutionalizing practices* (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Ultimately, these repairing strategies are consistent with Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) explanation that institutional maintenance is a combination of actions that support, repair and recreate social mechanisms that ensure compliance.

The specific work needed to fulfill the four dimensions of the institutional repair process is context specific (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). As suggested previously, actors need to feel enabled by their social position, power, and the resources available to them to creatively respond to the imposed disruption (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). In the case of the Italian professionals, two legal professional associations took charge of rebuffing the government-imposed reform of Italian professional services (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Compared to other associations facing similar institutional challenges, the resources available and ability of legal professional associations to communicate with the government allowed for their repair work to be more successful (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). For example, the legal

professionals were able to restore power balance by publicly criticizing the capabilities of Italian government and utilizing the media to create a climate of instability (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). In summary, Micelotta and Washington's (2013) analysis suggests that repair work must follow a two-pronged action plan to be successful. First, incumbents need to *actively resist* (e.g., public protests) an imposed change (Micelotta & Washington, 2013). Second, resistance needs to be paired with *creative* forms of work or strategies (e.g., media message manipulation) that progress towards the restoration of the status quo (Micelotta & Washington, 2013).

Institutional Maintenance in Emerging Fields

To this point, much of the mechanisms that are relied on to maintain and restore institutions are derived from the perspective of mature institutions. In order for institutions to be considered mature or legitimate they must go through an institutionalization process which requires ongoing maintenance (Scott, 2014). Over the course of the institutionalization process, institutions must learn to deal with the various forms of tension that challenge their stability. Specifically, institutions can be maintained from internal and external threats by learning to control key structures: *boundaries*, *practices*, and *cognitions* (Battilana et al., 2009; Currie et al., 2012; Nite et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Institutions that flexibly adapt their structures and regulations to the multiple and constantly evolving interests of stakeholders are more likely to achieve longevity (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Nite et al., 2019; O'Brien & Slack, 2003). Maintenance work that can be undertaken to control and adapt boundaries, practices, and cognitions is now discussed.

Boundaries. In general, a boundary is conceptualized as a distinction that establishes categories of objects, people, or activities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). In institutional research, the organizational field is a boundary that remains a dominant point of interest for researchers

(Greenwood et al., 2017). Specifically, an organizational field is a community of organizations that partakes in a common meaning system and whose participants interact more frequently and fatefully with one another than with actors outside the field (Scott, 2014). As organizational fields and the organizations within them evolve, actors engage in various forms of boundary work (Gieryn, 1983). Boundary work refers to actors' efforts to *establish*, *expand*, *reinforce*, or *undermine boundaries* (Arndt & Bigelow, 2005; Llewellyn, 1998). For example, Nite and colleagues (2019) highlighted that actors within the NCAA undertook various forms of boundary work (e.g., building membership structures, encompassing rival organizations, and adjusting internal structures) as it evolved to become the dominant institution within the field of intercollegiate athletics. Notably, strong boundaries around fields led them to become "isolated from or unresponsive to changes in their external environments," creating contradictions between the norms and practices accepted in fields and those legitimate in the broader society (Seo & Creed, 2002, p. 226). Thus, permeable boundaries allow for innovation and combat the alienation of marginalized stakeholders (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Practices. Practices are shared routines or recognized forms of activity that guide behaviour in specific circumstances (Barnes, 2001; Goffman, 1959; Whittington, 2006). Practices are often deemed defining features of groups because they define correct behaviour for members while also supporting and reinforcing boundaries (Barnes, 2001; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). For example, the NCAA had to establish regulatory practices for technology, gameplay, international competition, and financial management over the course of its evolution (Nite et al., 2019). Each of these practices were essential to defining NCAA as an institution and the standards member schools were expected to uphold (Nite et al., 2019). The complimentary

relationship between boundary work and practice work is essential to establishing institutional stability (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Cognitions. Maintenance work is not just "doing," it includes how actors discuss and perceive institutional norms (Agyemang et al., 2018; Nite, 2017). Positioning cognitions as a maintenance mechanism is based on Phillips, Lawrence, and Hardy's (2004) conclusion that organizational discourses are the primary method to disseminating institutional arrangements. Thus, it is imperative that organizations learn to effectively theorize internal and external issues and determine whether they warrant structural changes (Nite et al., 2019). A common tension that institutional actors deal with is between dominant and rival logics. In cases of tension between rival and dominant logics, institutional entrepreneurs may work to reframe the rival logic to be consistent with the dominant logic (Nite et al., 2013).

Message (re)framing is noted as an integral part of institutional maintenance and change (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Nite, 2017; Trank & Washington, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Specifically, framing is defined as the process whereby messages are crafted to influence an audience's thinking (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Furthermore, framing can be a mechanism for persuading opinions, embedding norms, and constructing reality (Knight, 1999; Lim & Jones, 2010; Payne, 2001). In this sense, key actors shape media messages to emphasize desired messages in efforts to increase the salience of the desired schema with intended audiences (Knight, 1999).

Nite (2017) found that the NCAA has relied on a three-point message framing strategy to shape the cognitions of its stakeholders and maintain itself despite being faced with an ample amount of criticism. The message framing strategies the NCAA has employed, include: *delegitimize opposition* (e.g., highlighting financial losses and that change would be harmful to

athletes); *defend legitimacy* (e.g., justify logics and rules); and *re-institutionalize* (position itself as a legitimate organization) (Nite, 2017). Nite's (2017) work emphasized that in order for message framing to be a valuable maintenance tool for institutional actors, the organization has to have been engrained in a top position within its organizational field. In short, message framing will not be effective if the framed messages cannot reference the legitimacy of the organization. In addition, Nite (2017) also reinforced Micelotta and Washington's (2013) point that it is important for actors to re-institutionalize the organization's place in the field after a disruption has been handled. This now shifts to discuss the importance of sequence in institutional work.

Sequencing & Organizational Life Cycle

To this point in this chapter, many of the mechanisms and practices that have been discussed are closely linked to either preventing or incorporating a form of change within an institution. This connection to the concept of change is consistent with Wolfe's (1994) analysis that noted that concepts like entrepreneurship are closely associated to the concepts of change and innovation because they share similar characteristics including instability, uncertainty, and risk. Furthermore, a number of organization researchers (e.g., Downs, 1967; Dodge et al., 1994; Lester et al., 2003; Penrose; 1952; Quinn & Cameron, 1983) have long adapted the biological concept of *life cycle* to understand the evolution of organizations. Numerous life cycle models have been presented that vary in number of stages; however, they tend to all describe a similar pattern in how organizational activities and structures change over time (Van de Ven, 1992). Specifically, organizations are theorized to evolve through five general stages: *Start-Up*, *Expansion*, *Consolidation*, *Diversification*, and *Decline* (Hanks, 1990). Lester and colleagues (2003) argued that the organizational life cycle for all types of organizations is better reflected through five stages labeled: *Existence*, *Survival*, *Success*, *Renewal*, and *Decline*. Within life-

cycle model presented by Lester et al. (2003) small businesses are constantly moving back and forth between the existence and survival stage. Research indicates that the theorized evolution of organizations reveals that top managers tend to transition from a focus on external issues impacting the organization to a more internal focus as the organization matures (Dodge & Robbin, 1992). Consistent with the organizational life cycle perspective, the nature of institutional work is constantly evolving in congruence with maturation of an organization and its field (Nite et al., 2019). Thus, institutional work should be considered and studied as a "temporal sequence of activities" similar to how innovation and change are researched in organizations (Wolfe, 1994, p. 409).

In the early 2000s there was a surge of interest in researching the sequencing of change and innovation in organization (e.g., Amis et al., 2004b; Denis et al., 2001; Dutton et al., 2001; Pettus, 2001). This research found that structural and systemic elements of an organization are not neutral and value free, therefore, the sequence in which they are altered requires attention (Amis et al., 2004b). These findings are consistent with Pettigrew's (1985; 1990) argument that change is indeed multifaceted and can be influenced by power, chance, and opportunism similar to the way that planning, or strategizing can deliver specific outcomes. Therefore, it is no surprise that Nite et al. (2019) found that the institutional work mechanisms invoked by actors is reflective of the components of the organization they deem to be most important, as well as their perception of an appropriate response to any threats conveyed by the organizational field. These findings are an indication that the structural and systemic elements of institutions do not evolve or change simultaneously (Nite et al., 2019).

In order to deliver theoretically and practically sound research on the evolution of an organization, researchers are called to examine the contents, contexts, and process of change

together with their interconnections to time (Pettigrew, 1990). Such an approach challenges the rational, linear theories of organizational change because it captures the conflicting rationalities amongst organizational actors that cause change to emerge (Pettigrew, 1985; 1990). Wolfe (1994), calls researchers investigating the sequence of change within an organization to analyze historical data linked to the evolution of an organization (e.g., archives, financial records, industry reports, political relationships). As noted in an analysis of the evolution of the NCAA into the premier collegiate athletics institution in North America, historical data is essential to understanding the actions by institutional actors and more importantly the consequences of those actions (Nite et al., 2019). Scott (1995) explained that the life course of an institution could only be explained through the understanding of actions and consequences. To this point, much of the literature on institutional work has focused on describing mechanisms institutional actors can employ to create or maintain institutions.

As called for by Nite et al. (2019), institutional researchers must move beyond simply describing the importance of institutional work in various contexts (e.g., Dowling & Smith, 2016; Edwards & Stevens, 2019; Edwards & Washington, 2015) to detailing the evolution of institutional work as an organization and field mature. By focusing on sequencing, institutionalists can begin to uncover how and why institutional work transitions from entrepreneurship to maintenance. Considering the variety in the types of sport organizations that exist, sport may be an ideal context to investigate sequencing within institutional work. Furthermore, sport is an area where data is abundant and is often readily available to researchers in a variety of forms that could aid in investigations of sequencing (Washington & Patterson, 2011). The next section further details how sport management research can be advanced through institutional analysis.

Advancing Sport Management Research Through Institutional Analysis

Throughout this chapter, central mechanisms and concepts of institutional theory, RBT, and RDT have been described, as well as their application in the context of sport. Washington and Patterson (2011) suggested that the unique context of sport could broaden the theoretical understanding of the work that contributes to the emergence, stabilization, and decline of institutions. Despite the depiction of long-term stability, the context of sport is also ripe with instances of change (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Within an amateur sport context—in particular, youth sport—the mounting of criticism of the increased standardization and underlying logics that govern sport has never been greater (Edwards, 2016; Riehl et al., 2019; Torres & Hager, 2007). In most contexts entrepreneurs could enter the marketplace with their own unique operations to service dissatisfied consumers, however, doing so within an institutionalized sport system has been difficult. Recently, Nite and Edwards (2021) have specified that the fields of management and sport management would benefit from more research examining how institutional work impacts perceptions of legitimacy. Thus, this research on the institutional work taking place within a new sport organization entering a highly institutionalized sport system is both timely and necessary

Research Questions

Theoretically, this study adopts micro level theories like resource dependence theory and resource-based theory, and macro level theories like institutional theory to better understand how new sport organizations challenge dominant sport organizations and achieve their own legitimacy within a highly institutionalized system. Through the analysis of the establishment of a new sport organization, this study seeks to document the sequence in which institutional creation and legitimization takes place. By drawing on the unique features of the youth sport

sector in Canada, this study will contribute to both sport management literature and the advancement of institutional theory. Specifically, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What actions must be instituted, and which resources must be acquired in order to launch a new youth hockey organization within a highly institutionalized sport system?
2. How does a new youth hockey organization institutionalize within its organizational field?
3. What types of legitimacy are essential to the development of a new youth hockey organization from the perspectives of the organization and key stakeholders?

Chapter 3: Methods

Methodology

This study was guided by an instrumental case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Instrumental case study is described as a preferred type of methodology to address "a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and a feel that we may get insight into the question of a particular case" (Stake, 1995, p.3). In other words, an instrumental case study is utilized when a specific case is uncommon, and a researcher seeks to develop theoretical understandings from the case (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Instrumental case study was an appropriate methodology to apply to this work as it explores a rare case in which a minor hockey organization has been successful at overcoming barriers to operate independently from the Hockey Canada system. Through this context, this study sought to facilitate further understanding of the types of legitimacy work that other entrepreneurial ventures should undertake to be identified as a reputable member of their respective sport field.

Grounded theory has been widely used by researchers across a variety of social science disciplines as an inductive method of theory development (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Yet, after over half a century of application, grounded theory continues to be accused of having little theoretical novelty to showcase has not been well suited for the development of existing theories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Given one of the aims of this dissertation was to further develop institutional theory, a purely inductive approach was not utilized. Instead, this instrumental case study utilized abductive reasoning.

Abduction is defined as an inferential creative process whereby a researcher is led from old to new theoretical insights based on anomalies in collected data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abduction is considered a radical shift from traditional approaches to grounded theory

because it is a pragmatic approach where discovering new theories is dependent on an inability to frame findings within existing frameworks, as well as the ability to modify existing theories (James, 1981). Through abduction, the researcher is called to enter the field with a deep and broad theoretical base and further develop their theoretical repertoire throughout the process (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). This approach requires researchers to be well versed in a theory in order to avoid claiming novelty that does not exist (Becker, 1998; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012; Tracy, 2013; Wilson & Chadda, 2009). Furthermore, abductive reasoning requires the researcher to move back and forth between data collection methods, sources, and evidence that are reflective of both induction and deduction to connect theory and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Morgan, 2007). In the following sections, abductive analysis and a variety of data collection methods and sources reflective of both deductive and inductive evidence are described. First, the context of this instrumental case study is detailed.

Research Context

The evolution and operation of True Hockey (a pseudonym) was the focus of this instrumental case study. True Hockey was founded in 2003 as an entrepreneurial venture based on developing hockey players (Garbutt, 2018). As stated earlier, the establishment of new youth sport organizations is rare due to the strict rules, regulations, and boundaries enforced by powerful NSOs and P/TSOs (Kikulis, 2000). Consistent with the noted difficulties faced by new youth sport organizations, True Hockey operators were never able to secure affiliation with Hockey Canada in their first 15 years of existence (Garbutt, 2018). Thus, as True Hockey programming has evolved from simply offering recreational hockey (i.e., house league) it has made a particular point of providing hockey-playing youth an alternative to Hockey Canada's highly restrictive development programming (Radley, 2015). The main points of distinction

between True Hockey and traditional minor hockey organizations are that True Hockey is structured as a for-profit organization, and it owns its own twin-pad arena (Garbutt, 2018).

Through the ownership of its own arena, True Hockey has been able to secure competitive advantages with regards to scheduling and programming that are not available to traditionally operated minor hockey organizations. With regards to scheduling, True Hockey has prided itself on ensuring its youth participants are successful in the classroom, therefore, they restrict team activities and travel during the week while only scheduling games on weekends (Garbutt, 2018). A common concern for parents whose children plays representative (rep) hockey is that the team and travel commitments negatively impact study time for their children (Wigfield & Chard, 2018). In terms of programming, the facility ownership has allowed True Hockey to integrate professionally instructed high-performance skating, shooting, stickhandling, dryland training, and skating treadmill access into the registration fees (Garbutt, 2018; Walsh, 2019).

Within traditional minor hockey organizations, teams interested in similar skill-development opportunities typically must seek out local entrepreneurs offering skill development services and require parents to cover the costs in addition to their registration fees. In addition to offering scheduling and skill development programming advantages, True Hockey also offers affiliations with hockey-specific prep schools and elite junior hockey clubs in the Ontario Junior A Hockey League (OJHL). Thus, True Hockey promotes itself as offering the first true hockey pathway program that leads players from entry-level hockey at five-years old to elite junior hockey (Garbutt, 2018; Walsh, 2019).

In recent years, True Hockey has evolved into a significant provider of youth hockey programming in their region of southern Ontario. By not being affiliated with Hockey Canada,

True Hockey does not have to strictly enforce geographic boundaries that would limit participant access to their programs to local residents only. Today, True Hockey offers 38 house league and 29 representative teams across various levels of competition and age groups. Through its evolution, True Hockey programming has been a regular point of tension for Hockey Canada and disputes between the two organizations have been highly publicized (e.g., Campbell, 2019; Radley, 2015).

Historically, Hockey Canada has invoked a policy that labels private entrepreneurial organizations, like True Hockey, as "outlaws" and prohibits participation to anyone associated with these rival organizations (Campbell, 2019; Garbutt, 2018). Furthermore, Hockey Canada has shown a tendency to adjust its organizational boundaries to absorb "outlaw" organizations and leagues (Garbutt, 2018; Kalchman, 2010). Interestingly, the disputes between the two organizations seem to have subsided as True Hockey has begun to offer Hockey Canada specific programming while also maintaining some of its "independent" programming. Specifically, True Hockey's representative teams were granted acceptance to participate in the Hockey Canada sanctioned Southwestern Ontario Hockey League (SWOHL) – a pseudonym - beginning in the 2018-2019 season (Garbutt, 2018). Considering True Hockey's ability to establish itself as a viable minor hockey organization and maintain its independence while also satisfying the demands of the dominant governing body like Hockey Canada, it made it an ideal case to investigate for the purpose of this research. The next two sections will describe this study's participants and recruitments methods.

Study Participants

Lawrence et al. (2011) indicated that institutional work must focus upon individuals and their relationship with organizations, which relates to this study to understand how True

Hockey's unique operation was established and maintained in the shadow of a dominant organization within their field (i.e., Hockey Canada). Therefore, participants in this study consisted of multiple stakeholder groups who were uniquely connected to and impacted by True Hockey's operations, including: True Hockey executives, coaches, parents, and executive decision-makers within regional governing minor hockey associations. Involving these diverse stakeholder groups assisted in developing a comprehensive understanding of the creation, maintenance, and overall perception of True Hockey within the minor hockey industry. Each stakeholder groups' contribution is discussed next.

True Hockey Executives and Staff

This stakeholder group was considered essential to the lifeblood of True Hockey. The key members of this stakeholder group include the original founders (i.e., institutional entrepreneurs) of True Hockey as well as also the staff members who manage the wide variety of programming portfolios (i.e., house league, representative hockey, prep school hockey, junior hockey, training, tournaments) offered by True Hockey, as well as the day-to-day operations of the organization. As institutional actors who interact with the organization on a daily basis, this stakeholder group's insights were essential to understanding the triggering conditions for True Hockey's formation, the institutional entrepreneurship process, and maintenance of the organization as it has transitioned to becoming a sanctioned member Hockey Canada.

Coaches

Considering the variety of hockey programming that True Hockey offers, gathering insights from the coaches who are tasked with delivering the programming were essential to understanding the uniqueness of the organization. By asking coaches to describe their own personal and team experiences within True Hockey, I was able to establish a sense of how the

organization differentiates itself from other minor hockey. Additionally, analyzing coach and team experiences offered insight into how True Hockey is perceived in the broader minor hockey community. Detailing how True Hockey is perceived in the broader minor hockey community was essential to understanding how the organization has established and maintains its legitimacy.

Parents

Given the unique structure of youth sport, parents become proxy decision makers for their child's sport experience (Chard et al., 2015). This is to say that, parents are the ultimate consumers of youth sport because they are the individuals footing the costs for their children's experiences (Green & Chalip, 1998). Therefore, understanding the parental perceptions and meeting this stakeholder group's expectations are essential for the lifeblood of a youth sport organization (Wigfield & Chard, 2018). Consistent with this literature, the recruitment of parents of youth who participate in any of True Hockey's programming was essential to understanding the success of the organization. Analyzing the reasons why parents chose to enroll their children in True Hockey programming over other longstanding minor hockey organizations in their region provided insight into how the organization has established legitimacy in a crowded marketplace. Additionally, through the analysis of parental concerns with True Hockey, an understanding was established as to how the organization must plan to repair and maintain itself going forward.

Regional Minor Hockey Executives

In 2018 True Hockey became affiliated with the SWOHL, a regional subunit of the Ontario Hockey Federation (OHF). Hockey Canada delivers minor hockey opportunities through a hierarchical system made up of 13 provincial and territorial branches (e.g., OHF) that consist of member associations (e.g., SWOHL) which deliver localized minor hockey opportunities

(Hockey Canada, 2017). Each organization within the system operates independently, however, in order to remain a subunit (i.e., organizational member) of the Hockey Canada system they are required to implement programs, rules, and policies in accordance with the national governing body's regulations within their jurisdiction (Ontario Hockey Federation [OHF], 2018). Thus, it is the executive decision-makers at both the SWOHL and OHF who are responsible for ensuring True Hockey's rep program remains consistent with Hockey Canada's regulations. Additionally, in the case of True Hockey, it was executives at the SWOHL that played a significant role in Hockey Canada approving True Hockey's affiliation request. As noted in the description of this case study's context, Hockey Canada has traditionally avoided working with entrepreneurial organizations like True Hockey (Campbell, 2019; Garbutt, 2018). Therefore, discussions with executives of the SWOHL provided significant insights into how the responses of a dominant organization (i.e., Hockey Canada) to a new organization (i.e., True Hockey) entering its organizational field evolved over time. Next, the participant recruitment process is described.

Participant Recruitment

Prior any participant interaction, interviews, or data collection taking place approval from the University of Waterloo's Research Ethics Board (REB) was sought. Upon receiving REB approval, potential participants were recruited through emails outlining the context of the study. With the exception of the parents' stakeholder group, all contact information was considered publicly accessible as it was obtained through each respective organization's website. Coaches within True Hockey acted as gatekeepers (Patton, 2002; Tracy, 2013) for their respective teams' parent group. In addition to requesting their participation, coaches were asked to share the information about the study with their respective teams' parent group. In order to align with Covid-19 safety protocols, interested participants were able to select the time of their interview

as well as whether the interview was conducted via phone or online platform (i.e., Zoom). A snowball sampling approach (Tracy, 2013) was employed to expand the sample as each interested participant was asked to recommend other participants. The next section describes the data collection process that was undertaken.

Data Collection

This instrumental case study employs multiple data collection procedures including *semi-structured interviews* and *document analysis*. Both of these sources of data have been commonly employed in case study research (Yin, 2018). Multiple sources of data allow case study researchers to address a broader range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues within the phenomenon being studied (Yin, 2018). Thus, case study findings are likely to be more convincing and accurate if they are based on a variety of data sources following a similar convergence (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). By using different data sources, a researcher is also able to cross-check findings (i.e., triangulation; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, the strengths of one approach can compensate for the weaknesses of another (Patton, 2002). Stated simply, case studies that use multiple sources of data are considered to be of a greater level of quality than those that use only single sources of information (Yin et al., 1985). Specific to this case study, the two selected data sources are well suited to address the research questions because they allow for a rich description of the triggering conditions that supported the organization's development, as well as the work conducted to achieve legitimacy, and how challenges issued from dominant organizations were addressed. Each of the chosen data collection methods are now described.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews are one of the most important sources of data for case studies (Yin, 2018). Interviews are commonly relied upon by case study researchers because they are especially

helpful in eliciting explanations of (i.e., the "hows" and "whys") key events, as well as the insights reflecting the perspectives of participants (Yin, 2018). For this case study, semi-structured interviews were the specific type of interview that were conducted with participants. A semi-structured approach to interviewing allows the researcher to follow the flow of information provided by participants (Creswell, 2013a; Roulston, 2010). Consistent with the common practices for conducting semi-structured interviews (i.e., Roulston, 2010), a unique interview guide which included a number of open-ended questions was created and used for conversations with each stakeholder group (see Appendices A, B, C, and D). Preparing the interview guide helped identify important questions necessary to address the research questions and focused the collected data to be consistent with the guiding theoretical framework (i.e., institutional work; Creswell, 2013a). After posing each question in the interview guide to the interviewee, the interviewer followed up with probes seeking further detail and description about what had been said (Roulston, 2010). Here, the interview guides acted as a tool to assist in establishing a directed conversation rather than a strictly structured dialogue with participants (Lofland & Lofland, 1984).

A key question in evaluating qualitative research is how many interviews is enough. Guest et al. (2006) statistical analysis to address this question found that interviewers regularly reach data saturation by the 12th interview. Similarly, a statistical analysis conducted by Francis et al. (2009) found that full data saturation occurred at 17 participants. Arguably, a researcher's own assessment of the data is just as important in determining saturation because context is likely to have a significant impact. In total, 20 True Hockey stakeholders from a variety of roles were interviewed. Specifically, the 20 interviewees consisted of two executives, three program directors, four coaches (two paid coaches), ten parents, and one regional executive from Hockey

Canada participated in the study. Of the 20 respondents, 18 (90%) were men and 2 (10%) were women. Of the organizational leaders that were interviewed, three of the interviewees noted that they have been in their respective roles for over 10 years. Three other participants explained that they have only been in their current positions for less than two years. Two respondents did not specify how long they have served in their current roles.

Of the parents and coaches who were interviewed, the majority of respondents (i.e., 12) indicated that they were the guardian of a son who played for one of True Hockey's rep hockey teams during the 2019-2020 season. Interestingly, four participants noted that they had at least one other child enrolled in a competing hockey organization. Two coaches indicated that they were part of True Hockey's paid coaching staff and that they did not have children participating in any of the organization's programming. Nine of the respondents reported that their child has played for True Hockey teams for multiple seasons. Additionally, three parents stated that they are former coaches from within the organization. The age groups represented by respondents ranged from U8 – U18, with the most (i.e., seven) coming from True Hockey's U16/U18 Prep program. A complete profile of the participants is presented in Table 2. Next, the document analysis that was conducted is described.

Table 2. *Interviewee Characteristics*

Characteristic	Total
Gender	
Men	18
Women	2
Organizational Leaders	
True Hockey Executive	2
Program Director/Staff	3
Hockey Canada Representative	1
Parents, Coaches, Team Managers	
Head Coach/Team Manager	3
Assistant Coach/Trainer	1

Former Coach	3
Parent/Guardian	10
Number of Children Enrolled in True Hockey Programming	
One	12
Multiple	1
No children	2
Number of Seasons Enrolled or Coaching in True Hockey	
One	5
Multiple	9
Age Groups/Program	
U8	4
U13	1
U16	2
U16/U18 Prep	7

Documents (Contemporary and Archival)

Document analysis was utilized to supplement the information provided by the interviewee. Within case study research, document analysis is essential to corroborating and augmenting findings from other sources of data (Yin, 2018). Analyzing documents brings to the forefront important historical and contextual information for a researcher to review (Prior, 2003). If a document analysis produces contradictory rather than corroboratory data, this is an indication that the researcher needs to inquire further into a topic before making inferences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Data under review during a document analysis can be categorized into three types: personal documents (e.g., individually produced websites, emails, blogs), official documents or archival data (e.g., organizationally produced websites, employee handbooks, service records, strategic plans), and popular culture documents (e.g., publicly accessible news articles, photographs, industry reports) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). It important to note that documents under review were written and created for specific audiences

other than those of the case study (Yin, 2018). Therefore, undertaking a document analysis required a strict inclusion protocol guided by the study's purpose (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For this case study of True Hockey, documents reflective of the institution's creation, pursuit of legitimacy, and relationship with Hockey Canada were sought. Specifically, a number of internal organizational documents were shared by True Hockey staff including marketing strategies, strategic growth plans, player recruitment packages, policies, and meeting minutes. Additionally, web-based searches revealed 25 website-based posts (i.e., press releases, organizational announcements, opinion blog) as well as 12 news articles that were included in the analysis. Lastly, 1,295 social media posts from nine Facebook, Instragram, and Twitter accounts operated by True Hockey were reviewed. Of the 1,295 social media posts, 427 were deemed to meet the criteria of the study and were included in the analysis. All the documents included in the analysis were either created or published between 2003 and 2020; thus, covering the entirety of True Hockey's existence. Furthermore, the types of documents that were collected are consistent with Bogdan and Biklen's (2006) categories (i.e., personal, official, and popular culture) of documents that are needed to complete a document analysis reflective of varying perspectives from a scene under study. Together, document analysis and semi-structured interviews were well suited to address the research questions because they allowed for a rich description to be generated of the triggering conditions that supported True Hockey's development, and the mechanisms employed to achieve legitimacy as well as resist challenges from a dominant organization. Next, abductive coding is described as the data analysis process to be undertaken during this study.

Abductive Analysis

Case studies offer a unique opportunity to develop theory through sharing detailed insights of empirical phenomena and their corresponding contexts (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin 2018). Dubois and Gadde (2002, 2014) suggested that the standardized conceptualization of a linear research process fails to reflect the potential uses and advantages of case study research (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014). Specifically, a key issue for researchers employing a case study methodology to manage is the interrelatedness of the various elements of the research process, including theorizing and hypothesis generation, data collection, and data analysis (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014). Thus, an abductive approach to analysis was employed in order to maximize the potential of this case study (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 2014). Timmermans and Tavory (2012) describe abduction as:

> The form of analysis through which we perceive the phenomenon as related to other observations either in the sense that there is a cause and effect hidden from view, in the sense that the phenomenon is seen as similar to other phenomenon already experienced and explained in other situations, or in the sense of creating new general descriptions. (p. 171).

In other words, an abductive approach to analysis requires the researcher to move back and forth between inductive and deductive analysis in order to connect theory and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Morgan, 2007). Similar to other forms of qualitative analysis, coding and memo writing are central components to abductive analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Traditionally, coding and memo writing are designed to ensure a researcher is familiar with their data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Emerson et al., 2011). However, within an abductive analysis these essential methodological steps are performed against theoretical background and

can give rise to new theoretical insights (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). To aid in the organization of data, NVivo software was used. The coding and memo writing processes are detailed in the following subsections.

Abductive Coding and Memo Writing

In order to effectively systematize qualitative data, researchers are encouraged to simultaneously conduct coding and memoing (Miles et al., 2014). As the researcher reads through their data multiple times, combining coding with memoing is essential to tracking the development of ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within an abductive analysis, coding and memoing are guided by both inductive and deductive approaches. First, a deductive approach to analysis is taken as the researcher is required to code and write memos by using as many existing theories as possible to explain the data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In order to assist with this portion of data analysis, researchers are encouraged to first enter the field with the deepest and broadest theoretical base possible (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). If the researcher is able to fully account for the phenomena through the use of existing theories, then the researcher has simply verified existing theories (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). For the present study, data was first coded, and memos were written to reflect known mechanisms of institutional creation (i.e., addressing community need), maintenance (i.e., policing, valorizing, demonizing), and disruption (disassociating sanctions) that were instituted by both True Hockey and dominant organizations within its field.

Any anomalies in the data that could not be explained by existing theories triggered an inductive conceptualization of this data in order to develop a new theory or refine an existing one (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The inductive conceptualization began with coding the data according to how it contributed to the creation or maintenance of True Hockey. Initial coding of

data that was determined to be an anomaly from pre-existing theories was followed by line-by-line coding which focused on answering the question of "What is going on here?" (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson et al., 2011). For example, True Hockey initially faced few barriers to entering the Southern Ontario minor hockey market due to the good fortune that the organization experienced when construction of its first arena was completed at a time when the surrounding community was in desperate need of supporting facilities to meet a drastic increase in demand for ice time from winter sport clubs. This information regarding True Hockey's entrance into the minor hockey marketplace was coded as *luck* and was considered a central determinant of institutional creation. Indeed, institutional literature does not consider luck as a determinant of institutional creation; however, in accordance with abductive coding further review of this anomaly in the data collected about True Hockey made it clear that luck may be central to the creation of new sport organizations. The initial coding and memo writing process was followed by theme selection, focused coding, and integrative memo writing. Each of these processes are discussed next.

Selecting Themes

Upon the completion of initial coding and memoing, the researcher determined which themes should be the focus of the remainder of the analysis (Emerson et al., 2011). In accordance with effective case study research, core themes were selected with a focus on ensuing that most detailed description of the case (i.e., True Hockey) was provided (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the researcher selected core themes that were reflective of underlying patterns of behaviour in the setting under study (Emerson et al., 2011). Particular attention was paid to behaviours, decisions, and processes that required significant time and energy commitments from subjects. Specifically, the *institutional creation*, *establishing legitimacy*, *perceptions of*

legitimacy by stakeholders, and *responding actions by dominant organizations* were deemed as the central themes for this case focused on True Hockey. Once the central themes were selected, data were sorted according to the theme it best reflected. In accordance with abductive analysis (i.e., Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), the researcher used the sorting of data to refine initial codes and determine how the central themes could be linked together or connected to the theories that explained other portions of the data (i.e., institutional work, RDT, RBV). Ultimately, the completion of this process resulted in the selected themes being expanded to include a number of subthemes (Emerson et al., 2011; Tracy, 2013). For example, the theme of institutional creation consisted of subthemes including *field-level determinants*, *key actor determinants*, and *organizational determinants*. Similarly, the selected theme of establishing legitimacy was made up of the subthemes labeled *boundary establishment* and practice implementation.

Focused Coding

Once core themes were established and the data were sorted, the researcher conducted focused coding. Focused coding is a line-by-line analysis of the sorted data where a conscious effort is made to elaborate on analytically interesting themes (Emerson et al., 2011). This process involved connecting data that may not have initially been connected, as well as further delineating subthemes that distinguish between differences and variations in the broader topic (Charmaz, 2006; Emerson et al., 2011; Tracy, 2013). Focusing on the variations in the data is essential to abductive analysis as it can lead to the discovery of new variables and/or relationships between variables that can ultimately extend an existing theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Emerson et al., 2011; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In the context of this study, focused coding was employed to expand on the understanding of the link between institutional work and

the establishment of legitimacy within an organization. Focused coding revealed that True Hockey was established within a highly institutionalized field as a result of organizational actors simultaneously invoking *resource acquisition activities* and *legitimacy seeking activities*. Therefore, the focused coding process led to refining the previously identified themes to reflect 13 resource acquisition and legitimacy seeking activities. The 13 activities were labeled as: *dissatisfaction with dominant organization(s)*; *community need*; *access to resources*; *luck*; *quality leadership*; *qualified support staff*; *novel athlete development philosophy*; *addressing stakeholder demands*; *establishing members and partners*; *mimicry*; *disconnecting sanctions*; *controlling messaging*; *maximizing facility usage.* The 13-resource acquisition and legitimacy seeking activities were considered determinants of organizational development within a highly institutionalized context.

Integrative Memo Writing

The final step of analysis that was undertaken during this study was integrative memo writing. Here, the researcher was called to formally elaborate on their interpretations of the data through the linking of particular incidents and themes (Emerson et al., 2011). Furthermore, the researcher's central task was to highlight and explain the theoretical connections between excerpts from their data and the conceptual categories they imply (Emerson et al., 2011). In short, due to the double engagement with existing theory and carefully followed methodological steps during this abductive analysis, integrative memo writing laid the groundwork for describing the theoretical innovations that have been garnered from the data and will be explained in greater detail in the following chapters (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012).

In particular, the integrative memos produced in this case study of True Hockey focused on connecting the determinants of organizational development to the construct of time. Central to

the purpose of this study was understanding the order of events that must take place for a new sport organization to be established and legitimized. Specifically, the process of memo writing revealed that True Hockey has been developed through four distinct phases of evolution: *Building*, *Growth*, *Competition*, and *Stabilization*. Each phase is characterized by the previously identified resource acquiring and legitimacy seeking activities. Thus, the memos produced during this point of data analysis described each phase of True Hockey's evolution as a product of specific resource acquiring activities and legitimacy seeking activities. Furthermore, within the memos it was documented how True Hockey stakeholders skillfully altered each activity to ensure that they continued to positively contribute to evolution of the organization. Microsoft PowerPoint was used to create a visual representation of each development phase and document how specific activities and mechanisms were implemented to address specific events in True Hockey's history. Next, the concept of trustworthiness as it applies to this study is described and the researcher's positionality statement is provided.

Trustworthiness

Foundationally, the concept and application of trustworthiness within qualitative research has been derived from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Specifically, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described of trustworthiness as consisting of four concepts: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Additionally, integrity was identified by Wallendorf and Belk (1989) as a concept that should be added to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) description of trustworthiness. Contemporary qualitative researchers (i.e., Burke, 2016; Smith & Caddick, 2012; Smith & McGannon, 2017; Sparks & Smith, 2009) have challenged Lincoln and Guba's (1985) conception of trustworthiness because it is derived from quantitative traditions. Particularly, Burke (2016) argued that the use of specific criteria to judge the trustworthiness of

qualitative research (termed a "criteriological approach") is grounded in positivist, postpositivist, and neo-realist ways of thinking about qualitative research (i.e., quantitative ways of thinking applied to qualitative research). Lincoln and Guba's (1985) conception of trustworthiness did acknowledge the limitations of applying quantitatively derived criteria to qualitative research but then, somewhat ironically, propose a set of criteria themselves, some of which (e.g., member checking) assume that there is a "ground truth" or "single reality."

To account for these apparently ontological and epistemological inconsistencies, a "relativist approach" to evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research has been proposed for those working in the fields of sport and exercise science (Burke, 2016; Smith & Caddick, 2012; Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Similar to the criteriological approach, the relativist approach uses criteria to discern 'good' from 'bad' research; however, the criteria are applied in a manner that is contextually situated and flexible (Sparkes & Smith, 2009). Thus, the relativist criteria differs fundamentally from the criteriological approach because universal criteria are not proposed or enforced (Burke, 2016). Instead, a relativist must make informed decisions and ongoing judgements about which criteria reflect the inherent properties of a particular study as it develops over time (Burke, 2016; Seale, 1999). Specifically, Smith and Caddick (2012) offer a list of nine criteria for contemporary researchers to consider adopting when employing the relativist approach to judge qualitative research in the field of sport and exercise science: *substantive contribution*, *impact*, *width* (i.e., comprehensiveness of evidence), *coherence*, *catalytic and tactical authenticity*, *personal narrative and storytelling as an obligation to critique*, *resonance*, *credibility*, and *transparency*. This study sought to ensure trustworthiness by implementing practices reflective of Smith and Caddick's (2012) description of substantive contribution, width, coherence, credibility, and transparency. This selection of trustworthiness criteria aligns with the

belief that relativists consider evaluative criteria to be study-specific (i.e. reflective of a study's goals and methods), and are only useful under certain conditions and in certain situations (Gergen, 2014; Tobin & Begley, 2004). Each of the selected criteria of trustworthiness is described in the following subsections.

Substantive Contribution

The substantive contribution criterion refers to evaluating how well a researcher contributes to our understanding of social life through their work (Richardson, 2000; Smith & Caddick, 2012). Additionally, this criterion considers how strongly the work is grounded in the researcher's social science perspective (Richardson, 2000; Smith & Caddick, 2012). The current study offers a substantive contribution because it explored the rare case of a minor hockey organization that has been successful at overcoming barriers to operate independently from Hockey Canada's highly restrictive development programming. Theoretically, this study was grounded in the institutional work perspective to help understand how new sport organizations can challenge dominant sport organizations and achieve their own legitimacy within a highly institutionalized sport system in order to diversify the range of opportunities available to meet participant needs. As youth sport remains a significant contributor to many children's development and wellbeing, there is a need to ensure that as many participants as possible experience sport in a positive manner.

Width

Width refers to the comprehensiveness of the evidence that was collected and used within the research (Lieblich et al., 1998). Specifically, width is used as criterion of trustworthiness to evaluate the quality of interviews and observations as well as the proposed analysis in a study (Lieblich et al., 1998). Further, width also reflects how researchers incorporate quotations and

suggestions for alternative explanations to support readers' interpretations of the work (Lieblich et al., 1998). This case study offers a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of True Hockey. This analysis was generated from collecting 20 semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (i.e., governing body executives, managers, coaches, and parents). Each interview was approximately one hour, with several participants agreeing to be interviewed multiple times or exchange written correspondence via email. Additionally, the information supplied by interviewees was supplemented by the collection of internal organizational documents, web-based posts, news articles, over 400 social media posts. Together, the interviews and collected documents offers a rich description of True Hockey's pursuit of legitimacy throughout its existence (i.e., 2003 – present).

Using an abductive approach, the rich detail provided by the interviewees and collected documents contributed to furthering the understanding of the link between institutional work and establishing legitimacy in an organization. Particularly, the data were coded into legitimacy seeking activities and resource acquisition activities that are performed simultaneously through various phases of evolution for the organization. Each phase of evolution as well as the legitimacy seeking activities and resource acquisition activities are described in the next chapter using a variety of quotes from stakeholders and exerts from the document analysis. Consistent with Tracy (2010), I made a conscious effort to include quotes from all participants and many different types of organizational documents to ensure that readers can evaluate the evolution of True Hockey from a variety of voices and perspectives.

Coherence

The trustworthiness criterion of coherence refers to whether the research presents a clear and meaningful interpretation of the subject with theoretical implications (Burke, 2016; Lieblich

et al., 1998). This study achieved coherence through an abductive approach to analysis which required me to move back and forth between inductive and deductive analysis in order to connect theory and data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Morgan, 2007). Both coding and memo writing – essential methodological steps to qualitative analysis – were conducted against the theoretical background (i.e., institutional theory, RBT) underpinning the study. This approach to analysis allowed me to contribute to furthering the understanding of how legitimacy is generated through institutional work through the production of a timeline describing True Hockey's evolution as an organization. The timeline consists of both legitimacy seeking activities ranging from True Hockey's creation in 2003 to its current operations in 2021. Case study research can often be criticized for only offering a biased snapshot of the subject (Tracy, 2013). The current study overcomes such criticisms by grounding the analysis of True Hockey's entire 18-year history in theories essential for understanding organizational behaviour. Thus, readers are presented a comprehensive documentation of the evolution of True Hockey for which they can evaluate and apply the findings to investigating similar cases in the future.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the authenticity and accuracy of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2010). Further, Liamputtong (2009) explains that consistency must exist between the derived data and the researcher's representations of this data through results and conclusions. In this study, credibility was sought by interviewing multiple stakeholder groups associated with True Hockey. As mentioned in a previous section, this approach for recruiting and interviewing participants was implemented to ensure that the findings were constructed using a variety of voices (Tracy, 2010). Each interview lasted approximately one hour, with several participants agreeing to be interviewed multiple times or exchange written correspondence via email.

Furthermore, credibility was pursued by voice recording and transcribing each interview verbatim to ensure accuracy. Additionally, all interviewees were given an opportunity to review and make changes to their fully transcribed interview, to ensure the correctness and contentment of the information they provided. Only one respondent returned their transcript with requested changes. Spending additional time corresponding with participants and offering them opportunities to reflect on their contributions enhances the credibility of the work as it ensures the richness of the data as well as triggering a deeper analysis (Tracy, 2010).

Transparency

This criterion of trustworthiness refers to whether the research undertaken was made transparent throughout the process of completing the study (Tracy, 2010). Particularly, this criterion of trustworthiness addresses whether the research process that was undertaken was critically scrutinized for matters like theoretical preferences, breadth of interviews, participant selection, organizing data, and data analysis (Tracy, 2010). As this study is a doctoral dissertation, a number of oversight procedures have been imbedded in the research process to ensure transparency. Specifically, prior to undertaking data collection, I had to obtain approval for the study from their doctoral research committee and the University of Waterloo's Research Ethics Board. Furthermore, my doctoral supervisor remained in constant contact throughout the data collection and analysis process to monitor progress and critically evaluate ideas. Approval of this dissertation is subject to final review by the doctoral research committee. The next section discusses reflexivity.

Reflexivity

Essential to the enhancing the accuracy, credibility, and overall trustworthiness of qualitative research is the concept of reflexivity (Cutcliffe, 2003). Reflexivity is commonly

viewed as the process of a continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome (Berger, 2015; Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach et al., 2007). A researcher's positionality can impact several major areas of the research project. First, access to the field may be enhanced or deterred depending on how respondents perceive the researcher's understanding of their situation (Berger, 2015; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). Second, the nature of the researcher-participant relationship, which, in turn, impacts the information participants are willing share (Berger, 2015). For example, when researching sensitive topics some respondents may only be comfortable sharing information with a researcher who reflects a specific demographic or personal characteristic. Third, a researcher's preunderstanding of the phenomenon under study may directly influence how data is collected, questions are posed, data is sorted, and findings are constructed (Berger, 2015; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). To effectively incorporate reflexivity in their work, Creswell (2013b) suggests that researchers disclose their past experiences with the phenomenon being studied while also demonstrating a critical self-awareness of how these past experiences, including preconceived values, attitudes, beliefs, influenced the findings and interpretations of the study.

For the present study, I have an extensive background in minor hockey including roles as a player, volunteer, employee, and researcher. As a youth, I played hockey for over 10 years within a highly successful Southern Ontario minor hockey association. As a young adult, I returned to minor hockey as a volunteer coach and worked for a tournament organizing company whose key target market was youth hockey organizations across North America. Currently, as a graduate student, I have completed a number of research projects which have used minor hockey as context. Through a variety of experiences within the hockey community, I have been able to

establish a significant network of people who have undertaken or currently hold key positions within the youth, amateur, or professional levels of hockey. One of the members of this network was a former True Hockey coach who remains highly regarded by the organization. This former True Hockey coach acted as the gatekeeper to the organization.

My association with the former True Hockey coach and extensive background in minor hockey positioned the researcher as a temporary insider of the organization (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This position as a temporary insider benefitted the study in several ways. First, the access that I was able to generate within the organization was greatly enhanced due my personal connections to the highly regarded former coach. This personal connection allowed me to achieve instant credibility in the eyes of True Hockey management and quickly establish primary access to the organization to conduct research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). My past experiences in minor hockey allowed me to further enhance my credibility and trustworthiness with True Hockey management. Specifically, I was able to develop a strong rapport with key decision makers within True Hockey by being able to speak the language of minor hockey executives and connect to their personal experiences within the sport; thus, I was able to quickly transition from having primary access to the organization to secondary access. As Brannick and Coghlan (2007) describe, achieving secondary access within an organization is essential for high quality insider research because it is through secondary access where the researcher is able to access internal organizational documents, data, closed-door meetings, and key decision-makers.

In addition to enhanced access, becoming a temporary insider with True Hockey greatly facilitated recruiting participants. The staff members, coaches, and parents that I invited to share their True Hockey experiences with me were very receptive and cooperative. Each participant expressed that they felt comfortable participating in the project because I was vetted and

supported by the organization. Together, being labeled as an approved insider of True Hockey and my own preunderstanding of the industry allowed for a strong rapport to be built with many participants which enhanced the richness of the data that was collected and quality of the analysis that was undertaken (Berger, 2015; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). For example, a number of the parents who were interviewed shared stories of their child's minor hockey experiences and due to my understanding of the minor hockey industry, I was better equipped to understand implied content that an outsider would struggle navigating.

Being a temporary insider also carried the risks of blurring boundaries through the imposition of my own beliefs, perceptions, and values on the data. When conducting insider research, a researcher's own biases can be imposed the study through an overreliance on interpreting data based on based experiences, internal organizational politics, and failing to establish role duality (Berger, 2015; Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). For this investigation of True Hockey, my preunderstanding of the minor hockey industry was beneficial for gaining access to the organization, establishing rapport with participants, and interpreting data; however, it also presented a disadvantage in a number of circumstances where I relied too heavily on my previous knowledge and assumed interpretations rather than probe respondents. Furthermore, as a trusted temporary insider, I became privy to politized information regarding relationships between key decision makers within True Hockey as well as the organization's contentious relationship with neighbouring organizations. Due to the sensitivity of this politicized information, I felt compelled to protect the identity of those who were willing to share such information. Therefore, I limited probing for greater details on the politicized issues with participants as extensive probing could reveal the identity of participants and jeopardize relationships within the organization. In several instances, participants allowed the me to probe

sensitive topics but later asked to retract their statements from the study. To maintain a reflective self-awareness during the study, the I engaged in reflective journaling after participant interviews, attending virtual meetings, and coding. The journaling was done by hand with the researcher writing a detailed reflection (i.e., 1-2 pages) intended to highlight how previous experiences, attitudes, values, and beliefs impacted interpretations of comments made by participants. This process was key to ensuring emerging areas of inquiry and themes remain connected to the research questions.

It should also be noted that this study was also greatly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, I was granted access to True Hockey in February 2020 and the previously described strong rapport with participants was established through frequent visits to the organization's facilities. When athletic facilities were forced to close in March 2020, True Hockey stakeholders were only able to be accessed through phone and email correspondence. The lack of regularly scheduled face-to-face interactions made maintaining the temporary insider position and associated credibility difficult to maintain. As a result, that richness of the data was negatively impacted because many respondents – especially, True Hockey staff – began scripting their responses to research inquiries due to the limited contact they were able to have with me.

Chapter 4: Findings

Legitimacy is an indication of social acceptance and credibility (Haveman & David, 2017; Scott, 2014). For new ventures, like True Hockey, attaining legitimacy is a continuous process requiring deliberate and strategic actions invoked by managerial actors (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Failure to attain legitimacy will ultimately result in the demise of the organization; therefore, perceptions of an organization's legitimacy can be derived from the assessment of managerial actions (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). For this case study, understanding how True Hockey stakeholders perceive their roles and interactions with the organization has offered insight into how True Hockey has evolved to become a legitimate venture within the Canadian hockey community.

Findings revealed that True Hockey's key actors have had to navigate four distinct phases of evolution in order to garner support and gain legitimacy within a field that lacks alternatives to program delivery. Specifically, the four phases of evolution that have contributed to the establishment of True Hockey include the *Building, Growth*, *Competition*, and *Stabilization* phases. Each phase is characterized by distinct actions and concepts reflective of the institutional work necessary to launch and maintain a new sport organization. The following sections of this chapter use the experiences of True Hockey's stakeholders as well as a variety of media content to detail how the organization's quest for sustainability within the Canadian hockey community has evolved over time. In addition to this chapter, the findings are also summarized in Table 3 which is located at the end of the document.

Building Phase: 2003-2006

The Building Phase describes the infant stages of True Hockey between 2003 and 2006. During this period, True Hockey's founders laid the groundwork for becoming a legitimate

alternative to traditional minor hockey programming offered by Hockey Canada and its community partners. Interestingly, True Hockey was founded with the purpose of filling a summer sport facility void in their community. Particularly, True Hockey's founders designed an organization and built a facility to service the booming interest in roller-hockey within the community. The focus on roller-hockey was short lived as it became apparent to True Hockey executives that their community was in desperate need of more arenas to effectively service the popularity of hockey. In order to capitalize on this opportunity, True Hockey's founders recognized that they did not just want to be facility operators instead they wanted to leverage their facility ownership to offer the community a viable alternative to traditional hockey programming. The successful launch of True Hockey and transition from focusing on roller hockey to ice hockey was achieved through the following actions: *assessing community needs*, *acquiring resources*, *good fortune*, and *hiring experts*.

Assessing Community Needs

Central to the success of any new venture is identifying a favourable environment to do business. In the case of True Hockey, executives and stakeholders recalled that the organization was initially created to service a shortage in multi-purpose sport facilities in City A. Specifically, in November 2003, the founder of True Hockey and his business associates announced plans to build and open a $2 million multi-purpose sport facility in 2004 (Tait, 2003). Fred remembered:

> At the time [the founder of True Hockey] was constantly driving to [neighbouring cities] to enroll his kids in roller hockey and he wondered why there was no local facility for roller hockey and other indoor sports. So, [he approached] his brother and childhood friend to build an indoor sports arena.

Tait (2003) pointed out that at the time of building the facility one of the key investors was operating a rapidly growing roller hockey league which lacked the facility infrastructure continue expanding. To this point, the investor's roller hockey league was limited to only operating in the summer because it required renting city arenas in the summer when the ice was out (Tait, 2003). Thus, the new facility that was being modeled after successful facilities in Vancouver and Michigan that serviced year-round roller hockey as well as volleyball and indoor soccer (Tait, 2003). The facility was an instant success in the community when it opened in April 2004. As Fred specified, "[Between] 600 and 700 kids ended up playing roller hockey in the facility the summer shortly after it opened."

Despite the early success of True Hockey, the founder and investor understood that the rise in roller hockey's popularity likely to be short-lived and continued to evaluate how they could service the local community's recreation needs on a larger scale. Fred remembered:

> Following the first successful summer of roller hockey, [True Hockey's founder and investors] decided to make ice in the new facility because [they identified a] significant demand that [City A] arenas couldn't keep up with. So, they made ice in the fall of 2004 and have never gone back to indoor sports…The success of that facility ultimately led to us building the twin-pad facility in 2006 to [further grow our hockey operations].

Indeed, as Gina suggested "installing ice in the [original facility] ultimately allowed the [True Hockey] to pivot its organizational strategy to focus on filling voids in the [local] hockey [market]. Garbutt's (2018) newspaper article on the history of True Hockey specified that the organization set out to design hockey programming that allowed all youth participants to reach their potential by incorporating positive elements from existing programs and improving on the negative aspects of the experiences.

Acquiring Resources

True Hockey's key actors' consistent access to substantial financial resources ensured that the organization could service the facility and programming voids they had identified. Rick confirmed that True Hockey's early success was related to the effective deployment of financial resources:

> It's incredibly rare for an organization at any level – let alone at the youth sport level – to own its own facility. [To their] credit, they were able to secure the necessary investments and partners to really lean into building an independent hockey program. I'm sure making that happen is not a cheap operation.

Tom specified the type of financial investment required to be a successful independent minor hockey operator:

> It cost the founder a couple million dollars to start this organization back in 2003 and that was to essentially build the facility. Now, to get a controlling stake in privately owned, basic single ice pad facility – similar to our first facility – it would cost over $3 million. So, if you look at facility like our twin pad that includes a gym, restaurant, office space, and control of the programming the price would be well above that. So, it's not cheap and that doesn't even include all the upkeep costs that are necessary.

Fred added to Tom's comments by highlighting the significant maintenance costs True Hockey faces:

> I have binders full of our bills and costs dating back to 2006. Unfortunately, hydro and utilities are not getting cheaper; especially, in [City A]. Making and maintaining ice is literally one of the most expensive things you can do now. So, just to keep our staff and facility functioning we have to be very aggressive in getting usage out of the facilities.

Indeed, access to substantial financial resources allowed True Hockey to enter Southern Ontario's highly restrictive and competitive minor hockey market by building two facilities which were outfitted with unique programming. Furthermore, the organization's financial resources have allowed key actors to pursue opportunities in designing and instilling programming that traditional minor hockey organizations cannot offer. It is important to note that True Hockey's key actors (i.e., executives and program coordinators) recognize the benefits of belonging to an organization who has sufficient financial resources; however, they do not consider this a reason to spend frivolously.

Good Fortune

Luck played an integral part in the early success of True Hockey. Many of the longest serving True Hockey staff members acknowledged the expertise of True Hockey's founder in managing youth sport organizations; however, the organization's successful launch as a roller hockey organization and subsequent transition to focusing solely on ice hockey is accredited to luck. Specifically, Fred and Gina recounted two incidents that took place during the building of True Hockey's original facility that highlight the significant influence luck has had on the organization's success. Fred described:

> While the original investor group was being put together, one of the key investors came to be this gentleman who was running a pretty popular roller hockey league in the city. Yes, the facility was going to be multi-purpose and service a variety of sports but to be able to have a guy whose league was going to be your primary tenant signed up before building has even started was huge. For whatever reason, roller hockey was seeing a boom at the time and they were able to open the facility just in time to catch a full

summer season. So right off the [start], they were [maximizing] their facility usage which is huge for the financial position of privately owned facilities.

Gina recalled:

> Likely, the most important reason why I am here today or really any of us are here today is because of a stroke luck that happened during construction. On the last possible day for this to happen, the founder of True Hockey approached the builder to put the necessary pipes [into the facility] that would allow [us] to one day make ice. Well, sure enough after one successful first roller hockey season, there is an ice-shortage in the city, and [we] decided to make ice for the first time. Ice has not come of out our facilities since September 2004.

Fred expanded on the impact of the decision that ensured True Hockey had the capabilities to build ice in its first facility:

> I don't know what would have happened to the organization if those pipes had not made into the building. Sure enough, after 2004 the roller hockey bubble [burst] in this area and the facility would have likely just had to be a gymnasium. With the ice we were able to service all the local hockey clubs and figure skaters… Where we were really able to make a name for ourselves in those early days was in the hockey off season…At the time, a lot of city facilities removed their ice for summer months to save money, which allowed us to host a bunch of training and development camp events at our new facility. Without this success in ice hockey, it is unlikely the twin pad facility ever gets built.

Hiring Experts

Since transitioning to focus on ice hockey, True Hockey has relied on leaders who are experts in navigating the often-complicated field of minor hockey and facility management to

nurture its evolution. Furthermore, stakeholders (i.e., coaches and parents) regularly noted that they expect leaders of youth hockey organizations to be knowledgeable about the athlete development system, equitable, well organized, and easily accessible. The characteristics that True Hockey has prioritized in leadership hires is exemplified by Fred's recollection of the reasons why he was first approached to work at True Hockey in 2006:

> I was approached by [the founder of the organization] to run the new facility and help launch the on-ice programming. I guess the guy they had in place was not serious enough about growing the business. At the time, I was working facilities for [a neighbouring city] and was involved with the Ontario Hockey League [OHL]. So, [the founder] believed that I would be good in helping him get the organization where he wanted it to go.

Ron explained that attracting and retaining experts, like Fred, are essential to the vitality of the organization:

> The hockey community is actually quite small which makes stability essential… Bringing in people who have shown they have 'done it' in the hockey community is important. It brings a level of assurance to what we are [and will be] offering.

Growth Phase: 2006-2012

The Growth Phase describes a six-year period (i.e., 2006 – 2012) in True Hockey's history where the organization completed its transition from being considered a facility operator who specialized in off-season training programming for hockey players to becoming a bona-fide independent minor hockey organization. This transition was completed through the rapid and aggressive expansion of True Hockey's program portfolio. Highlights of True Hockey's rapid program expansion during this time include the launch of their house league program, assisting HB Academy establish a prep hockey program, and creating a new rep hockey league for

Southern Ontario. Indeed, much of True Hockey's rapid program expansion was guided by its executives' desire to become a viable alternative to traditional minor hockey programming; however, the rapid expansion was also born out necessity for the survival of the business. Specifically, in 2006, True Hockey opened its twin ice-pad facility which triggered a shift in the organization's strategy to become ultra-aggressive in ensuring that both of its facilities saw maximum usage; thus, allowing True Hockey to stay ahead of the extraordinary costs associated with arena operation. True Hockey's successful program expansion between 2006 and 2012 was made possible due to the following actions: *instituting a novel athlete development philosophy*, *hiring experts*, *building membership and business partnerships*, *addressing stakeholder demands*, and *disconnecting sanctions*.

Instituting a Novel Athlete Development Philosophy

A main focus of the Growth Phase for True Hockey executives and staff members was to establish the organization's athlete development philosophy and implement it through unique programming. All True Hockey executives and program coordinators highlighted the organization was created to be a "one-stop hockey shop" for player development. As Fred outlined, "The focus of the organization is skill development and training. We really try to not get bogged down by the political stuff and crazy competition that impacts other [minor hockey] organizations." Gina, a program coordinator, similarly noted that "For much of our history, we've wanted to give players and parents who were sick of the old hockey politics an alternative option where they could actually play more and develop." Fred and Gina's comments align with those made by True Hockey's founder when discussing the history of the organization in a 2018 newspaper interview. Specifically, True Hockey's founder explained that they have built a

business based on developing hockey players where the programming is designed to incorporate the good and eliminate the bad from traditional minor hockey experiences (Garbutt, 2018).

In order to fulfill True Hockey's vision of eliminating the negative aspects from minor hockey experiences, organizational executives sought to develop an athlete development program that was conducive to enhancing the skills of *all* participants. All those interviewed noted that they either had children or had been personally involved with delivering Hockey Canada programming (i.e., coach, team manager, board member). Each interviewee recognized the success of Hockey Canada programming in developing elite players; however, they noted that the programming is conducive to providing the most opportunities to the most gifted players beginning at a young age. Thus, as Fred described, True Hockey's executives instituted programming that was similar to European development programming where:

> Practice time is prioritized and professionalized. This ensures that *all* players get on the ice more often and maximizes their touches of the pucks throughout the season… [In fact,] competition isn't prioritized until players hit the age of 13 or 14.

True Hockey's commitment to individual skill development is exemplified by how True Hockey launched its first full-season youth program in 2006. As Fred recalled: "We started off with the basics: house league. Only difference was instead of the standard one game and one practice model for house league, our program included power skating for all players. In year one we had over 600 players." Fred further described how True Hockey's approach to delivering house league expanded to the organization establishing its own competitive rep league:

> After a couple of years and consistent demand [for the house league program], [we] ventured into offering [a competitive independent] tournament series. After some success with the [independent] tournament series, we moved into creating the Alternative Youth

> Hockey League [AYHL]. At the time [i.e., 2011-2012], concussions and other injury rates were high in the [traditional sanctioned leagues]. So, we had a motive to launch and operate a safer rep hockey league.

Similarly, Ron detailed an important point in True Hockey's history when the organization identified the potential to offer an alternative to the traditional elite hockey development model:

> In 2006, I was working for HB Academy and we were looking for a new facility to host our athlete-day training program when True Hockey's new twin-pad facility was brought to my attention. Well, it was exactly what we needed, and they have been there ever since…We were having success running HB Academy's athlete day-training program out of the twin-pad facility; [however,] it wasn't really a team [program]. So, kids would go to class, and then train with us [in the afternoon]…Occasionally, we would put together school teams and go to tournaments. In 2010, [it was decided] that we should try to put together a full-time prep team because we thought the appetite was there for this type of intensive practice schedule and we knew that the caliber of hockey good. Having worked in the U.S, I knew prep hockey down there was very popular, and the caliber was high. Plus, at that time it was us and [one other program] that was going to be heading in this direction, which made this an untouched marketplace.

Hiring Experts

In order to successfully implement the organization's novel athlete development philosophy, True Hockey's leaders focused on surrounding themselves with support staff (i.e., program coordinators and skill instructors) who hold their own legitimacy within the hockey community. For example, Ron remembered that he was hired in 2006 to support True Hockey's leadership with his specific expertise in administering youth hockey program:

> I have been here 14 years. I had been teaching for HB Academy and helping run their hockey program. Plus, I had worked, coached, and had success in both the Canadian and U.S system so they asked me to come aboard. Originally, I was an all-around coach for some of their independent programming that they were offering. Also, because of my background I was writing curriculum for them. So, I did their coaches' manuals and [membership policies] and other things like that. Ironically, after the first couple years it was my connections in the prep school world that allowed us to launch our prep hockey program which is the most unique part of our pathway…The prep hockey program is not only unique to our athlete development programming, but also essential to sustaining the business because it eats up a lot of midday ice which is typically impossible to sell.

Gina expanded on Ron's comments by explaining that the successful expansion of True Hockey's programming was a result of the creative co-ordinators, staff, and instructors the organization hired in its early years. Specifically, Gina noted:

> We have top-notch staff members and coaches who love helping children develop and have great experiences. The people we hire bring great energy to help with the development of each child, so that way people want to come back, and then people start spreading word of mouth when other people are asking, hey, where do we go? Thanks to these enthusiastic people, the organization was able to strategically establish attractive programming that touched those who want to play hockey recreationally or competitively in its early years.

It is clear that much of True Hockey's expansion in programming between 2006 and 2012 is credited to the expert staff working to realize the vision of the organization becoming a "one-stop hockey shop" for player development. Specifically, expert staff guided True Hockey

through the launching of its house league, prep hockey, and rep hockey programming as well as supplemental skill development programming (e.g., learn-to-skate, power skating, shooting clinics, goalie skills camps) and recreational participation opportunities (e.g., adult hockey, summer camps). Figure 1 offers examples of advertisements and social media posts regarding True Hockey's programming that was created during the Growth Phase.

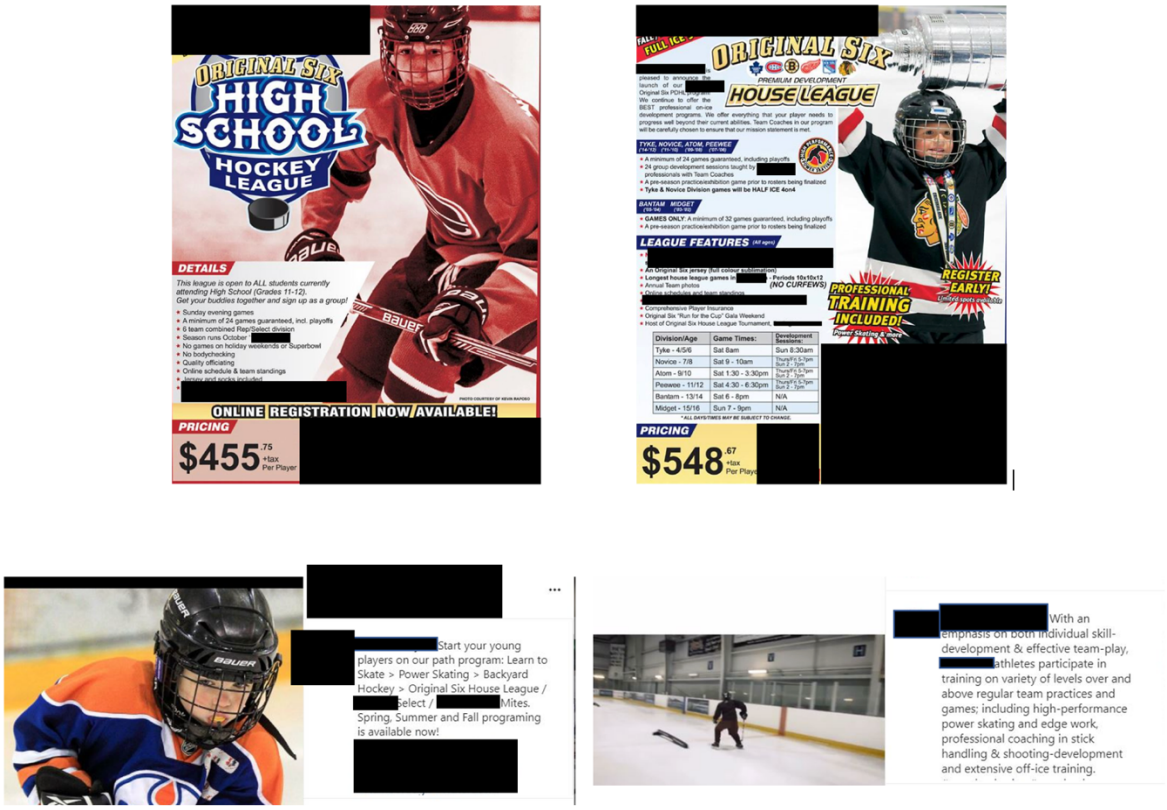

Figure 1: True Hockey Social Media Posts and Advertisements Between 2006-2012

Building Membership & Business Partnerships

Without the nostalgia and tradition of typical minor hockey organizations, True Hockey had to rely on expanding its programming and growing its number of participants by establishing partnerships with prominent members of the Southern Ontario hockey community. As Tom detailed, organizational partnerships have been essential in True Hockey's quest for legitimacy:

> When you aren't a historic non-profit community organization and you have to be accountable to customers, you tend to be more creative or more on your toes. The onus is on us to create the best environment possible. So, if there is someone or some organization out there that can help us to do that, we should be trying to get them to work with us.

Specifically, True Hockey executives celebrated partnerships that allowed the organization to quickly deliver on its mandate of being a "one-stop shop for hockey development." Rather than have teams seek out and hire additional skill coaches or trainers on their own, True Hockey has always felt strongly about delivering those services inhouse. Fred noted that, "Teaming up with various skill coaches and other athlete services by offering them a home facility to work from is a win-win. It gives our teams amazing access to training for lower the price and it allows us to maximize our facility usage." For example, in 2007, True Hockey welcomed a renowned fitness expert to open a training facility in the upper level of their twin-pad facility ("Ahead of the Curve," 2007). This partnership granted participants in True Hockey programming access to high quality off-ice training while also transforming the facility into the off-season training home for many professional and elite amateur hockey players ("Ahead of the Curve," 2007). The success of the partnership with the off-ice trainers triggered the formation of partnerships specialized skill instructors, skating coaches, and a goalie academy (see Appendix E). Ron further described the link between True Hockey's partnerships and growth between 2006 and 2012:

> It was the inherent focus on individual skill development and imbedding opportunities for it to take place throughout the facility from day one that led to HB Academy taking up residence in the facility and the creation of a robust house league program. The

> uniqueness of the house league program caught the attention of other independent hockey operators around the province. This ultimately led to partnerships and the formation of a rapidly growing independent rep league which Hockey Canada had to pay attention to.

Fred provided further insight as to how True Hockey was able to leverage relationships with other independent hockey operators into a viable alternative to Hockey Canada's sanctioned programming:

> When a group of parents approached us to add little bit more competition to our house league program, we decided to see if there were any like-minded partners who would want to run little tournaments with us. We ended up finding a partner in City B, and a partner in City C. It was a simple process; I just made some phone calls and all of sudden we started running three select tournaments. So, after a couple years and a little bit of demand, I asked the group 'Hey, you guys want to do a rep league?'… So, we started the AYHL… Each evolution of our programming was all about timing, [connections], and marketing. We went from offering little tournaments now to launching a robust [independent] league in under 10 years.

Addressing Stakeholder Demands

Addressing the demands of True Hockey's early participants was identified as a key determinant for the creation of some of the organization's most recognizable programming and growth. Both Tom and Gina spoke about the importance of the organization's staff – especially, program coordinators – to be attentive to stakeholders' feedback on their experiences with True Hockey's programming. Tom highlighted that:

> The advantage of being a commercial minor hockey entity is that we can actually act on the demands of customers. Non-profits may only provide lip-service but never actually change [their programming]. If we don't deliver on what our players and parents want, they won't come back…Our goal has always been to get [the greatest] number of youths playing hockey in our programming. So, if we hear that there is a camp or team or skill session that want us to offer, then we got to go figure out how to deliver it.

As a program coordinator, Gina, echoed many of Tom's comments. In particular, Gina emphasized the importance of stakeholder feedback in her work by saying "Feedback is only way you get better, so why wouldn't I seek it out? [Plus], it always helps make sure our camps, skills sessions, and ice-times remain filled." Gina also described how True Hockey's willingness to address stakeholder feedback led to significant expansions in programming that ultimately led to becoming one the most prominent independent hockey operators in Canada. Specifically, Gina described how True Hockey expanded from only offering house league programming to establishing an entire competitive rep hockey league between 2006 and 2012:

> Some families and players loved our house league a lot. But they would say to us: 'This is great. We're getting one game, one practice, and/or a power skating session per week, but we would really like a little bit more.' They didn't want something that compared to playing rep hockey for the neighbouring Sharks or Panthers because we didn't offer anything like that. They wanted [a program] that was a little more competitive and played games more frequently than one house league game per week. So, [we tried to figure out] how we could deliver this program? We [ended up deciding] to launch a select team program and tournament series. The select team program would give families extra games and practices, but not necessarily every week…Well, when we launched the select

> team program and tournament series it grew so fast that we were constantly adding more teams at each age group. It was clear that people just wanted an option of playing a little bit more, but not too much more. Plus, with the select team program, you're also not traveling every weekend. A lot of our families didn't want to travel. So, it was just giving them that extra option of a little bit more hockey, but not too much more…The success of the select program and tournament series ultimately led to the AYHL.

Disconnecting Sanctions

Indeed, True Hockey's rapid growth is attributed to astute staff who were able to leverage the organization's resources to establish creative programming and effective interorganizational partnerships. However, as Ron acknowledged "some of the early success [True Hockey experienced] was likely a result of the anti-competition issues Hockey Canada was dealing with around the time we were really starting to build our program." Specifically, Ron referred to the 2008-2009 investigation that Competition Bureau Canada opened into Hockey Canada's policies that labelled hockey organizations, like True Hockey, operating outside the auspices of Hockey Canada as "outlaws." Furthermore, the policies prohibited Hockey Canada members from engaging with outlaw organizations and strictly sanctioned those who did. A number of interviewees noted that in the early 2000s there were many independent hockey organizations popping up across the country and Hockey Canada was actively working to prevent them from gaining any traction in the hockey community. Indeed, Hockey Canada is the dominant youth hockey program provider in Canada; thus, much of the programming and operating practices of minor hockey organizations are uniform across the country. Rick accurately summarized Hockey Canada's position during this time period, "There is a reason why all the hockey organizations

look the same. It is because no one will ever take on Hockey Canada with something different and win."

Interestingly, Competition Bureau Canada ruled that Hockey Canada's policies regarding "outlaw" organizations was a violation of the *Competition Act* because they abused the organization's position of dominance within the marketplace. As a result of the ruling, Competition Bureau Canada ordered Hockey Canada to either eliminate or substantially modify their policies. A summary of Competition Bureau Canada's ruling regarding Hockey Canada can be found in Appendix F. Ron recalled how the Competition Bureau Canada's ruling impacted True Hockey:

> We never filed the complaint. I don't know who filed it, but it has always been thought to be one of the other independent Ontario organizations...Regardless of who filed it the ruling was important because it really relaxed Hockey Canada's oversight of the market and almost made it easier to launch the rep league.

Fred added, "Maybe it was a bit of naivety on our part, but we never had an issue with [Hockey Canada] in the early days. We knew they had their rules, but I don't think they were ever policed with our participants." Ron further explained that True Hockey had a positive relationship with Hockey Canada throughout its Growth Phase:

> As we got into to offering more competitive hockey, part of my job was to meet with Hockey Canada and all the regional branches in Ontario to keep them updated on what we were doing. Mainly, the updates revolved around what we were doing with HB Academy. Everything was usually positive, and I think a big reason for that was because no one really understood the place of prep hockey in the Canadian system. Looking back, no one really said yes or no about progressing with the HB Academy program. So, we

> kept paying the annual sanctioning fee for the Academy to keep Hockey Canada happy and moved forward. We really only ever heard from them if one of the other local organizations complained because an elite player decided to join the Academy. The complaints would never go anywhere… Honestly, I don't think [Hockey Canada] really took us seriously. They probably thought we would be out of business of in a couple years. The same thing happened when I met with USA Hockey to get clearance for HB Academy to play in the prep school league I targeted for the launch of the program. It was once we started having sustained success with HB Academy and the AYHL that issues started to arise.

Competition Phase 2013-2017

The Competition Phase marks a four-year period (i.e., 2013-2017) in which True Hockey executives and staff were focused on continuing to rapidly increase their membership. During this period, True Hockey experienced great success growing the number of players and teams joining the AYHL and prep hockey programming. Much of this growth was attributed to the organization capitalizing on the growing discontent being exhibited by local minor hockey stakeholders towards the dominant hockey program providers. True Hockey's success as an alternative youth hockey organization triggered the implementation of defensive mechanisms designed to stall its growth by local rival organizations who were sanctioned by Hockey Canada. Thus, True Hockey's key actors were required to simultaneously continue growing and defend the organization in order maintain its pursuit of legitimacy within the hockey community. Successfully navigating the Competition Phase was made possible by the following actions: building *membership and business partnerships*; *mimicry*; *addressing stakeholder demands*;

leveraging stakeholders' dissatisfaction with dominant organization(s); expanding the *novel athlete development model*; and *controlling messaging*.

Building Membership & Business Partnerships

During the Competition Phase, recruiting as many players as possible to ensure that programs were filled, and facility usage was maximized remained a priority for True Hockey's key actors. Prior to becoming sanctioned, True Hockey executives noted that they typically targeted potential participants who were fed up with Hockey Canada's strict residency and eligibility rules that limited participants to playing within their hometown organization. Gina explained some of the steps that True Hockey has implemented over the course of its history to eliminate the common sources of contention within traditional minor hockey organizations:

> The big issue that always seems to come up is which team a player is eligible to play for. So, when we ran the AYHL we made our own rules, our own decisions. If a parent just said, 'I don't want to be on this team, I want to be on this team or I want to play down an age group, up an age group', we did whatever we felt best was for the, for the customer to make them happy and come up with the best solution for the most amount of people.

In addition to working to increase the number of participants in the organization, True Hockey's key actors also had to focus on recruiting other independent hockey organizations to join the AYHL to ensure that their teams could compete in a full schedule. This shift in focus for interorganizational partnerships was different from True Hockey's previous efforts to leverage partnerships in order to enhance participant experiences at the organization's facilities. Fred confirmed the importance of securing regular competition with partners for True Hockey:

> Even though we are focused on individual skill development and maximizing practice time, games matter. [Games are] what kids want, and it's what parents want to see. The

> toughest part about being an independent hockey provider was finding games. I remember the first year we ran [our own AAA program] we had one team for the 2003 age group and on August 1st we had no games scheduled yet. As you know the season starts in September. By September 1st we had a few games lined up and then by the end of year we ended up playing 49 games and had an awesome year with the training included. But it was always a battle to get the games. After that year it then became easier for to get games... [The main point] is independent hockey is insured, independent hockey is legal, but it could also fold anytime. I give a lot of credit to our staff in mitigating this issue by growing the league from 0 teams to 80 teams [across Southern Ontario] so quickly.

Gina further described the challenges True Hockey faced due to the inconsistency of scheduling games between independent hockey operators:

> From a game standpoint, people would kind of ponder their decision joining us because they would be worried. 'What if we don't get games? You're promising me 36-40 games in a season, but you can't actually show me on a calendar when my games are.' So, people may have had doubts that we would deliver. We did deliver, but we couldn't show them [at the start of the season], we just had to say have faith in us, believe in us, we're going to deliver.

Comparably, Ron recalled how he leveraged partnerships in order to launch the Prep School Hockey League (PSHL) in 2015:

> I was challenged to reduce costs for our prep hockey program. We were having a great success in the American league we were playing in, but the travel costs were costing us and HB Academy a small fortune. Plus, USA Hockey was not taking too kindly to us

> being so successful as the only Canadian team in this prep school league. They were starting to come down hard on us limiting our eligibility for tournaments and it seemed like they were always auditing our roster and coaching staff to make sure we weren't sneaking through loopholes. We had nothing to hide but it was like they were forcing us out. So, in hopes of cutting down our costs and limiting some headaches I was challenged to investigate whether there was enough private schools or sport-specific schools with hockey programs who would be interested in joining a league operated by True Hockey. I was able to leverage my relationship with [two highly-regarded private schools] and create the PSHL…I wasn't looking for financial backing, I just wanted a guarantee from them that they would support the league and attend its showcase events because that would attract other participants. In 2015, the PSHL launched with 12 teams that play in six showcase style events.

In summary, all respondents suggested that participants and competition are central to a minor hockey organization's legitimacy. Grant best described this sentiment, "Who plays for you, who coaches for you, and who you play against is key. It is a hard sell if people can't connect with those things."

Mimicry

In addition to securing participants and organizations to join the AYHL and PSHL, the Competition Phase also marked the beginning of True Hockey's pursuit of sanctioning from a governing body (i.e., Hockey Canada). Grant offered an explanation as to why being a member of a prominent governing body is so important for new youth hockey organizations.

> Hockey, at least around [Southern Ontario], is so branded now. All the clubs, teams, and coaches got stories and want you to know that they're connected to a certain elite

> organization or specific pathway. I would bet it's the same for other sports too, but my point is if want you are offering isn't part of that mainstream conversation that parents and kids recognize then it is a really tough sell.

Many of the parents who were interviewed confirmed Grant's comments by either questioning or raising concerns regarding True Hockey's history of operating as an independent minor hockey association. Rick and Charles shared stories of friends who enrolled their children in early years of True Hockey's unsanctioned rep hockey programming. The stories explained that while the unsanctioned programming provided ample amounts of practice time for skill development, the extensive travel that took place for a limited number of games to be played hampered the season.

Fred acknowledged that True Hockey was aware of parents' concerns regarding the stability and consistently of independent hockey operations; thus, he and the founder actively worked behind the scenes to get the program sanctioned by Hockey Canada or another recognizable governing body. From 2012 to 2017, regular meetings took place between True Hockey executives and the governing body of hockey in Ontario (i.e., Ontario Hockey Federation [OHF] in order to get True Hockey on Hockey Canada's radar for sanctioning. At the time, True Hockey executives believed that getting the OHF interested in their organization was essential to gaining sanctioning because the OHF is Hockey Canada's largest member organization and is perceived to have significant influence in decision-making processes. Specifically, Fred described his interactions with the OHF between 2012 and 2017:

> While we were happy with the way the AYHL was coming together, we always knew it would be a difficult task to convince players -especially, the most talented players – to leave sanctioned hockey for an operation where we had to be the authority on everything. To address that challenge and really [affirm] the organization, myself and [True

> Hockey's founder] chose to pursue sanctioning with Hockey Canada. So, in between the 2012 and 2013 season myself and True Hockey's founder met with the OHF to gauge their interest and by extension Hockey Canada in making us members. These meetings became an annual offseason event, and we were always told that despite our success putting independent hockey organizations through membership processes was low on the OHF priority list. At that time, there were major issues regarding head injuries and girls hockey that had to be dealt with first.

After three years of limited progress towards gaining Hockey Canada membership, Fred described turning the attention of True Hockey's executives to pursue an alternative path to sanctioning with the American Athletic Union (AAU).

> In 2015, an opportunity presented itself for us to be the Canadian hockey affiliate of the AAU. This was interesting because they are obviously most well known for their work in basketball, but they do work with every sport. The hockey operation is small compared to Hockey Canada or Hockey USA; however, they're one of the oldest and most recognized youth sport sanctioning bodies in the world so the credibility that comes with joining them is substantial. At the time, they were exactly what we were looking for, so we signed on in time for 2015-2016 season.

Receiving AAU sanctioning granted all AYHL members, and the AA/AAA program True Hockey launched in 2015 the ability to participate in or host AAU hockey tournaments across North America. Similar to Fred's comments, most True Hockey staff members recalled that receiving AAU sanctioning was a moment that "brought much needed notoriety" and "emphasized the seriousness of the program." True Hockey's internal organizational documents reveal the AYHL significantly expanded following the AAU sanctioning the league. True

Hockey executives seeking out a membership with the AAU and Hockey Canada is consistent with the organization's previously described obligation to provide the best development environment for its stakeholders. As Tom mentioned, "being accountable to our stakeholders requires the acknowledgement that partnerships may be needed to deliver the organization's mandate."

Addressing Stakeholder Demands

Similar to the Growth Phase, True Hockey's ability to quickly address stakeholders needs and desires played an important role in progressing the organization through the Competition Phase of its evolution. Specifically, Gina explained that:

> Trial and error were a key part of our strategy while we were operating the AYHL. Having our own facilities [at the time was] great because it allows, to be creative in getting kids on the ice. So, if we heard something from parents or a coach we could try things and if only 10 kids showed up we wouldn't sweat it…[For example], around 2015, people saw the quality of play and the consistent growth of the league and they would come to us and say: 'This is great. We are playing A level hockey, but could we get something in the AA/AAA level for the most talented kids?' So, we launched a [AA/AAA program] out of our twin pad facility. This program was really focused on practicing, skill development and played in the highest competition tier under the AAU. We wanted to use the AA/AAA program to [feed] the HB Academy team as the players got older. [Ultimately, launching the AA/AAA program] completed our competitive hockey portfolio.

Most of Gina's colleagues added to her comments by suggesting that True Hockey actually holds a competitive advantage in Southern Ontario's cluttered minor hockey

marketplace because of the organization owning two facilities. In particular, staff highlighted that facility ownership allows True Hockey to hold significant control over improvements and changes to their infrastructure that organizations who rent or lease time at their facilities would not likely be able to pursue. Thus, as the competition for players in True Hockey's constituency amplified between 2015 and 2017, True Hockey was able to design some unique athlete development opportunities (i.e., practice focused AA/AAA program) that allowed them to recruit participants away from the neighbouring Sharks and Panthers organizations.

Leveraging Stakeholders' Dissatisfaction with Dominant Organizations

Many study participants identified that a growing dissatisfaction that parents had with the local dominant hockey organizations presented an opportunity for True Hockey to transform the marketplace. Fred further described the True Hockey's position within the local market:

> When we got going, that meant there was essentially three hockey groups [in City A] and this has led to the market being really competitive but also really negative. The model [in the city] is really broken and we [have been] trying to fix it.

Rick and Gina provided specific examples when True Hockey was able to leverage the growing sense of dissatisfaction with the local dominant organizations to improve their program portfolio. Specifically, Gina explained:

> So, while we were operating the AYHL it would have been comparable to 'A' level competition in the Hockey Canada system. Even though it was a lower level of competition were getting AA or AAA caliber players because they were politically cut from the other [local clubs]. You know how it goes, sometimes if you aren't in the proper [clique], you don't get to be on a certain team. So, these parents just wanted another option because something negative happened in the other location.

Rick added that it was ultimately a dispute within the Sharks organization that led to True Hockey expanding its rep hockey offering to include AA/AAA programming:

> It was about five years ago when some negative things happened regarding the Sharks' selection process for their AA and AAA teams. [The events] rubbed a lot of people the wrong way and they ended up [joining] True Hockey to start their own AA/AAA program and play under the AAU.

Tom summarized the importance for True Hockey to leverage the local minor hockey stakeholders' growing sense of discontent for the Sharks and Panthers respective organizations:

> Being a provider for the community is serious for us. Being able to provide programs where kids are active and get exercise is really important. We provide these types of programs and I think we do it in a more effective way than our competitors. Over time, I think we should become the prominent hockey provider in this community.

Expanding the Novel Athlete Development Philosophy

As was mentioned in a previous section, the Competition Phase marked the period where True Hockey's programming portfolio was solidified. True Hockey staff regularly recalled two key moments between 2012 and 2017 that led to the solidification of the organization's program offering. First, in 2015, the creation of the AA/AAA program enhanced to True Hockey's ability to attract and retain the most skilled players from each age group. As Fred described, the AA/AAA program closed a substantial gap in True Hockey programming portfolio:

> We were doing really well with kids who preferred to pursue hockey more recreationally than competitively. Our biggest struggle was retaining players in their early teenage years who had really advanced their skills through [our model] and wanted to now apply them against stiffer competition. Because we didn't have any AA/AAA teams and players

> aren't eligible for HB Academy's program until they are 14, our most talented players would leave for rival programs in the city. Thankfully, there was enough interest to start a couple AA/AAA teams in 2015. This helped us bridge the gap between the key development ages of 12 and 16. [Between] 14 and 16 [years-old], if the kid is really serious about hockey, we can steer them to enter HB Academy's program.

Second, in late 2016, in an effort to enhance its contributions to the community a local Junior A (Jr. A) hockey franchise approached True Hockey about assisting in the development of youth hockey players. This resulted in True Hockey's founder joining the management group of the Jr. A franchise and the team becoming embedded in True Hockey's portfolio. Fred explained the importance of adding the Jr. A franchise to True Hockey's portfolio:

> It allows us to have an elite top piece to our development pyramid. This is a key point of differentiation as it's incredibly rare for a player to have the opportunity to go from Learn to Skate when they are a toddler all the way to elite junior hockey under one roof. [Typically], if a player demonstrates they are talented and want to pursue elite hockey they have to leave their home organization.

Gina further described the value of True Hockey's relationship with the Jr. A franchise:

> With our development model, we did want it branded so we could better show the link between youth hockey and elite hockey. So, we renamed the [youth] teams to be the same as the junior team. Plus, we were able to have the junior players come out on the ice to help with camps, clinics and team practices. Additionally, kids in our programs got to go to the junior games for really cheap. So, with the name change and [interactions] with the junior team our minor hockey players got to build a bond and for some these experiences likely started to give them goals to work for in the game. Now, by seeing the

successful junior players regularly come work with their team, the kids have a visual to strive for at the end of their hockey pathway [see Figure #2].

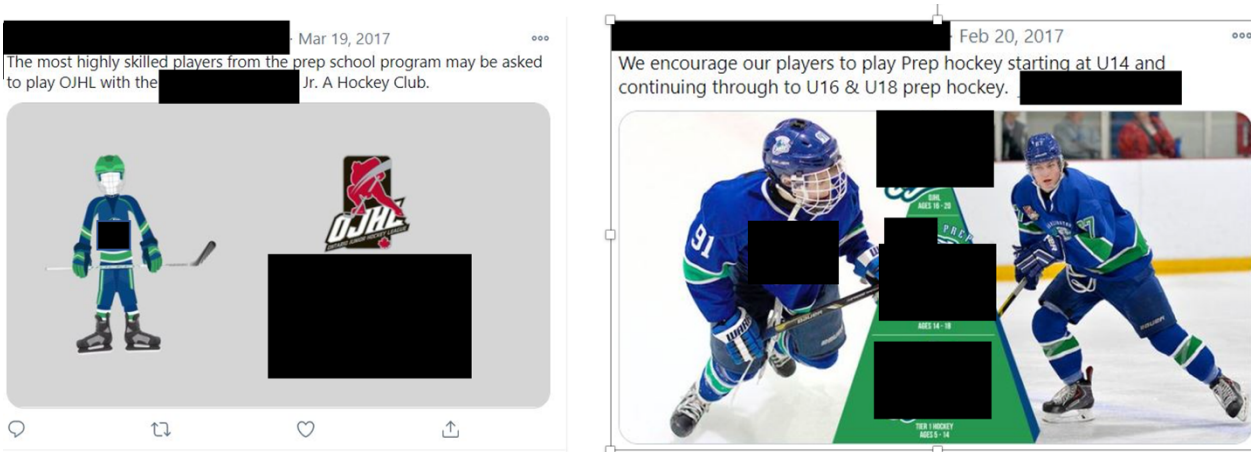

Figure 2: True Hockey's Expanded Player Development Pathway

Following these key additions to True Hockey's portfolio in 2015 and 2016, the development pathway was considered to be noticeably similar to Hockey Canada's model. Specifically, Fred, Gina, and Ron acknowledged that True Hockey's model was similar in terms of how players are introduced to the game and ultimately progress to higher levels of training and competition. However, they all stressed that the key difference between True Hockey and Hockey Canada is how programming is delivered. In particular, True Hockey's staff identified the organization's program *pricing structure*, approach to *scheduling*, and *team management* as defining features of the development model. As Fred described, "Our pricing and scheduling are key differentiation points from traditional minor hockey. Plus, we really work to eliminate the typical drama when picking teams and coaches. To me, the package is really attractive to play here." Between 2015 and 2017, True Hockey staff stressed the defining features of the organization to recruit new participants. The following subsections will further describe the program features (i.e., pricing structure, scheduling strategy, and team management practices)

that True Hockey personnel believes distinguishes their approach to athlete development from other hockey organizations and contributed to significant growth in the AYHL.

Pricing Structure. A focal point of True Hockey's athlete development programming is its all-in-one pricing structure. Both Gina and Fred acknowledged that a significant issue with organized hockey is the cost. As Gina specified, "Between equipment and paying for a minimum of one game and practice per week, parents are on the hook for a lot." Fred furthered Gina's point by saying:

> The real issue with hockey's costs is the add-on pricing. You know if you want your kid or your team to have any level of skill development beyond a single practice a week, you have to pay for the extra sessions. One thing that a lot of average hockey parents don't recognize is that covering the rental cost for ice-time takes up the majority of any registration fee. Since we operate our own facilities, we understand that having to consistently pay for that extra hour or two of training time per week can really add up throughout a season. Knowing this we have always looked to leverage our facility and relationships with professional instructors to package all games, practices, uniforms, and any additional training teams would want into one price.

In addition to the all-in-one pricing, True Hockey offers its teams the opportunity to conduct an unlimited amount of fundraising to reduce team fees. As Gina noted:

> In youth sport organizations – not just hockey – there can be caps on fundraising or all fundraised amounts regardless of who did the work are distributed equally throughout the organization. As you can imagine, this can upset a lot of people. So, we don't do that here. If you can raise enough money to cover every player on your team then good for you.

Scheduling. In addition to the all-in-one pricing structure and unlimited fundraising opportunities, True Hockey's approach to scheduling has been highlighted as an organizational advantage. Many respondents noted that an unfortunate trend in minor hockey is that organizations are at the mercy of their city and/or county when it comes scheduling. Due to competing demands for weekend ice time from a variety of community groups, minor hockey organizations are often left settling for late night weekday ice time that they assign to older age groups (i.e., 14 years-old and above). As Fred, Gina, and Ron pointed out from a parent's perspective this type of scheduling is often a point of contention because it can impact school performance with so many late nights and it limits family-time. Therefore, a focal point of True Hockey's operations has been to leverage owning its own facility to offer family and school friendly scheduling. As noted by True Hockey's founder in a media article about the evolution of the organization:

> [I] didn't like when one of [my] kids had a playoff game, but also had an exam to study for the next day. [I] also didn't appreciate the last-minute scheduling changes and having to shuttle kids between multiple rinks…I knew from my experience what was good for my family and that wasn't. (Garbutt, 2018, para. 2).

With this sentiment True Hockey has maintained a commitment to offering a schedule to participants that does not include weekday games and limits travel. Fred explained the specifics of True Hockey's approach to scheduling:

> Anyone who runs a rink will tell you adult hockey is king because of the [margins you can] run on it; but you shouldn't be selling out [youth hockey] for adult hockey. Here, every weekday from 3pm – 9pm we run our youth programming and then all day on weekends is kids. Then from 9pm to 1am or 2am we can run our [adult hockey].

Both, Fred and Gina remarked that a significant point of success for the organization was when True Hockey was able to launch the AYHL and have league members adopt their scheduling structure. Fred specified the unique structure of the rep hockey leagues scheduling:

> It was great in that we are able to avoid the constant weekend traveling that is common in typical rep hockey. Rather than have games every weekend or throughout each week, we employed a showcase model. So, typically for one or two weekends each month throughout the season all teams in the league would gather at one member's home rink and you'd play four or five games over two days that would count towards the standings. This would give you the rest of the weekends in the month off to spend with family, do other activities, or if a team wanted to, they could attend a tournament. Plus, this format allows the season to last longer. Traditional programs see their seasons end in mid-February if you don't advance in playoffs. With the showcases we could schedule them into the early spring.

Gina noted that this scheduling formatting was sticking point for many parents whose children joined the league:

> When I was involved with the rep league, parents would say to me all the time that they loved the amount of free weekends they had during hockey season. They also loved how it allowed their kids to be easily involved in other activities like music, basketball, and swimming without conflict. Compared to the condensed and crazy travel schedule that the Sharks and Panthers are forced to employ this was a really nice change for parents.

Ron recognized that the showcase scheduling format was such a success that he opted to employ it when launching the PSHL:

> When I was involved with the independent league, I saw how much parents loved that scheduling approach. So, when I was tasked to create the prep league it was an easy sell to school administrators and parents because it really eliminates any conflict with school.

Team Management. A central feature in negative experiences for minor hockey participants are internal organizational politics that impact team and coaching selection. As Grant summarized these antics within an organization can become tiresome for participants forcing them to leave or quit the sport entirely:

> We get a lot of players who hate their home organization. Everyone [seems to have] a story. And you know what these stories are valid. I used to say, I used to think in my head 'Would you shut up and stop whining.' [Guess what], they're valid, it's run by volunteers these organizations who don't have time to really navigate and make hard phone calls and hard decisions, so they do easy stuff, they align with friends that keep their life simple, they don't want to disrupt their [drinking] buddies.

A primary concern for True Hockey has always been to eliminate the contention and conflict associated with selecting and developing minor hockey coaches. Governing documents from True Hockey's time operating the AYHL indicate that the organization prioritized recruiting independent coaches and encouraged other league members to do the same. Ron explained that he invoked the same team management principles when the PSHL was launched in 2015:

> For the academy model to work, you really want coaching staffs to be objective and independent of their players. For the most part, the early members of the PSHL abided by this principle already so it really wasn't an issue. I must say though, from the get-go it

has been impressive to see some of the astute coaches that have been recruited to the league by some of these schools.

Controlling Messaging to Defend the Organization

The longest serving True Hockey personnel (i.e., Fred, Gina, and Ron) all expressed that the most difficult part of building the organization during this phase was controlling the messaging within the hockey community about the type of organization that was being created. Specifically, True Hockey personnel had to defend the organization against Hockey Canada policies and marketing ploys from local rival organizations that was designed to deter parents from registering their children with independent hockey organizations. Specifically, localized marketing ploys distributed literature (both online and through program advertisements) that created a negative narrative about True Hockey's programming that suggested it was unsafe, unskilled, and was not created with the best interest of the participants in mind. Ron described the longstanding feud between Hockey Canada and independent hockey organizations:

> Hockey Canada will do anything to protect conventional hometown hockey organizations. You know the small town, volunteer-run hockey organizations? Well, it's no secret that a lot of those old programs are lacking in skill development opportunities and overall fun. Near us, [Organization A] has been dying for years and somehow it keeps getting propped up. As you can imagine, the powers that be hated seeing players leave the Hockey Canada program for alternatives like ours.

Appendix G offers a copy of Hockey Canada's Action Bulletin A09-02R which denotes independent hockey operations as risky outlaw ventures that should be avoided by all members of Hockey Canada. The bulletin highlights significant penalties and sanctions Hockey Canada members face for engaging with outlaw organizations during the hockey season. In short, the

purpose of the Action Bulletin is to prevent players and teams from simultaneously participating in both Hockey Canada and independent hockey programming. As Fred specified:

> With their confusing and misleading language in their rules, Hockey Canada let people believe that [independent hockey] was unsafe and uninsured…It became a full-time job marketing the organization to correct that notion. All those things you hear about independent or unsanctioned hockey being unsafe and uninsured are a myth. When we operated the independent AYHL we always had insurance and made sure our partners and league members had insurance as well.

All True Hockey personnel similarly noted the confusion and difficulties caused by Hockey Canada's Action Bulletin. Interestingly, many noted that the issues caused by Hockey Canada's distrust of unsanctioned organizations were exacerbated within their local hockey market. Specifically, Ron detailed the tension between True Hockey and its two neighbouring organizations (i.e., the Sharks and Panthers) who are Hockey Canada members:

> Our two neighbouring sanctioned organizations have been run by the same people for decades…so you can imagine that the attitude for change or anything doesn't really exist.
>
> The Action Bulletin gets sent to all Hockey Canada member organizations and executives every year and of course both our neighbours made sure it was front and centre during registration season. With the wording of the bulletin being so misleading stuff would get said about our organization like 'we are here to steal players and your money' or 'we're unsafe.' So, we had to spend a ton of time on damage control.

In order to overcome the challenges of the negative narrative that had begun to build against True Hockey and the leagues it was operating (i.e., AYHL and PSHL), the organization employed an extensive web-based marketing campaign between 2015 and 2017. Specifically, the

social media campaign was focused on creating and sharing posts that highlighted True Hockey's program advantages compared to the experiences provided by traditional minor hockey organizations. In particular, the majority of social media content shared by True Hockey during this campaign focused on educating potential participants about the success of the European approach to hockey development as well as the organization's all-in-one pricing structure, team management practices, and family-friendly scheduling. Figure 3 provides a compilation of examples from True Hockey's the social media campaign between 2015 and 2017. In addition to the social media campaign, True Hockey captured testimonials from

Figure 3: Compilation of Posts from True Hockey's Social Media Campaign

program participants, issued press releases any time the AYHL expanded into a new community, and regularly shared editorials or blog posts that discussed the "unnecessary" contention between independent and sanctioned hockey organizations. For example, the following quote from an executive stakeholder within the AYHL was widely shared by True Hockey, "Supposedly we live in a free society, except in hockey, it seems" (Radley, 2015, para. 4). Appendix H offers an

additional example of a blog post that was widely shared by True Hockey personnel in order to help control the narrative about the organization.

True Hockey coupled its web-based marketing campaign with prioritizing its customer service as way to establish positive messaging about the organization in the hockey community. As Tom noted, "We are a commercial business, so we have to make sure we are accountable to those who use this facility." Gina furthered Tom's comments by discussing the importance of establishing and maintaining a positive rapport with customers:

> A key part of my job [has always been] helping to establish a strong image for True Hockey by building and maintaining respectful relationships [based on] trust and integrity. [I do this] through marketing activities, working with colleagues, and building rapport with customers based on their experiences using our facility. I have always said to our customers that we value and welcome feedback, whether it be good or bad. Because the only way that we can grow and get better is hearing customers' feedback. They're the ones in it firsthand, their children are the ones coming home and talking about their experiences in our camps or on one of our teams.

Ron concluded the commentary regarding the importance for True Hockey controlling messaging about the organization in order to compete in a highly competitive marketplace:

> So, over the years we worked to offer what we believed is a high-quality development program. We have never and will never be out actively looking to steal players. To me, it was like any other business. If you are going out for lunch and order soup and that soup crap well then you are going to go someplace else next time. We were providing something different to a space that never experienced different, and our numbers show a decent amount of people have bought into what we offer.

Stabilization Phase: 2018-Present

The Stabilization Phase captures the most recent iteration of True Hockey. In the eyes of True Hockey's executives and staff, these recent years have seen the organization finally be perceived as legitimate by the greater Canadian hockey community. The main reason for this feeling of having achieved legitimacy is that during this period True Hockey executives made the difficult decision to abandon its success as an independent minor hockey organization to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada. Many of True Hockey's key actors denoted the decision to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada as essential to the creditability and long-term stability of the organization. The decision to become a member of Hockey Canada and its overall ramifications on the perceived legitimacy of True Hockey was supported by the following actions and mechanisms: *mimicry*, *hiring experts*, *controlling messaging*, *solidifying the athlete development philosophy*, and *continuing to build membership as well as business partnerships*.

Mimicry

As described in the Competition Phase of this chapter, True Hockey was able to overcome extensive challenges to its legitimacy to become a premier provider of independent hockey in Canada. Thus, it was a surprising to many when True Hockey announced it would become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada in 2018. Fred elaborated on the reasoning True Hockey pursued membership with Hockey Canada despite its success as an independent minor hockey organization:

> It wasn't an easy decision; we've had a number of people on our staff who worked so hard for 10 years to build independent hockey. [We realized that] one of the biggest things [for the business would be to] have accreditation from Hockey Canada. We felt

> that what we had developed was stable, but it was still unpredictable with clubs constantly coming in and out. Parents want guarantees, they want guaranteed games all the time. So, we were very happy [to join] the OHF [and Southwestern Ontario Hockey League]. Being accepted by them is great because now we have the training facility and development, the guaranteed games, tournaments, and events. [Becoming a member] of Hockey Canada took a big load off.

Ray, an executive with the Southwestern Ontario Hockey League (SWOHL), described Hockey Canada's perspective of True Hockey's pursuit of organizational membership:

> True Hockey expressed interest in joining Hockey Canada under the OHF and by extension [the SWHL] in the spring of 2018…I suspect that it was result of it becoming too difficult to replicate some of the many benefits you get as a Hockey Canada member. Comprehensive insurance policies, the most up to date approaches to player safety, [as well as] consistent and equal competition are all big reasons why Hockey Canada membership is important for organizations like True Hockey…Additionally, from a Hockey Canada perspective if there is an organization, like True Hockey, who is successful at recruiting and retaining players, we should be doing everything in our power to get them under our umbrella.

Becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada sparked a rapid transition process in order to ensure True Hockey aligned with Hockey Canada's policies, processes, and ensured the organization's teams were ready to compete in the SWOHL during the 2018-2019 season. Ron recalled the feelings around the organization during the transition period, "It was interesting. Once sanctioning was granted, the organization kind of lost a lot of what was unique about it. Now, we were just kind of a normal minor hockey organization…But this was always the goal of

our founder." Ray outlined the specific regulations True Hockey had to adapt to in order to successfully become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada:

> When True Hockey received membership status, they were notified of specific conditions they had to meet in order to retain their membership. Specifically, they had to transfer control of the AYHL to an outside party. The membership only applied to True Hockey and no other AYHL clubs. True Hockey was definitely the most established part of the AYHL and if other league members wanted to join Hockey Canada they would have to apply on their own. Additionally, True Hockey would have to pay membership dues, and ensure that all their teams were constructed following Hockey Canada's residency rules.

In order to ensure that True Hockey experienced a smooth transition to becoming a Hockey Canada member, the SWHL and True Hockey agreed that the 2018-2019 would be an "education season" for the organization. Ray offered specifics regarding True Hockey's first season as member of Hockey Canada:

> There's a lot of stuff that you have to put in place in terms of sanctioning and there is a lot of stuff that we have to learn about the organization in order to ensure they have the best experience possible. For example, we had to learn what skill level their rep teams would be at so we could assign them to the proper divisions. So, we felt, between the two parties that it would be best if we got them in into an exhibition season where they only played 12 or 13 games in the SWHL and then they could supplement that with tournaments. So, we allowed them to go to extra tournaments that year to make sure that each team got enough games played. And then of course they had their training and practices and extra stuff they offer. Plus, during that time we would be working hand-in-

hand with them to ensure they understood our policies and procedures and implemented them properly.

True Hockey personnel spoke glowingly about the organization's experience since joining Hockey Canada. In particular, many True Hockey personnel were appreciative of the support Ray and the remainder of the SWHL's staff have provided to ensure a most transition from independent to sanctioned hockey.

Adopting Hockey Canada's Development Practices

Becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada has had the most significant impact on the delivery of True Hockey's athlete development model. Tom best summarized the impact Hockey Canada membership has had on True Hockey's programming:

> [As a] sanctioned member of Hockey Canada meaning much of our programming cues comes from them. But that hasn't changed the goal of providing the best minor hockey experience possible for our players. So, we try to take the Hockey Canada [program] and try to put a twist on them that we feel will best fit our participants.

Fred expanded on Tom's summary of the impact Hockey Canada membership has had on True Hockey programming:

> [The organization] has not swayed from prioritizing the individual development of all registrants. All our teams regardless of age group or skill level get the same delivery of programming. They get two practices per week, league games, and regularly scheduled off-ice training sessions with our partners upstairs. For the two practices, one is focused on individual skill development with one of our paid instructors and the other is team specific where they work on things like defensive systems or special teams.

Notably, while joining Hockey Canada has had a significant impact on True Hockey's on-ice programming delivery, Hockey Canada membership has had limited impact on other key organizational features like all-in-one pricing, team management, and scheduling strategies. Prior to joining Hockey Canada, True Hockey's key actors labeled the organization's pricing, team management and scheduling strategies as a competitive advantage held over other minor hockey programs. Most of True Hockey's personnel were appreciative that the SWHL, OHF, and Hockey Canada has worked with the organization to ensure these features remained unaltered. For example, Fred credited the SWHL for employing a scheduling strategy that aligned with True Hockey's focus on offering family-friendly scheduling:

> The SWHL has been a great partner to join because they are mainly a weekend league. Sure, the member clubs are spread out across Southern Ontario but I can't tell you a time where our teams have had to go anywhere on a weeknight or we have had to host a game. So, this allows us to operate how we always have operated: afternoons and evenings are for kids and adults get the late-night stuff. Now, obviously we can't control we teams in [City C] or [City D] have games and if they happen to be at 9pm on Saturdays well then, our teams have to deal with that. But at least it is not the norm every week or weekend in the SWHL.

Similarly, many parents and coaches shared their appreciation for True Hockey and the SWHL's approach to scheduling. In particular, Bryan noted, "I really liked that their scheduling consistent, relative to what happens with other son who plays AAA for another organization. It made it easy to balance competing calendars when True Hockey's schedule was typically the same time every week." Furthermore, Julian suggested, "[It was] nice change from the traditional 8pm-11pm schedule for U16 hockey."

Fred further described that the most significant change to True Hockey's program features has been to how True Hockey constructs their teams. Stated simply, beginning in the 2018-2019 season all players on True Hockey teams who were entered to play in the SWHL had to have residency in City A; thus, aligning roster construction with Hockey Canada's residency rules. In order to assist with the transition, Hockey Canada implemented a grandfather clause that allowed players who were playing on True Hockey's teams without a City A residency during the 2017-2018 season to continue to play for the organization in future seasons. See Appendix I for the grandfather clause impacting True Hockey's enforcement of residency playing restrictions. It is important to note, that the HB Academy-True Hockey partnership is not impacted by Hockey Canada residency rules. Therefore, the HB Academy teams that are operated by True Hockey are not limited to players located in City A. Interestingly, prep school hockey teams are allowed to roster international players who are members of the school's student body. Thus, as reported by Ron:

> It has been common for HB Academy and other members of the PSHL to have players from the U.S. and Europe to play for them while they are here to go to school. I actually think we have done it the most with the HB Academy program.

Jim added to Ron's points by saying, "Playing with international kids is such an interesting wrinkle with the prep program that you don't get anywhere else. I know that it has really taught our teams and myself a lot." Eric expanded on Ron and Jim's thoughts:

> The international player rule is crucial for us. I think if we can grow our international alumni out of this program it will do wonders for our recognition in the hockey world. As a program coordinator, I have allocated a specific part of my personal hockey network to be successful in this area.

Charting a New Course

In addition to gaining Hockey Canada sanctioning, the Stabilization Phase also saw True Hockey undertake a change in leadership. Specifically, in November 2018, True Hockey's founder sold his majority stake in the organization to a new controlling partner. The change in leadership was described as a tremendous opportunity for True Hockey to become the leading organization in City A's hockey market due to the new leader's successful track record growing businesses, financial resources, and previous involvement in the hockey community. The new leader of True Hockey employed a new vision for the organization that focused on continued growth but prioritized long-term financial sustainability. Tom best described the vision of True Hockey's new leader:

> Ideally, we want to work with neighbouring programs to reduce the competition and complement each other's offerings. Unfortunately, there doesn't seem to be much of an appetite for that in the other organizations. So, now the pressure is on us to really showcase or facility and maximize the opportunities we offer in order to get the organizations to realize it is in their best interest to work with us.

Similar to Tom, Fred acknowledged that the vision of the new leader presented a great opportunity establish itself as the premier hockey organization in City A; however, he understood that this would take time because "the hockey scene has been broken for so many years here because of two of the three organizations being stuck in their old ways and feuds." Ron offered his own commentary on the vision presented by True Hockey's new leader:

> When the original management group was here, we were a commercial business, but we maintained a community focus like traditional grassroot sport organizations. We were always asking what's best for the kids' development? Now, with a predominant business

mind running things everything is about revenue because the organization is an investment for him. So, now we constantly have to ask how can we get the most kids possible on the ice? This type of thinking is very different from the traditional approach to deliver hockey and it can be off-putting for some. So, it will take some getting used to [internally and externally].

Interestingly, True Hockey has begun to advertise and launch programming specific to girls hockey. To this point, True Hockey has been predominantly a boys hockey organization. Fred acknowledged that, "There is a very strong girl's hockey program [in the city] and we don't compete with them because we would need to get sanctioned. However, girls and boys train, power skate, and shoot here…it's an open door for everyone." This shift is an indication that despite a strong girl's hockey program already existing in the community, True Hockey's staff have recognized that there remains a demand for programming they can successfully use to address their need of facility usage. An example of the types of girls-only hockey programming that True Hockey plans to offer is presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Girls-Only Hockey Programming Advertisements

Furthermore, Grant reported that "Management seems pretty committed to adding and additional one or two rep teams to all age groups." Grant went on to acknowledge the risk of taking this approach:

> I [understand] the reasoning behind taking this approach. It is really easy to do. But in the long run it can hurt the organization. By doing this you are essentially cannibalizing the competitiveness of all the teams in every age group. I would rather limit the number of rep teams in each age groups to the best players available and use them to establish ourselves as a strong and competitive program. You can always fill the gaps in the ice time gaps with additional camps or even adult leagues.

Gina acknowledged the risks True Hockey is taking by focusing of maximizing facility usage but stressed the importance of the strategy: "[Unfortunately], now balancing customer demand with actually making money to run the facility has become more important than ever. [Therefore], we are going to implement programs and teams that we know we can fill without hesitation."

Building Relationships with Neighbouring Minor Hockey Organizations

In recent years, True Hockey executives have transitioned from pursuing partnerships with other hockey skill proprietors and aggressively recruiting participants to build relationships with their two neighbouring organizations. As has been discussed previously, three Hockey Canada sanctioned organizations exist simultaneously in City A. As a result, the competition for players between the Panthers, Sharks, and True Hockey has been intense. A number of stakeholders noted that the inability for the three organizations to work together and limit the competition for players has done the city a disservice. Specifically, Randy noted:

> The [competition] between the executives of the Panthers and Sharks goes back to when I was growing up playing here. It serves no purpose and now that there is a third organization it only waters down the skill level of the competitive teams even more.

Similarly, Charles added:

> It becomes dangerous when you have this many programs competing for players in such a small area. What ends up happening is each club adds teams to the various rep competition levels because they need the registration fees. This results in a number of players or in some cases full teams playing at competition levels they are unfit for [which can lead to] a bunch of injuries or getting blown out in every game. I got friends who coach in City C and they just laugh when any of the City A teams are on the schedule. To them, it's not even worth putting the gas in the car to come here and win by 10 goals.

True Hockey's longstanding personnel (i.e., Fred, Gina, and Ron) all recognized the issues that plagued the City A hockey community. Tom outlined the vision that True Hockey hoped to achieve with the other two organizations:

> If the three of us could come together to consolidate programming it would make the overall hockey experience better for everyone regardless of what organization, they belonged too. In our mind each organization would focus on one type of programming. So, let's say the Panthers took over all the recreational and house league program, while the Sharks took over all of the A/AA rep teams, and we took over all the elite hockey because we have the best facility to do it. This would be perfect because there would be no need to compete for registration fees, they would take care of themselves. And, by doing that I bet all the teams become more competitive and the city's best players don't choose to go play in the Toronto league.

In the summer of 2018, the first step towards realizing the vision of True Hockey's key actors came to fruition when Panthers organization presented an idea to consolidate programming. Fred described the Panthers' idea:

> All the credit goes to the Panthers' president, he made the first move. He recognized that with us joining his club in the SWOHL for the 2018-2019 season, it would be stupid both clubs to offer the same amount teams. So, he proposed that we take over all of the competitive rep teams in the A and AA divisions while the Panthers took over our house league program. The idea made sense because we had the infrastructure to take on the additional rep teams and it helped maximize the facility usage.

Internal organizational communication shared by key actors confirmed that True Hockey's agreement with the Panthers has worked well thus far and that there was hope a similar agreement could be established with the Sharks.

Interestingly, after seeing the success the partnership between True Hockey and the Panthers organization, the OHF requested all three hockey organizations in City A form a council where they work together to address local boys hockey issues. Fred explained the reason for the OHF's request, "City A is a very important area for the OHF in terms of participants. It's kind of a hockey hotbed so it is in their best interest have all the organizations here functioning to the best of their ability." Unfortunately, as Tom reported, the City A hockey council has not been as productive as a number of the members have hoped:

> The issue is the Sharks organization. They have reluctance to work with anyone in the local hockey community. In order for this council to work we each have to give up control of something. Two of the members have already done that and now it's their turn…To me, the biggest issue is that the Sharks are the designated AAA organization in

> the city and the OHF has said they are not giving out any more designation for the time being. So, all the highly-skilled players in the city eventually end up with the Sharks because they want to play AAA. I think [the Sharks' leadership] believes that if work with us on this council they will eventually have to give that up. So, instead of using the council to develop hockey in City A, they are using it as defense mechanism to protect what they have by hearing our ideas. It bugs everyone [at True Hockey] because [the Sharks'] league, the Greater Ontario Hockey League [GOHL], is letting them get away with this behaviour. Meanwhile, the SWOHL is pushing and encouraging us and Panthers to keep working together.

Reviews of the program offerings between 2018 and 2021 seemed to confirm Tom's thinking that the Sharks' organization was using ideas shared at the council meetings for their own purposes. For example, in recent seasons the Sharks have begun to offer all-in-one pricing to registrants that includes access to additional skills instructors that the organization has hired as staff members. Additionally, Bryan confirmed that "the Sharks are adding teams at every level which will only make it harder for players to leave and further water down the skill level of True Hockey's players." In order to effectively deal with the challenges of local hockey market, Fred noted that "the OHF has gotten more involved, and we hope that they start forcing things to happen between the three organizations."

Maintaining the Original Focus of the Organization

In addition to working towards positive working relationships with its neighbouring local organizations, True Hockey has also been focused on maintaining the organization's original vision of challenging the traditional way in which hockey players develop in Canada. In order to maintain the original focus of the organization, True Hockey have spent considerable time and

resources solidifying the prep hockey portion of its programming portfolio. True Hockey's venture into prep hockey has been essential to the organization enhancing its position in the hockey community in recent years. Specifically, Fred explained the importance of prep hockey to True Hockey's current program portfolio:

> There still remains a lot of gray area with regards to prep schools and the academy model to development. So, even with [Hockey Canada] sanctioning, schools are given way more freedom in terms of where they can play and how kids develop. For us, this is huge because we have never been afraid to try anything with programming.

Ron outlined that the academy model is indeed a viable alternative to elite AAA hockey. He also explained that the key to achieving legitimacy using the academy model is to prioritize protecting the member schools that your work with over collecting more membership fees through expansion. Thus, True Hockey has undertaken a slow and methodical expansion of the PSHL, and HB Academy programming compared to its previous expansion efforts:

> We don't really advertise for new members other than on our website. The application package is there for anyone to download, fill out, and submit to us. Since we are lucky enough to have some pretty prestigious private schools as members in the league, we have to hold a high standard of who we accept. For example, I've rejected this one sport school operation for membership multiple times because [a certain board member] has had a well-known questionable past in terms of finances and paying his debts. Our members in the PSHL would never be associated with anyone like. Plus, being careful around expansion protects our name which these schools seem to hold in high record for operating this league.

Eric added to Ron's points regarding the careful expansion process in the PSHL:

> Another reason why we have to be careful with expansion in the PSHL is we want not only our HB Academy teams but other league members to continue to be invited to events and tournaments by renowned schools like Ridley College, St. Andrew's, and UCC. Being able to attend these events and compete against the best prep hockey and academy programs in North America helps both our league and True Hockey achieve recognition in the most elite hockey circles. We can use this type of recognition to recruit players to True Hockey and potentially even get these elite schools to come to our events.

Since the PSHL launched in 2015 with 12 school, membership has only increased to 15 in recent years. The PSHL members extend across Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes. Currently, PSHL holds showcase-style competitions for members in the U16 and U18 age groups; however, True Hockey is gauging the interest of HB Academy and other member schools in offering programming to students in middle school age groups (i.e., U14, U13, and U12).

Controlling Messaging to Standout in a Competitive Marketplace

Since receiving sanctioning from Hockey Canada, the focus of messaging regarding True Hockey has shifted from legitimizing the existence of the organization to validating the programs that the organization offers. Tom explained why this shift in messaging has taken place:

> One of the best parts about being a Hockey Canada member is the boost to your organization's communication. Most of the communication now comes from the governing body so you don't have to worry about narrative or anything like that. All we have to worry about is getting kids on the ice.

Other than marketing material for True Hockey's various camps and skills clinics much of the unique content shared across the organization's communication network is dedicated to

highlighting the accomplishments of players, teams, coaches, and staff members. Ron suggested why this shift in messaging has taken place:

> Now, that we are just kind of a normal minor hockey organization, we have to ask ourselves what we can do to standout in such a competitive market? Well, our relationship with HB Academy and PSHL is unique. The other thing that people want to know is does the organization win a lot or do players graduate to the next level consistently.

Fred, Eric, and Grant acknowledged that much of the recent messaging from the organization has focused specifically on highlighting True Hockey's relationship with HB Academy and the PSHL. This particular messaging is necessary because True Hockey has struggled in attracting the most talented players from its City A and as a result many of the organization's teams have been inconsistent winning games.

Fred specified the current recruitment issues facing the organization:

> [Hockey Canada] only accredited us to offer AA hockey and below. Without the ability to offer AAA hockey it is a tough sell to get players, especially the best teenagers to join us. It is really tough trying to change the ingrained thinking in a lot of these players and parents that AAA is the only path to the next level. The prep program we offer is arguably better and can get you to the same place as the traditional model. Plus, I always highlight that our facility is one-stop hockey shop where pros train in the offseason. So, if you are serious about hockey, you should be playing with us.

Eric added details on how True Hockey plans to alter the assumption that the organization is an inferior place for elite players to develop:

> The key is to educate players and parents that what we do with prep hockey is just as good or arguably better than AAA programs. That could mean buying more rink boards around the area, setting up information booths at tournaments, and holding more open houses or information sessions. I truly believe this program is a hidden gem. Historically, the HB Academy program has been excellent at graduating players to higher levels of hockey. Plus, look at the PSHL, we operate this league and some of the teams are having players scouted by National Hockey League (NHL) teams, not junior teams. So, yes, I believe if kids come play here, they will develop for sure.

Grant added to Eric's thoughts:

> I have a close friend who works for the Sharks organization, and he just laughs at the whole prep hockey system. I find that ignorant because HB Academy has graduated tons of players into all levels of junior hockey and even the pros. Each year I sit down with each player and ask them what their hockey goals are and develop some sort of plan or connect them with some of my contacts who can help them achieve them. And when our players do achieve one of their goals like winning an MVP of a game or signing with a junior, I make sure that it's broadcasted. Whether it's on my Instagram or organizational website, it is important the hockey world sees us document our successes.

Consistent with Grant's points about recognizing player accomplishments, True Hockey has created an alumni wall within their twin-pad facility to denote where their graduates have gone on to play. Additionally, the organization has become more active recognizing the advancement of its players to the junior, collegiate, and professional ranks on its website and social media pages. See Figure 5 for examples of these acknowledgements.

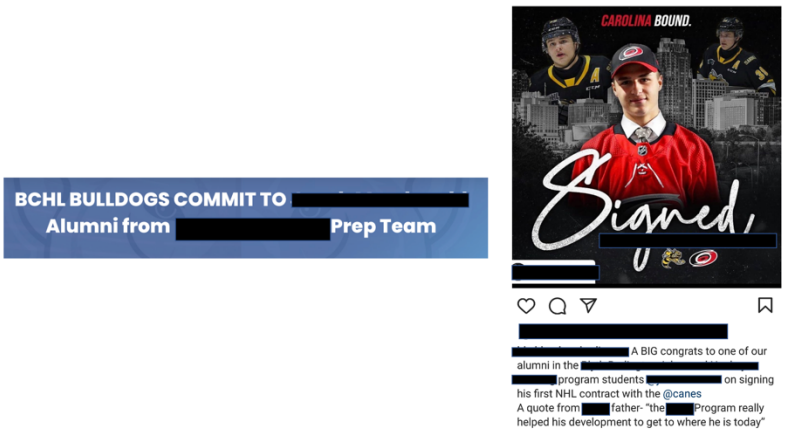

Figure 5: True Hockey Alumni Graduation Announcements

Perceptions of Legitimacy from Key Stakeholders

Indeed, True Hockey's executives and staff perceive that the organization has achieved legitimacy because of the actions and practices described throughout this chapter. Interestingly, the perceptions of both parents and coaches from within True Hockey suggest that the organization's work with regards to its pursuit of legitimacy remains incomplete. Parents and coaches in this study gauged True Hockey's legitimacy through the evaluation of its operations and outputs. This characterization of legitimacy was best exemplified by Rick who stated, "For something to be legitimate, you're evaluating the quality of the organization's operations, management, and what they offer as an end of product." More specifically, participants' assessments of True Hockey's legitimacy was directly linked to how they perceived the minor hockey organization's *business processes*, *athlete development programming,* and *participant experiences*. It is important to note that when discussing their perception of True Hockey's legitimacy most respondents offered insights into specific actions and mechanisms the organization must take in order to retain its legitimacy. Interestingly, a number of these insights arose from issues stakeholders have experienced in their interactions with True Hockey since it

has become a member of Hockey Canada. The following sections describe these three dimensions of legitimacy in detail.

Business Processes

When discussing their perceptions of True Hockey, a polarizing point of conversation for all respondents was the business processes of the organization. When discussing True Hockey's business processes, respondents regularly noted that *managerial expertise and support*, *organizational transparency*, and *evidence of internal investment* as elements they considered important to the organization's legitimacy. Each element of the business process is directly impacted by managerial decisions and behaviour. Therefore, respondents noted that an inability to consistently deliver valued programming, support, transparency, and clear communication would leave them questioning the legitimacy of True Hockey. Interestingly, stakeholders from older age groups (i.e., U13 and U16) and more elite program offerings (i.e., Prep U16/18) held True Hockey's business processes to a higher standard of effectiveness. Thus, perceptions of the legitimacy of True Hockey's operations varied amongst stakeholders. The following subsections further describes each element of the business process and its link to organizational legitimacy.

Managerial Expertise & Support. Due to its pricing, skill development opportunities, and family-friendly scheduling many stakeholders deemed True Hockey to be offering a "premium product." As many parents and coaches noted, astute management is required to ensure that True Hockey delivers on all of its promises and maintains its premium designation. Specifically, stakeholders expected management to be knowledgeable about the athlete development system, equitable, well organized, and easily accessible. Many interviewees felt that together these characteristics equate to a strong program being delivered on and off the ice. Interestingly, many respondents were critical of True Hockey's management ability to deliver a

premium experience despite characterizing the program as a good fit for their child. Jake expressed his criticism of True Hockey management by stating, “They are great salespeople, but not great hockey or even understanding athletics people.” Charles further explained the criticism through his comments, “True Hockey advertises and recruits a lot. In their messaging a lot of promises are made. Unfortunately, based on my experience it seems to harder for them to keep all their promises.” Charles experience was echoed by other stakeholders from the U13, U16, and Prep U16/18 program. Some of these individuals questioned whether True Hockey was beginning to prioritize the experiences of players 10 years-old and under because the organization was struggling to deliver on many of the development features (i.e., specialized skill practices and dryland training) that were promised as part the registration package for the 2019-2020 season.

Indeed, many stakeholders expressed that their dealings with True Hockey management over the past season (i.e., 2019-2020) has eroded the organization’s legitimacy. Both Mitch and Peter suggested that True Hockey was behaving like they had a “cash-flow issue” and were trending towards being designated as “cash-grabbers” because of their inability to deliver on some of their programming promises. Peter further warned, “Having worked in [the financial sector], I have seen firsthand what happens to organizations when their integrity gets challenged by customers. It is very difficult to come back from breaking promises.”

Moving forward, many stakeholders suggested that if True Hockey management was more consistent with their support of teams they could easily restore the credibility that they have lost. For example, multiple interviewees (i.e., Amy, Charles, Grant, Mitch, Steve, and Tim) mentioned how off-putting it was for management to rarely check-in with their son’s team once the season began. As Tim explained, “It was like they disappeared once my cheque cleared. They

took forever addressing some of the in-season questions myself and other parents had. It was quite the change in service from when I was requesting information to register my kid." Steve suggested that, "Simple check-ins would go a long way. You know, it be would be nice if management came to a game or practice a few times a year to mingle with parents or coaches to make sure everything was going well." Grant further described how important witnessing consistent managerial support is to stakeholders:

> Compared to other teams, management doesn't really delegate much time or effort in support of my teams. I'm sure it's because I'm one of the paid coaches that they feel I don't need anything extra. But this approach really limits the experience I can deliver the players. If I can't deliver the best experience players won't stay here and that hurts the whole organization.

In order to improve the perception of its support staff and prevent the organization's newfound legitimacy from eroding, True Hockey's executives hired a program co-ordinator with extensive knowledge of the local hockey community and development pathway. As Eric shared, he understood his role with the organization and why he was pursued for the position:

> I understand that I was recruited [to join True Hockey] because the organization wanted to leverage my expertise and local ties. I've been fortunate to play at a high level and because of that I have built some strong relationships with some good people in hockey whether they're agents, [coaches, trainers], or equipment [providers]. Now, with me here it shouldn't take long for the word to spread about our programming to be a preferred option [for players in the region].

Organization Transparency. Essential to a positive minor hockey experience is limiting the impact of internal politics on key organizational decisions like coach selection, team

selection, and facility usage times. Many of the stakeholders interviewed here, spoke positively about True Hockey limiting the impact of internal politics on their son's hockey experience. For example, Amy noted:

> While the season wasn't perfect, it was better than having to navigate the cliques and board politics that seem to have taken over the Sharks organization. In many cases –like ours –your son could be cut from the team before the tryouts even begin. Here, things seemed fairer. Sure, there were instances whether on our team or others that you question the coach, ice-time, or even why a certain player made the team. But these concerns did not dominate the season which was refreshing.

In the case of the Prep U16/18, parents like Julian loved that, "Traditional AAA hockey politics were completely eliminated. We knew for sure that the best players made the team." Considering the statements of Amy, Julian, and other stakeholders, there clearly is an appetite for minor hockey organizations to be more transparent in their decision-making. Similar to Amy, many respondents shared stories about how their past experiences with other organizations ended poorly due to internal politics. As Joe explained, "If True Hockey can prevent themselves from falling into the trap of micromanaging their coaches and teams, they may be able to begin stealing players from rival organizations."

Interviews with parents and coaches also revealed that they would appreciate transparency on managerial decisions that impact program offerings and the overall the direction of the organization. As Steve outlined:

> True Hockey is structured different than a traditional minor hockey organization, it is part of a corporate entity. Then on top of that, they have a relationship with a private school which allows them to run the prep program where my son plays, school. So, the business

> and operations ecosystem over there is pretty confusing when you think about it. I will you an example, has never really been clear to me who is the final decision-maker in the organization and my son's played here for two years. Plus, the person deemed your main point of contact for questions keeps changing. Considering the amount of money that I pay for this service, I would love a clear outline of who is responsible for what.

Grant echoed Steve's comments saying, "For some reason management continues to give themselves catch-all titles. So, you could potentially speak to one of five people any time you call about program or team. It's no wonder the decision-making here can be very confusing." Jake expanded on the concerns regarding the future direction of True Hockey by stating that, "It cannot be forgotten that the corporate background casts a long shadow on decision-making. Being upfront with parents or players – especially, in the prep program – about its impact will be crucial for the future." In sum, transparency and fairness regarding decision-making are essential for a minor hockey organization in order to maintain its credibility and overall legitimacy in the minds of stakeholders.

Evidence of Internal Investment. As mentioned previously in this chapter, one of the reasons for the rise in excitement regarding True Hockey's future was the resources – mainly financial – that are available to the organization's new controlling partner. Many stakeholders acknowledged that they have high expectations for the experience and service they receive from True Hockey because they classify the program as a "premium product" due to its features (i.e., scheduling, all-in-one pricing). For example, Tim expressed his expectations about the organization, "These hockey organizations aren't exactly giving their programs away. So, it is kind of expected that they match our investment of time and effort into the kids' experiences." Furthermore, Rick noted:

> My son has played in the HB Academy program for two seasons. The difference in experiences between the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 season was noticeable. A bunch of the gym sessions and extra skill training practices were cut, and I don't remember a reason ever being provided but the price was still the same.

Similar to Tim and Rick's comments, many parents questioned how True Hockey was investing in improving its own programming by highlighting that some neighbouring programs are now offering cheaper registration fees for similar experiences. In response to True Hockey's rising registration costs, Fred explained:

> Unfortunately, our overhead costs to make and keep ice will not be getting cheaper any time soon. So, just to keep our staff and facility functioning we have to raise prices. Now, I stress to parents that we are still cheaper if you break down the registration fee to the per hour cost that their kid is on the ice throughout the season.

Many parent and coaches acknowledged the unique situation that True Hockey is in having to foot overhead costs associated to operating an arena; however, this unique circumstance should not absolve the organization from regularly reviewing their on-ice product to see if there are features that could be added to increase satisfaction across all age groups. Interestingly, many of the respondents suggested that enhancing the level of care around the True Hockey facilities would go a long way in enhancing the level of enjoyment that is experienced throughout each program. For example, Tim shared a list of facility improvements that he would like to see:

> First of all, this isn't a city facility so we shouldn't have to wait multiple weeks to see crude graffiti removed from the bathroom and dressing rooms. Second, make sure the heat over the stands is functional. That alone could make it more comfortable for parents

> and grandparents to actually sit in the stands and watch the kids play. For sure, that would bring more atmosphere to the games and make it more fun for the kids. Right now, all the games are quiet because everyone watches from the restaurant or lobby, so they don't freeze. Third, they should splurge on the nice pro-style ice dividers, shooting targets, and other practice equipment. If you look around to all the other programs in the area, they have the top-of-the-line practice tools, and we have the budget stuff. I think simple investments in the program and facility would do wonders to overall experience.

Steve summed up stakeholders' thoughts regarding True Hockey's use of its resources by saying:

> It is now well known that the gentleman who took over the organization has deep pockets and with that comes expectations that the organization will be improved with some of that money. I'm not saying dump all your savings into the organization. But you have to wonder what is going on behind the scenes considering how some things have become subpar since the change in leadership [took place]. Based on the location of [the facilities], the properties are valuable so is this just simply a real-estate investment?

Athlete Development Programming

Discussions regarding the legitimacy of True Hockey's programming regularly focused on three elements: *familiarity*, *coaching expertise*, and *skill development*. Interestingly, familiarity with athlete development program was often deemed as the deciding point of whether a parent would enroll their child in True Hockey. Coaching expertise and the perceived skill development of the child throughout the season were often noted as determining factors to whether a parent would register their child to return for the next season. The following subsections describes familiarity, coaching expertise, and skill development in greater detail.

Familiarity. Almost all respondents questioned or raised concerns regarding True Hockey's history of operating as an independent minor hockey association. As Mitch expressed, "I just didn't understand the outlaw program they started up. I like the curve of potential achievement the traditional pathway gives you. What were they playing for? If that was still going on, we wouldn't be playing here." All interviewed parents shared Mitch's position stating that they would not have enrolled their sons in True Hockey programming if the organization was still considered an outlaw club by Hockey Canada. Many noted a sense of trust or credibility when pressed as to why Hockey Canada accreditation was so important to their decision to enroll their child in hockey True Hockey programming. For example, Tim explained "Having partnerships with organizations like Hockey Canada gives the club a sense of credibility. It limits any doubts or buyer's remorse going into season." Additionally, Bryan noted:

> I just really like the communication cascade that comes from Hockey Canada and the OHF. You know they have done their research and you trust they have designed programs that are best for the kids…Additionally, when a program belongs to Hockey Canada I believe that ensures you are going to have a quality schedule with ample practice time, competitive games, and the ability to go to tournaments. All of those things are part of the minor hockey experience and I don't know if private or unsanctioned hockey can ensure that.

Rick and Charles confirmed Bryan's concerns about unsanctioned hockey. Both shared stories of friends who enrolled their children in True Hockey's unsanctioned programming. The stories explained that while the unsanctioned programming provided ample amounts of practice time for skill development, the extensive travel that took place for a limited number of games to be played hampered the season. Indeed, for the participants in this study, positive perceptions of an

organization are formed through knowing that the program(s) they offer will meet their expectations in terms of time commitments, skill development, and competition.

Consistent with the sentiments shared above, all stakeholders from the Prep U16/18 program recalled feeling uneasy when they were first approached to have their son join the prep team. Despite prep hockey's prominence in the United States, Western Canada, and Quebec, it is considered a non-traditional hockey pathway in Ontario. Therefore, due to a lack of familiarity parents are hesitant or avoid enrolling their son in prep hockey programming. This hesitation is best exemplified by Steve:

> When my son was first approached to join the prep team, I had no idea what the coach or manager was talking about. The package sounded great based on the amount of ice-time, training, and exposure he would get but I was still thinking this seems too good to be true. I couldn't tell you how many emails and voicemails I must have left for management – they probably hate me for that. But, at this level you want to make sure that if make this jump to a non-traditional program that you aren't closing any doors on eligibility for future opportunities. When I found out the program was sanctioned and the other teams in the league were legit, I was more comfortable with my son playing prep.

Grant acknowledged that the lack of familiarity with prep hockey has made it really difficult for True Hockey to recruit players to its program. Specifically, Grant said:

> Being this close to Toronto makes it really difficult to overcome the prominence of the GTHL. Even when we are able to recruit good players, doubts about the program can persist into the season. But they usually go away once parents and players see the level of competition in the first showcase tournament. It's just getting that initial buy-in is really tough.

Interestingly, many interviewees noted that concerns regarding the legitimacy of a program could be quelled if someone they knew personally was responsible for its delivery. Particularly, parents noted that a positive, personal relationship with the coach would make them more likely to enroll their child in a program that they were unfamiliar with. This reasoning was expressed by Julian, "Rick joining True Hockey was one of the main reasons we switched over from the [Sharks]. Rick was a great coach and I trust his opinion on hockey. With him here, I figured the program must be worthwhile." The next section expands on the impact that coaches have on the perceived legitimacy of an organization.

Coaching Expertise. As many parents noted, the type of coaches that an organization is able to recruit are a sign of its legitimacy. Regardless of age group, respondents regularly acknowledged that coaches often make or break a child's sporting experience. As Tim explained, "We don't want glorified babysitters. We want people who can actually teach them something." Amy furthered Tim's points by saying, "Coaches should be good at teaching skills, but they also have to be good motivators and instilling confidence in the players. The Sharks' inability to provide this is the reason why we switched organizations." Many respondents commended True Hockey for selecting coaches and providing on-staff skill instructors that instilled and maintained a positive atmosphere on their respective teams throughout the season. As Amy shared, "My son has definitely gotten better here over the last two seasons and more importantly I think his confidence is at an all-time high." From a coaching perspective, Joe discussed how True Hockey has organized regular virtual coaching clinics that include tutorials from high profile guest-speakers from across the hockey world. Joe was appreciative of True Hockey's proactive approach to developing their coaches' skills:

> I've been coaching a long time in a variety of organizations, and I've never seen an organization be this proactive in supporting their volunteer coaches. By doing these tutorials they are improving the tools in our toolbox to make both the on ice and off ice experience better. Plus, they have the skill instructors on staff that come out and help you run practices. To me, it is just wow! It's nice to be supported as a volunteer. As a parent, knowing this is how coaches are treated here, it is a no-brainer as to where to enroll your kids.

As players become teenagers and enter more advanced levels of hockey (i.e., AA, AAA, and Prep), parents suggested that good coaches shift from prioritizing basic skill development (i.e., shooting, stickhandling, passing, and skating strides) to team systems and game management. As Peter explained:

> Regardless of sport, there comes a point where in an elite league all the athletes are good at basic skills. The ones who are the best and regularly advance to the next level are the ones who able to outthink their competition. So, in hockey, when a player is 13, 14, or 15 coaches should be spending extra time focusing on how to teach players how to think the game. This doesn't necessarily come in practice. This comes from a coach's ability to make in-game adjustments and getting their players to perform based on those changes. Being able to think the game on your own is so important at this level because if you can think it then chances are it will rub off on your players. Plus, if you have a good mind for the game there is a good chance you will win more often than you lose. Winning isn't everything but it matters to teenagers.

Peter's thoughts were shared by all stakeholders from U16 and Prep U16/18. Most were critical that True Hockey's coaches at this level seemed to lack the capabilities to advance player skills

development beyond fine tuning foundational skills. For example, Jake noted "I'm not sure how valuable this experience was for my son. We were often outcoached in games and that made the season a bit of a drag. The coach is a nice guy, but not a lot of bang for my buck." Those interviewed here strongly encouraged True Hockey to not discount the value of coaches who bring results – especially, for their prep program.

Similar to acknowledging the need to hire an expert program coordinator, like Eric, to limit the organization's managerial deficiencies, True Hockey has organized regularly scheduled virtual coaching clinics to aid in their coaches' development. The virtual clinics include tutorials from high profile guest-speakers from across the hockey world. From a coaching perspective, Joe was appreciative of True Hockey's proactive approach to developing their coaches' skills:

> I've been coaching a long time in a variety of organizations, and I've never seen an organization be this proactive in supporting their volunteer coaches. By doing these tutorials they are improving the tools in our toolbox to make both the on ice and off ice experience better. Plus, they have the skill instructors on staff that come out and help you run practices. To me, it is just wow! It's nice to be supported as a volunteer. As a parent, knowing this is how coaches are treated here, it is a no-brainer as to where to enroll your kids.

Additionally, Grant described the necessity for True Hockey to be a leader in addressing coaching deficiencies:

> Coaching hockey is a thankless job, which is why so few people want to do it anymore. It costs a lot of money and takes a lot to get all your certifications from Hockey Canada. I'm lucky that I was able to that and I understand why most guys just get the bare minimum. But it's these bare minimum guys that end up coaching a lot in these

> organizations who are desperate for coaches and that usually doesn't result in a good season. It may be fun, but the results are likely not there…It makes sense why all the best players around here seem to leave for the Toronto clubs because that's where the best coaches are. So, I get investing in something internally to improve the state of play locally.

Skill Development. For coaches and parents, a key mark of a legitimate minor hockey program is that players visibly improve throughout the season. For most respondents, a key sign of visible improvement was whether or not their son's team was able to "hold their own" against the top teams in the league. This was best exemplified by respondents from the U8 program (i.e., Randy, Joe, Bryan, and Tim). Each discussed how their son's team started the season losing to City D by an average of eight goals, but by the end of the season their games against each other were close and they ended up winning a few. Joe added to the story of beating City D by saying, "These results by the end of the season were proof that the program and infrastructure here actually work."

Interestingly, stakeholders from older age groups (i.e., U13, U16, Prep U16/18) did not share the sentiment that True Hockey's program was effective in improving their son's hockey skills. As explained in the previous section, each of these respective teams had coaches who were perceived to lack the expertise needed to effective at this advanced level of youth hockey. As a result, team performances were inconsistent and noticeable improvements in skill level were marginal. As Charles explained, the inefficiencies in the programming go well beyond coaching:

> In my opinion, True Hockey's biggest problem is they lock all their teams into the same development plan. By that I mean each that team has two hours of practice per week and

> then one or two game per weekend. With one hour of practice having to be dedicated to an inhouse skills instructor, this doesn't leave much time to work on important team systems or plan for opponents. For teenagers playing AA or AAA hockey, their practices should be 90 minutes for them to get a legitimate workout in. Plus, the practices should be focused on team systems, strategy, and position specific training. I feel like I have a good understanding of what team at the next level are looking for from developing teenagers because I was fortunate enough to play at a decent level of professional hockey. Specifically, teams at the next level looking for young guys who play their position well while also having the ability to quickly adapt to new systems and game plans. So, when I see how the program is designed here for those important developmental years as a teenager, I think True Hockey is doing their players a disservice.

Consistent with Charles point, many parents noted that the number of players who graduate to a higher level of hockey the next season is a good indication of the legitimacy of a program. The prospects of advancing to higher level of hockey was crucial to stakeholders of the prep program. Grant commented on the aspirations of players in the prep program:

> If you are enrolled in the prep program and your parents are footing that large bill, then there clearly is some belief you can play at the next level in junior or even college hockey. Therefore, it is our responsibility to properly showcase you to make that happen.

As noted in a previous section of this chapter, True Hockey's relationship with HB Academy has a strong track record of advancing graduating players to either junior, college, or semi-professional hockey. However, after the inconsistencies of this past season, Grant acknowledged that maintaining the success of graduating players to higher levels of hockey could become a

greater challenge. As a result, many parents and players from the prep program have taken finding opportunities to play at next level into their own hands. For example, Mitch shared, "I couldn't be prouder of my son. He did his research and took it upon himself to send film and connect with junior coaches and a new prep school. Now, he has couple tryouts and we will see what happens."

For stakeholders outside the prep program, the number of players a program can graduate to local AAA teams is a sign that is a legitimate developer of skill. Rick acknowledged that True Hockey has also had a good track record in graduating players to the city's AAA program. Specifically, Rick noted, "True Hockey used to have this robust house league program. This program was impressive because it seemed like in every season multiple kids would make the jump from house league to AAA." However, Rick also noted that ever since the house league program ended in recent years, it has been very rare to see any player from a True Hockey program advance to play for a AAA team. The limited advancement of players from True Hockey to higher levels of hockey as well as the other noted struggles within the program could be an indication that the perception of the organization as skill developers is waning.

Player Experience

Parent and coaches regularly pointed to their evaluation of the player experience as the foundation for how they perceived the legitimacy of a sport organization. Indeed, business processes and athlete development are important; however, if the sport organization was not able to deliver an enjoyable experience to athletes then the organization would be discredited in the mind of stakeholders. Specific to minor hockey, stakeholders held participant experiences in high regard if they were defined by *fun*, *socialization*, and *discipline*. Randy touched on each of these elements while discussing the importance for an organization to deliver an appreciable player

experience: “The player experience is ultimately the culmination of the organization’s efforts. I want my kids to have fun, learn to be good teammates, and develop. If an organization can’t deliver those basic things, then they should re-evaluate what they are doing.” The following subsections further describes the key elements of a legitimate player experience.

Fun & Enjoyment. When considering whether True Hockey’s programming was fun and enjoyable, stakeholders often reflected on whether it was a “chore” to get their son or team members motivated to participate in hockey-related activities (i.e., practices, games, and team functions) throughout the season. Many respondents stated that they enjoyed being part of their respective teams; however, they also acknowledged that experiencing consistent fun and enjoyment goes beyond having pleasant interactions with team members. Specifically, Rick explained:

> [Parents] are always evaluating whether the model or program is the right fit for their kid. For me, that means I’m looking to see whether my son is being challenged enough and is he being given the proper tools to overcome those challenges. For sure, team comradery is important, but if my kid is bored playing the sport, he will eventually come to me and ask to do something else.

Many parents and coaches shared Rick’s sentiments of prioritizing on-ice experiences in their assessment of whether True Hockey offered fun and enjoyable programming. As exemplified by Mitch, failure to deliver quality on-ice experiences can lead to feelings of regret:

> I’ll be honest with you, my son lost interest about half-way through the year. The main reason for that was the redundancy in the program. I get that they are trying to instill a uniform development system for all their teams, but it’s not working. The development needs for teenagers is way different than those of kids just starting travel hockey. At this

> age, the guys actually care about team strategy and performance. They want to win! Plus, my son is a goalie and they have barely built anything into their program that helps goalies get better. I hate to say it because the people are nice, but it was regrettable coming here.

Other stakeholders were not as critical as Mitch reflecting on their experiences with True Hockey. Yet, most recommended that the organization regularly review their on-ice product to see if there are features that could be added to increase satisfaction across all age groups.

Socialization. In addition to on-ice development, stakeholders also raised the importance of organizations developing athletes' off-ice habits and personal skills. Respondents spoke positively about True Hockey encouraging teams and coaches to focus on building comradery. For example, Joe was impressed with the sense of unity that was developing throughout the organization:

> It was really cool to see the team-oriented culture they are developing here. For example, if multiple True Hockey teams were competing in the same tournament, it didn't matter the age group we'd typically all end up hanging out at some point. There were also multiple incidences where older players would ask me if I wanted their help running practice. Plus, you would always see other True Hockey players supporting each other in the stands during the games. This type of behaviour you only get in small town organizations. So, for it to so prominent in an organization like this, it's great!

Grant discussed the importance of emphasizing team-culture and off-ice development for teenagers:

> I'm always encouraging guys to socialize whether it's here or away from the rink. I often say at the start of the season that if they treat this dressing room right, there is chance

> they will make friends for life here. With that being said, I also recognize that these guys often need to improve on personal skills that will be useful when they go off to work, school, or even play at an elite level. So, when we are together as team, I'm always harping about work ethic, commitment, and professionalism. In team meetings, I ban them from using their phones so they can focus on listening and actually speaking to each other.

As mentioned, these efforts to develop athletes both on and off the ice have not gone unnoticed by parents. Steven mentioned, "I give the coaches a ton of credit, the guys really like hanging out with each other. This is impressive because you never know what you are going to get when a group of teenage boys are together." Interestingly, as Jim reported, players also acknowledged and appreciated the efforts the coaching staff and organization had made to develop their off-ice character. In particular, Jim said, "At the end of season, I had multiple players come up to me and say they would come back to play for us in a heartbeat because we taught them the game and how to be a better person."

Discipline. Lastly, many stakeholders spoke about the importance that sport programming plays in instilling discipline in young players. Discipline was especially important for parents and coaches of players in their teenage years (i.e., U16 and Prep U16/18). For example, Julian noted, "When kids hit high school their interests evolve and they can struggle prioritizing their responsibilities, which can be detrimental if they are involved in any team or group activities." Having been part of coaching staff with teams at a variety of levels, Jim recognized the importance of instilling a sense of discipline in his players and the longstanding impacts it can have on their lives outside of hockey. Specifically, Jim explained:

> I take pride in treating my players like young adults from day one. From the get-go, I prioritize structure, discipline, commitment, and how to properly treat each other. This is family-organization but there is no reason for us to behave like a dysfunctional family.

Efforts by coaches like Jim do not go unnoticed. As Steve remarked, "Whether the organization did this on purpose, or it was just a coincidence based on coaching assignments, it was nice to have another adult voice in my son's life preaching the importance of discipline and commitment." Steve also added, "When you get to bantam or midget age hockey, it can be hell because you never know whose head is going to be in the game that night. It was nice not to worry about that for a couple seasons."

Indeed, discipline is essential to athletes having positive training experiences and ultimately being successful. Additionally, maintaining a sense of discipline and accountability throughout a sport organization is essential to it being perceived as credible. As Peter discussed, discipline and accountability are critical to achieving sustainable success for both young athletes and their organization:

> If you're going to build a sustainable program, I'm a big believer in that you got to do right thing. Doing the right things needs to be the foundation. By that I mean you got to be focused on real development and real accountability. Everybody from the top management down to the athletes has to come in and work hard every day. It should be clear that if you want to be part of the program in any capacity there are specific expectations you must meet and if you don't you will be removed. To me, this is the type of full-scale discipline doesn't exist anymore in sport programs and if I'm being honest, it's the thing a lot of these kids are missing.

In closing, the mixed perceptions regarding True Hockey's legitimacy by key stakeholders provides further indication that attaining legitimacy is a continuous process for a new organization (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Indeed, True Hockey has been in business for almost 20 years and is a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada, yet True Hockey's key actors have and continue to employ a variety of mechanisms to ensure that the organization attains and maintains legitimacy. Therefore, the case of True Hockey highlights how the perceived legitimacy of an organization is an indication of the likelihood that the organization will experience long-term success. As noted at the outset of this chapter, failure to attain legitimacy will ultimately result in the demise of the organization.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Practical Implications, and Future Research Considerations

The purpose of this doctoral study was to provide a better understanding of the mechanisms that new youth sport organizations use to successfully legitimize and maintain their operations within a highly institutionalized sport system. Specifically, the evolution of True Hockey offers key insights into how a new CSO transitions from start-up organization to legitimate venture within the highly restrictive and regulated Canadian hockey community. By drawing from the details of True Hockey's evolution this chapter offers insights into the essential elements and types of legitimacy needed to launch a new CSO as well as the process of institutionalization for a new sport organization. Each of these areas of focus are detailed in the following sections.

Essential Elements Needed to Launch a New Youth Hockey Organization

Essential to understanding how legitimization takes place within a new sport organization was documenting the reasons why the organization was created and the resources that were necessary to ensure a successful launch. In most contexts entrepreneurs can fill unmet needs, however, doing so within an institutionalized sport system has been difficult. Operational costs, lack of funding, and legitimacy concerns have acted as significant barriers to entrepreneurs interested in entering the sport system with their own unique operations (Misener & Doherty, 2013; Legg et al., 2016; Slack & Parent, 2006). As the sport opportunities delivered by CSOs remain a significant contributor to children's development and wellbeing, there is a need to ensure that as many participants as possible experience sport in a positive manner. One way of doing so is ensuring that a diverse range of opportunities exist to meet various needs. Therefore, in order to contribute to the enhancement of youth sport experiences, investigating how a newly

established CSO has successfully launched and maintained operations to challenge the traditional delivery of sport in its field was timely and necessary.

In the case of True Hockey, the successful launch of the organization and navigation through the Building Phase was attributed to four actions: assessing community needs, acquiring resources, good fortune, and hiring experts. Specifically, True Hockey was created to service a void of multi-purpose sport facilities within their community. However, within two years of existence the founders of True Hockey recognized that the community would be better served by the organization transitioning to becoming an arena operator and hockey program provider due to a local ice time shortage. Due to some good fortune during the construction process, True Hockey's facility was equipped with capabilities to make and retain ice; thus, the organizations transition to becoming an ice-hockey provider was simplified. Furthermore, access to substantial financial resources allowed True Hockey to enter Southern Ontario's highly restrictive and competitive minor hockey market through facility construction and instilling programming that traditional minor hockey organizations cannot offer. Consistent with other successful start-ups, True Hockey relied on the guidance of experts to navigate its early years of existence. Particularly, True Hockey has relied on leaders who are experts in navigating the often-complicated field of minor hockey and facility management to nurture its evolution.

The elements that make up the Building Phase of True Hockey's evolution are indeed reflective of those necessary in establishing a self-sufficient organization. From the beginning, the ability of True Hockey's founders to identify a community need and institute a plan to serve the need themselves is reflective of the catalytic conditions necessary for a successful attempt at institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al. 2009; Bourdieu, 1977; Lawrence, 1999; Maguire et al., 2004; Meyer et al., 1990). By following these entrepreneurial efforts with the acquisition and

construction of material resources (i.e., facilities) as well as the hiring of expert human capital, True Hockey was set up to be a self-sustaining CSO. Self-sustainability is rare for any type of organization (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978); however, within sport the issues surrounding resource-dependency relationships between organizations are often magnified. Specifically, the resource dependent relationship between NSOs, PSOs, and CSOs have been noted to have significant implications for financial support, decision-making, and program offerings within the various types of sport organizations (i.e., Slack & Hinings, 1992; Legg et al., 2016; Vos et al., 2011). Indeed, it was the financial resources accessible to True Hockey's founders, that allowed the organization to break from the resource-dependency that often limits the capacity and capabilities of other amateur sport organizations.

Due to the actions undertaken by True Hockey's founders during the Building Phase, the organization was equipped with a sustainable competitive advantage within a highly competitive and restrictive field from its inception. In particular, owning and operating a facility is a significant advantage for any type of sport organization – especially, at the community sport level. Facility ownership allows an organization to have significant control of scheduling, program offering, and registration fees (Garbutt, 2018; Walsh, 2019). These particular advantages of facility ownership were later leveraged by True Hockey in order to shapes its athlete development philosophy and distinguish itself from competing organizations in its field. Due to this study offering a longitudinal view of True Hockey's evolution, the competitive advantages that the organization relies on during a particular moment in time (i.e., later phase of evolution) can be connected back to a particular event or advantage established during the early days of the organization. Thus, the choices that founders make during the beginning stages of

forming an organization have longstanding implications for its ability sustain competitive advantages and survive within its field.

In addition to establishing a sustainable competitive advantage, the Building Phase also saw True Hockey's founders establish the foundation necessary for the organization to achieve legitimacy. Specifically, the process of attaining legitimacy requires the recognition of organizational needs and either assigning or acquiring the appropriate human capital that can help address the need through the acquisition of resources (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Failure to acquire or retain the necessary organizational actors to address organizational needs will be detrimental to the survival of the organization (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995; Tolbert, 1985). Consistent with the work of organizational behaviourists (i.e., Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995; Tolbert, 1985; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002), True Hockey's founders sought to hire individuals with significant experience in operating facilities as well as designing and implementing youth hockey programming early in the organization's history. Interestingly, start-ups in many other industries seek to hire experts with significant social clout in order to bring instantaneous legitimacy to the new organization (Cliff et al., 2006; Leiter, 2005; Maguire et al., 2004). In the case of True Hockey, the individuals who were hired during the Building Phase were selected due to their institutional knowledge of the Canadian hockey industry rather than their social clout. This action by True Hockey founders provides indication that organizational actors must be equipped with significant levels of institutional knowledge regarding the organizational field for a start-up venture to achieve legitimacy in the shadow of a dominant organization.

Furthermore, this longitudinal view of True Hockey offers insights as to how the reliance on specific resources changes as the organization progressives towards legitimacy. For example, True Hockey was able to enter the Canadian hockey system without any consumer support. In

most other industries, start-up ventures have required a level of public support (e.g., evidence of sales) in order to be launched successfully. True Hockey was able to enter the hockey system as a facility operator and transitioned into program provider. This approach allowed True Hockey to experiment with program offerings in order build a following of consumers because it was known that any unfilled ice-time could be sold to other community groups due to the local facility shortage. Indeed, the challenges that entrepreneurs face entering the sport system have been well documented throughout this report; however, obtaining material and leveraging resources (i.e., facilities, equipment) that are in short supply may allow for easy entry into a sport system regardless of its level of restrictiveness. As True Hockey progressed out of the Building Phase, attracting and retaining athletes – especially, those with elite skills – became essential to the organization's pursuit of legitimacy. These transitions in level of importance for resources re-iterates position that the pursuit of legitimacy is an endless process of attainment and maintenance (Deeds et al., 1997; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002).

Institutionalizing a New Youth Hockey Organization within its Field

In order for an organization to be considered mature or legitimate they must go through an institutionalization process which requires ongoing maintenance (Scott, 2014). To date, the pursuit of legitimacy has been both a focal point of sport management research (e.g., Nite & Hutchinson, 2018; Sam & Tore Ronglan, 2018; Sant & Mason, 2019; Stenling & Sam, 2017; Strittmatter et al., 2018) and has been included within other sport management institutional research (e.g., Edwards & Washington, 2015; Hemme & Morais, 2021; Huml et al., 2018; Li et al., 2020). However, much of the existing work on legitimacy involves the retrospective analysis of organizations whose success indicates that institutionalization has been completed. Furthermore, much of the existing research regarding the pursuit of legitimacy focuses on the

largest or most dominant organizations in a particular field; thus, the need for establishing a greater understanding of the highly strategic and unique institutionalization processes of small, unconventionally operated organizations (e.g., CSOs) has gone underserved (Deeds et al., 1997; Scott, 2014; Washington & Patterson, 2011; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Through the investigation of how True Hockey became institutionalized within a highly-restrictive sport system, this study directly contributes to closing the gap in understanding the importance of legitimacy to new ventures.

Over the course of the institutionalization process, organizations are likely to be called to flexibly adapt their structures and processes in order to reflect the constantly evolving interests of stakeholders and achieve longevity (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Nite et al., 2019; O'Brien & Slack, 2003). Organizational theorists have long considered that organizations evolve through a life cycle (Downs, 1967; Dodge et al., 1994; Hanks, 1990; Lester et al., 2003; Penrose; 1952; Quinn & Cameron, 1983.) In the case of True Hockey, institutionalization took place over four distinct phases: Building, Growth, Competition, and Stabilization. Each phase that True Hockey has passed through during the institutionalization process shares similarities with the stages of the organizational life cycle (i.e., Existence, Survival, Success, Renewal, Decline) that were identified by Lester and colleagues (2003).

Specifically, the stage of Existence shares similarities to True Hockey's Building Phase as both are characterized by the entrepreneurial nature and actions of key organizational actors. During the Building Phase, True Hockey's founders made decisions and instituted mechanisms in a hands-on fashion in order to personally secure the organization's survival in its early years. The behaviour of True Hockey's founders is consistent with the stage of Existence where key actors are solely focused on ensuring the viability of the organization (Lester et al., 2003). The

Growth and Competition Phases that True Hockey experienced are similar to the Survival stage of the organizational life cycle because both are defined by the organization's key actors constantly pursuing growth by establishing distinctive competencies (Downs, 1967; Miller & Friesen, 1984). During the Growth and Competition Phase, True Hockey sought to establish itself as a viable alternative to Hockey Canada programming by instituting programming that prioritized individual skill development, safety, and limited participation restrictions (i.e., residency rules). Lastly, True Hockey's Stabilization Phase is reflective of the Success stage in the organizational lifecycle. The Success Stage sees organizations who have passed the survival test and have grown to a point where managers shift their focus to protect their gains through the installation of bureaucratic processes that formalize organizational control (Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Lester et al., 2003). True Hockey seeking and ultimately securing Hockey Canada sanctioning aligns with the expected behaviour of organizations in the Success stage. As many True Hockey staff members noted, the decision to join Hockey Canada solidified the organization because it formalized their programming in terms of communication, competition, scheduling, and skill development; thus, better aligning with the expectations of hockey parents within the surrounding community. For this study, True Hockey showed no signs of entering the fourth (i.e., Renewal) or fifth (i.e., Decline) stages of the organizational lifecycle which are respectively comprised of an organization focused on innovating its key competencies or addressing the potential termination of the business (Lester et al., 2003).

By its progression to the Success stage of the organizational life cycle, True Hockey has evolved further than expected for start-up businesses. Lester et al. (2003) explained that start-up and small businesses rarely progress beyond the stage of Survival and are constantly forced to return to the stage of Existence to ensure viability. True Hockey's successful evolution from

start-up facility operator to viable minor hockey organization can be attested to managers' successful navigation of the surrounding external environment. Indeed, Southern Ontario is a hockey hotbed where ice-time is sold at a premium and advanced skill development programming is in high demand (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Fitz-Gerald, 2019); however, the restrictive nature of the Canadian sport system has ultimately allowed True Hockey to maintain its success. The establishment of new youth sport organizations is rare due to the strict rules, regulations, and boundaries enforced by powerful NSOs and P/TSOs (Kikulis, 2000). Therefore, as described in the previous chapter by a regional minor hockey executive, a NSO (i.e., Hockey Canada) will make a conscious effort to work with any start-up youth sport organization (i.e., True Hockey) that demonstrates an ongoing successful approach to programming.

By formally becoming a sanctioned member of the Canadian hockey system, True Hockey is insulated from many of the environmental pressures that inhibit an organization's progression through the organizational life cycle or ultimately cause the business to be terminated. Specifically, the top-down approach to governance in the sport system limits competition amongst members for resources and consumers as well as enhances uniformity of service delivery and communication (Harvey, 2015; Sharpe, 2006). As noted by several True Hockey stakeholders, these practices act as safeguards preventing CSOs from going out of business despite a lack of expertise in leadership or willingness to innovate operations or program offerings. For non-sport businesses, progressing through the organizational life cycle stages to achieve success requires an organization to consistently address variables influencing its strategy and structure (Hanks, 1990). True Hockey is in the unique circumstance of having found the ability to establish itself as a viable minor hockey organization and maintain its independence while also satisfying the demands of a dominant governing body. Understanding

how entrepreneurial ventures like True Hockey progress through their organizational life cycle offers insights for those in management positions within youth sport on how to successfully challenge and debate past ways of doing things in order to create the best possible sport experiences (Snelgrove & Wigfield 2019).

True Hockey's institutionalization process was dominated by invoking institutional work mechanisms that are consistent with successful efforts to disrupt, transform, and/or create institutions. First, True Hockey's founders were able to present and construct an alternative delivery of minor hockey programming in their community. As noted by True Hockey's executives, the vision for the organization was to offer programming that focused less on competition and more on the individual skill development of all players while being more accommodating to the demands of family schedules. This new vision for hockey programming was successfully launched due to the mobilization of key resources (i.e., capital) and expert managerial staff. Together, creating a vision for divergent change in a field *and* mobilizing allies to enact the wanted vision is reflective of a desired outcome for institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009; Fligstein, 1997; Greenwood et al., 2002; Rao et al., 2000). Stated simply, securing the appropriate resources and people to support a vision for change creates a strong institutional foundation in which maintenance work can be performed. Specifically, institutions can be maintained from internal and external threats by learning to control key structures: boundaries, practices, and cognitions (Battilana et al., 2009; Currie et al., 2012; Nite et al., 2019; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

The most effective work done by institutional actors comes from manipulating the boundaries of an institution (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). A boundary is conceptualized as a distinction that establishes categories of objects, people, or activities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002).

The boundary work conducted by True Hockey actors mainly focused on people. Specifically, throughout each phase of the organization's evolution, a primary focus for True Hockey staff was building membership in the form of individual athletes and clubs around southern Ontario. In any industry, the viability of a business is directly linked to identifying and retaining a sufficient number of customers to support the existence of the business (Lester et al., 2003). In youth sport, securing and retaining participants is amplified due to the significant costs that organizations incur to operate programming. This is especially true in hockey where steadily rising operating costs and a shrinking participation pool have significantly challenged minor hockey organizations' ability to break even (Campbell & Parcel, 2013; Fitz-Gerald, 2019). Therefore, the consistent focus of manipulating True Hockey's boundaries by building its membership base within each phase of its evolution was both a matter of institutionalization and survival.

Interestingly, the nature in which True Hockey pursued membership building changed as the organization progressed through the institutionalization process. Within True Hockey's early years, actors focused on mass membership building; however, as the organization shifted to the Growth, Competition and Stabilization phases of evolution the focus of membership recruitment narrowed to aggressively pursue elite athletes to ensure that True Hockey's resources (i.e., facilities) saw maximum usage. This was demonstrated by partnering with prominent members of the hockey community (i.e., skill coaches, independent hockey operators, prep school) to expand the organization's programming portfolio. These tactics were noted as being essential to allowing the organization to overcome a lack of nostalgia and tradition within the field. In addition, the recent consolidation of programming between True Hockey and a neighbouring program further expands the organization's potential participant pool which will ultimately

extend its operating longevity within a cluttered marketplace. Together, the boundary work conducted by True Hockey is similar to work (i.e., building membership structures, encompassing rival organizations, and adjusting internal structures) conducted by actors within the NCAA as it evolved to become the dominant institution within the field of intercollegiate athletics (Nite et al., 2019).

The boundary work conducted by actors within True Hockey was supported by mechanisms that shaped the organization's practices to ensure environmental and institutional pressures were addressed. Furthermore, practices are often deemed defining features of groups because they define correct behaviour or routines for members while also supporting and reinforcing boundaries (Barnes, 2001; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Central to True Hockey's institutionalization process was establishing a novel athlete development philosophy in order to standout against the dominant organization within the field. As True Hockey matured a key practice for True Hockey staff was to listen to stakeholder feedback and refine the athlete development philosophy to be reflective of participant needs and demands. Ultimately, True Hockey's athlete development philosophy was built to reflect the organization's core beliefs in delivering youth programming. Specifically, youth hockey programming should be able to be delivered free of internal organizational politics (i.e., team selection biases) with a family-friendly scheduling and for an all-in-one price that emphasizes individual skill development. True Hockey's staff were able to aggressively push the distinguishing features of their development model to recruit many athletes away from Hockey Canada programming.

Despite the success and appeal of its own athlete development philosophy, True Hockey relied heavily on mimicry in order to compliment the constant pursuit of growing membership. This is reflected in the Competition Phase when True Hockey executive began pursuing

sanctioning from a governing body in order to quell parental concerns around enrolling their child(ren) in an unsanctioned hockey program. After briefly being a member of the AAU, this pursuit ultimately culminated in accepting a membership offer from Hockey Canada in 2018. Becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada caused True Hockey to lose much of its identity as an independent hockey programming provider because it now must take programming cues from the national governing body; however, the organization has worked to ensure that sanctioning has had a limited impact on other key organizational features like all-in-one pricing, team management, and scheduling strategies. Furthermore, since prep hockey remains a grey area under Hockey Canada jurisdiction, True Hockey regularly looks for ways to leverage its prep hockey portfolio to ensure that it continues challenging the traditional way in which hockey players develop. Interestingly, while True Hockey may have lost much of its identity by having its practices drastically altered by pursuing sanctioning it also created the opportunity to consolidate programming with a neighbouring organization. The consolidation agreement which is vital to True Hockey's long-term stability would not have been possible without adopting Hockey Canada practices. Based on the practice work undertaken by True Hockey actors during the institutionalization process, in addition to defining organization expectations, practices are essential to establishing and maintaining the identity of an institution while also contributing to its survival. Thus, the complimentary relationship between boundary work and practice work is essential to establishing institutional stability (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

The success of the boundary and practice work conducted by True Hockey's actors was directly linked to the organization's ability to control cognitions. Message framing is noted as an integral part of institutional maintenance and change (Micelotta & Washington, 2013; Nite, 2017; Trank & Washington, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). Specifically, framing can be a

mechanism for persuading opinions, embedding norms, and constructing reality (Knight, 1999; Lim & Jones, 2010; Payne, 2001). In the case of True Hockey message framing took on two forms: defence and promotion. At the height of True Hockey's success as an independent hockey organization (i.e., Competition Phase) an essential maintenance mechanism for actors was defending the organization against Hockey Canada policies and marketing ploys from local rival organizations designed to deter parents from registering their children with independent hockey organizations. As a number of intuitionalists have noted (Agyemang et al., 2018; Nite et al., 2019; Phillips et al., 2004), institutional actors are often called to address tension between dominant and rival logics within a field. In cases of tension between rival and dominant logics, institutional entrepreneurs may work to reframe the rival logic to be consistent with the dominant logic (Nite et al., 2013).

True Hockey's actors refused to align their messaging with that of the dominant organizations in their field. Instead, True Hockey's actors invested time and resources educating potential participants about the benefits of the organization (i.e., pricing, scheduling, and team management) and legitimacy of independent hockey (i.e., safety, insurance coverage). Ultimately, this approach to message framing was successful as it allowed True Hockey actors to convince many dissatisfied stakeholders of the dominant organizations to register for True Hockey's program offerings. Nite's (2017) work emphasizes that this approach to message framing only works if the organization is engrained in the top position within its field. The success of True Hockey's actors employing this message framing tactic indicates that stakeholders of youth sport are indeed receptive of longstanding intuitions foregoing stability in an effort to implement changes that enhance participant experiences. After receiving Hockey Canada sanctioning, True Hockey's message framing changed to reflect traditional promotional

material. Specifically, True Hockey actors now seek to validate the programs that the organization offers by consistently highlighting stakeholder accomplishments. This form of message framing is reflective of valorizing and mythologizing which are common institutional maintenance mechanisms employed in sport organizations in order to ensure specific attributes or practices are normalized (Riehl et al., 2019). Within the cluttered Southern Ontario hockey market, ensuring that an organization's successes are constantly reported, and standout are essential to program longevity (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Fitz-Gerald, 2019).

It is important to note that the institutionalization process and associated institutional work that has been conducted by True Hockey actors took place against the backdrop of resistance mechanisms employed by Hockey Canada and its member organizations. Similar to the NCAA (Nite, 2017), Hockey Canada also significantly relies on message framing in its effort to maintain its institutional dominance. Specifically, Hockey Canada annually distributes an information bulletin to all members in order to dissuade them from engaging with independent hockey operations (see Appendix G). The information bulletin is comprised of three message framing strategies. First, Hockey Canada labels independent hockey operations as outlaws and challenges the safety, insurance coverage, and skill development opportunities they offer to delegitimize opposing operations (e.g., True Hockey). Second, Hockey Canada defends its own legitimacy by outlining the importance of developing athletes through programming that aligns with the LTAD as well as highlighting its record in developing elite athletes, coaches, and hosting key competitions. Lastly, Hockey Canada reminds members that it is the premier organization for hockey programming by touting expertise in delivering hockey programming and reclaiming its mission of bettering the delivery of the sport across the country.

In addition to message framing, Hockey Canada also relies on enabling work to deter challenges from independent hockey operations. Enabling work is commonly used by sport governing bodies to maintain their institutions through localized member organizations by instituting constitutive rules that provide legitimacy and promotion of a sport (Riehl et al., 2019). In case of Hockey Canada, a key constitutive rule is the banning of any type of member (i.e., organization, team, player, coach, referee) from simultaneously participating or engaging with independent hockey organizations. If violated, the member faces significant discipline in the form of a prolonged suspension (i.e., one season) and/or fine (Campbell, 2019). True Hockey staff noted that the significant penalties associated with this constitutive rule was commonly cited as a deterrent for stakeholders from joining their organization. Furthermore, Hockey Canada's entrenchment as the leader in amateur hockey programming has resulted in its practices and routines to become embedded within the Canadian hockey community. Consistent with other longstanding sport organizations (i.e., NCAA, International Olympic Committee) who have faced ample amounts of criticism regarding their practices, Hockey Canada has invoked resistance mechanisms that reinforce its stability as an institution and enhances the challenges competing organizations must overcome in order to survive in the field. This is best displayed by the fact that even though Competition Bureau Canada ordered Hockey Canada to alter how it interacts with independent hockey operations (see Appendix F), Hockey Canada has been able to maintain its dominant position with few challenges.

Interestingly, some of the most impactful forms of resistance that True Hockey faced was implemented by neighbouring organizations within its own constituency. In particular, the enabling work that took place within True Hockey's constituency went well beyond maintaining Hockey Canada policies. One neighbouring rival organization (i.e., Sharks) are known within the

local hockey community to have blacklisted players and coaches who pursued opportunities with True Hockey. This has made it extremely difficult for those players and coaches to join some of the region's most elite teams which the Sharks organization operate; thus, few elite level players and coaches have joined True Hockey. The same organization has also mimicked program offerings and pricing structures in order to limit any competitive advantage True Hockey may hold. The resistance mechanisms enacted by the Sharks organization provide further evidence that participants – in particular, highly skilled participants – are indeed the key source of legitimacy for amateur sport organizations. The actions of people within an organization are central to perceptions of legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011; Lock et al., 2015). Furthermore, human capital has long been described as a resource linked to sustained competitive advantages (Barney, 1991; Mahoney & Pandian, 1992). Therefore, as Hyman (2009) described youth sport organizations who routinely develop elite athletes and showcase dominance in competition can develop cultural significance within their field which translates to a sustainable competitive advantage over rival clubs because they are often the first choice for any potential registrants. Like other industries, maintaining the position as the premier choice for consumers must be done at all costs.

For True Hockey executives and staff, the institutionalization process was deemed complete when the decision was made to abandon its success as an independent minor hockey organization to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada. It is important to note that this decision was not a result of forceful defensive actions by the dominant governing body. As described above, the resistance mechanisms employed by Hockey Canada consisted of a single memo and policy deterring interactions with independent hockey organization. Comparably, the NCAA invoked aggressive boundary, practice, and cognition work through its

institutionalization process (Nite, 2017; Nite et al., 2019). Specifically, the NCAA regularly pursued rival organizations to absorb their membership – especially, for basketball - while also regularly altering their gameplay and competition practices to ensure that they offered the most enticing place for college-aged amateur athletes to pursue their sports (Nite et al., 2019). Furthermore, any competing organization or criticism of the NCAA is met with a three-pronged message framing response that attacks the viability and legitimacy of the offending party while also positioning the NCAA as a premier institution in its field (Nite, 2017). Impressively, the embedded nature of Hockey Canada's logics throughout the hockey community provides the organization an institutional presence that cannot be overcome. Indeed, True Hockey showcased that with key resources (i.e., capital, facility access) and innovative program design an independent hockey organization can compete with Hockey Canada's dominance. Ultimately, key stakeholder (i.e., parents, coaches) judge the legitimacy of a minor hockey organization by the success of the athlete-development opportunities provided by the organization which is an area in which Hockey Canada is unmatched. Therefore, becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada was essential to the credability and long-term stability of True Hockey.

This study offers insight into the factors influencing managers of independent sport organizations decisions to join a governing association. Displaying the ability to adjust key organizational practices, structures, and policies according to institutional pressures being faced contributes to an organization's ability to successfully progress through the institutionalization process (Lok & de Rond, 2013; Nite et al., 2019; O'Brien & Slack, 2003). However, in the context of sport joining a governing association can propel an independent organization to a level of legitimacy and longevity that would be difficult to obtain otherwise. As highlighted by the evolution of True Hockey, pursuing legitimacy by joining a governing association causes some

key drawbacks that should be considered by future managers faced with a similar decision. Specifically, independently operated organizations forgo any operational flexibility and competitive advantages they may hold as members of governing associations are often required to be structured uniformly (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003; Harvey, 2015). Furthermore, True Hockey's actors' pursuit of legitimacy provides further confirmation that sport organizations - regardless of size or structure - face similar institutional pressures to those outside the sport domain (Washington & Patterson, 2011). In this case study, institutional work mechanisms were commonly reused with different purposes (e.g., message framing) to overcome various pressures. This aligns with amateur sport organizations being characterized as highly unique and strategic in order to stretch resource usage as far as possible (Washington & Patterson, 2011; Wolfe et al., 2004). Unlike other industries, sport does not offer a straightforward pursuit of legitimacy where securing essential material resources, legal status, or cultural significance will result in attaining legitimacy (Leiter, 2005). Instead, sport managers must often consider trading organizational control for legitimacy.

Perceptions of Legitimacy by Key CSO Stakeholders

Legitimacy is described as an essential asset for an organization's economic viability and overall survival (Bitektine & Haack, 2015; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Haveman & David, 2017; Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995). Despite the imperative nature of achieving legitimacy for an organization, the concept should not be thought of as dichotomous (Deeds et al, 1997). Instead, legitimacy should be viewed as a continuous variable that ranges in value based on the strategic actions of those pursuing and maintaining the legitimacy (Deeds et al., 1997; Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Specifically, organizational legitimacy originates from the idea that there is social acceptance of an organization's actions and/or managerial decisions to meet stakeholders' goals

(Edwards & Washington, 2015; Lehtonen, 2017; Lock et al., 2015; Phelps & Dickson, 2009; Sam, 2011). Therefore, multiple types of legitimacy can exist and be pursued simultaneously within an organization as it and its stakeholders' demands evolve (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). Within the context of sport, there remains a limited understanding of how novel organizations gain the social acceptance necessary to penetrate close sport systems or marketplaces (Edwards & Washington, 2015; Washington & Edwards, 2016). Thus, key insights for sport management literature can be derived from understanding how the stakeholders of organizations who have penetrated a closed sport system (i.e., True Hockey) perceive legitimacy.

Similar to other novel start-up organizations, True Hockey's evolution was marked by the pursuit of several types of legitimacy (Zimmerman & Zeitz, 2002). The early days of the organization (i.e., Building Phase) were characterized by the pursuit of consequential legitimacy. Consistent with Lock and colleague's (2015) work, True Hockey's founders sought to attain legitimacy by servicing a need within their community. First as a roller hockey facility and then as an arena, True Hockey goals was to provide their constituency with facilities that allowed local athletes to conveniently pursue their recreational interests without having to travel to neighbouring communities. As True Hockey transitioned from a facility operator to hockey program provider (i.e., Growth and Competition Phase), organizational executives became focused on attracting and retaining athletes – especially, those with elite skills. Within the hyper competitive Southern Ontario hockey market, key stakeholders (i.e., parents, coaches, players) regularly evaluate organizations based on the success of teams and individual players (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Fitz-Gerald, 2019). Thus, during this period True Hockey executives instituted mechanisms and practices reflective of an organization pursuing technical legitimacy (Bitektine, 2011). Specifically, True Hockey relied on highlighting the benefits of its alternative approach

athlete development and its partnership with other independent hockey providers and trainers to the local community. Interestingly, pursuing technical legitimacy did not significantly enhance the number of elite players who joined True Hockey programming like the organization's key decision makers had hoped. During the Competition Phase, it became apparent that due to Hockey Canada's dominance in the field, legitimacy and long-term stability could only be achieved by establishing a positive relationship with the national governing body. Therefore, True Hockey executives made the difficult decision of abandoning the organization's success as an independent hockey operator in order to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada in 2018 (i.e., Stabilization Phase). Ultimately, the pursuit of multiple forms of legitimacy (i.e., consequential, technical, linkage) were required for True Hockey to obtain social acceptance as a credible minor hockey program within the Canadian hockey community.

Indeed, becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada was critical to True Hockey's perceived legitimacy and overall sustainability of the organization. However, the perceptions of both parents and coaches from within True Hockey suggest that the organization's legitimacy is still evolving. Specifically, many of True Hockey's key stakeholder's (i.e., parents and coaches) were critical of the organization for not having or failing to retain the specialized individuals necessary to consistently deliver the premium program experiences it advertises. In particular, key stakeholders suggested that program co-ordinators and staff who were knowledgeable about athlete development systems, equitable, well-organized, and easily accessible would heighten the perceived legitimacy of the organization. Additionally, coaches who could expertly enhance individual athlete skills while providing enjoyable off-ice team experiences were highlighted as essential assets for attaining and retaining legitimacy. The perceptions of legitimacy provided by True Hockey's key stakeholders indicate that gaining entry to Hockey Canada's highly

restrictive development system did not mark the end of True Hockey's legitimization process. Instead, this key point in the organization's history triggered a shift to focus on attaining managerial, procedural, and technical legitimacy in order to further strengthen stakeholders' perceptions of True Hockey's legitimacy (Lock et al., 2015). Continuing to work to enhance the organization's perceived legitimacy is essential in order for True Hockey's key actors to achieve their ultimate goal of being the host organization of their constituency's most talented hockey players.

Traditionally, the perceived legitimacy of organizations within the Canadian sport system have been shaped by strict adherence to normative and regulative foundations that have been established by dominant NSOs and P/TSOs (Donnelly & Kidd, 2003; Harvey, 2015). Recent research (e.g.., Legg et al., 2016; Riehl et al., 2019) highlights the under reported significance that the cultural-cognitive influences have had on shaping Canadian sport opportunities. The case of True Hockey reveals that new CSOs derive legitimacy from blending the regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive pillars of institutions (Haveman & David, 2017, Scott, 2014; Suchman, 1995). As displayed by True Hockey's executives and staff, internal perceptions of legitimacy were shaped by a consistent pursuit of aligning the organization with the normative and regulative foundations of the Canadian hockey system. Indeed, True Hockey displayed that the foundations of the sport system can be challenged with novel offerings and practices; however, conforming to the dominant practices and regulations within the field is ultimately necessary to ensure the organization's long-term sustainability. Thus, a new CSO can attain legitimacy within a closed system or restrictive marketplace through the establishment of associations and partnerships with dominant organizations (i.e., linkage legitimacy).

As explained by Deed and colleagues (1997), legitimacy work is never complete because in order to retain any gains in perceived legitimacy it must continue to evolve with the demands of consumers and organizational field. True Hockey's key external stakeholders (i.e., parents and coaches) perceived the organization's legitimacy through the evaluations of the individuals (i.e., managers, program co-ordinators, executives) who acted as faces of the organization. Thus, the retainment and enhancement of a CSO's perceived legitimacy is accomplished through the adoption of elements reflective of the cultural-cognitive pillar. Specifically, the effectiveness and efficiency in which a CSO's staff can consistently deliver its programming to constituents should be prioritized (i.e., managerial, technical, and procedural legitimacy). Interestingly, throughout the legitimization process, True Hockey executives have routinely prioritized the recruitment and retainment of elite athletes to act as faces of the organization. Despite the uniformity within the Canadian hockey system, a key mark of an organization's legitimacy is its ability to advance athletes to higher levels of competition (Edwards & Washington, 2015). Here, and in all cases of an organization establishing legitimacy, management must convince stakeholders of the value, and appropriateness of the organization (Golant & Sillince, 2007; Suddaby & Greenwood 2005) to meet consumers' expectations, in light of competitive offerings. Therefore, maximizing the number of elite athletes an organization hosts can inflate perceptions of legitimacy amongst potential participants and trigger a constant flow of new registrants which would greatly enhance the organization's pool of resources (Hyman, 2009). The perceptions of True Hockey's parents and coaches suggest that the consistent recruitment of elite athletes can only be accomplished if managerial, technical, and procedural legitimacy are achieved.

Usefulness of Institutional Theory in Understanding an Organizations Evolution

Indeed, True Hockey is a unique case within the Canadian sport system where

investigating its development has offered insights into how an organization develops within an institution. Specifically, this case highlighted a heightened reliance on making decisions to employ institutional work mechanisms and acquire resources that allowed True Hockey to directly oppose threats from both Hockey Canada and neighbouring minor hockey organizations. Additionally, this case also highlighted the importance of borrowing or mimicking successful practices from competitors to ensure that stakeholders are satisfied. The institutional work perspective and resource-based theory offered an appropriate lens to understand the build-up of these actions as well as their consequences; however, the focus on the choices and behaviours of actors within True Hockey limited the understanding of how other dominating social structures impact the development of an organization.

Application of institutional theory - in particular, the institutional work perspective – has been criticized for privileging agentic power over hegemonic power in the analysis of organizations (Munir, 2019). Thus, organizational actors are often characterized as novel, catch-all beings responsible for creating, changing, and stabilizing the organization (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Munir, 2019; Suddaby, 2010). Furthermore, focusing on the agency and behaviours of organizational actors has limited the understanding of how end-users or clients of an organization contribute to its evolution (Munir, 2019). In the case of True Hockey, the executives of the organization gave up years of success offering independent hockey because it was deemed that its most-preferred clients (i.e., highly skilled athletes) wanted their organizations to be accredited by Hockey Canada. In a broader sense, focusing on agentic power has limited the understanding of the impacts of larger dominating social structures on organizations in favour of strong understandings of how small problems are managed within an organization (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Munir, 2019).

Going forward, authors who have been critical of institutional theory (e.g., Alvesson et al., 2019; Bouilloud et al., 2020; Munir, 2019; Ocasio & Gai, 2020), recommend that those studying organizations incorporate theoretical perspectives that capture the implications of dominating social structures on the shaping of organizations. Specifically, Munir (2019) calls institutional researchers to avoid the continued reification and legitimation of structures of domination in their analyses; thus, an opportunity exists to increase the application of critical theoretical perspectives in institutional research. Furthermore, Bouilloud and colleagues (2020) presented the value of employing the perspective of institutional analysis because it considers institutions be a locus of tension between the instituted (i.e., phase of stability) and instituting (i.e., forces informing the institution) rather than the inherently stable image that is commonly portrayed in institutional research. The perspective of institutional analysis causes researchers to rethink institutionalization by bringing to the forefront the influences of power and political engagement on the legitimization process (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Klein, 2014; Kokkindis, 2015). Sport may be the ideal context to pursue critical analyses of the evolution of organizations because sport is commonly noted for being at the forefront for engaging with important societal issues (Nite et al., 2019). Therefore, rather than borrowing organizational theories and applying them to a sport context (Washington & Patterson, 2011), sport management researchers have an opportunity to make a significant contribution to the advancement of institutional theory.

Advancing Theory Through Abductive Analysis

As suggest by Dubois and Gadde (2002, 2014), the theoretical contributions and practical implications from a case study can be maximized through abductive analysis because researchers are required to consistently move back and forth between deductive and inductive analysis in order to connect theory and data. Furthermore, abductive analysis requires the researcher to look

for anomalies in the data that can be inductively conceptualized; however, this should not take place until the researcher has exhausted applying a broad theoretical base to their analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). For this study, which was theoretically underpinned by institutional theory, resource dependency, and RBV, much of True Hockey's evolution was attributed to specific institutional work mechanisms and resource acquisitions. As noted by Timmermans and Tavory (2012), if the researcher is able to fully account for the phenomena through the use of existing theories, then the researcher has simply verified existing theories. Sport management researchers have been criticized for only extending the scope for the application of management theories (e.g., institutional theory) rather than advancing the theories through sport management research (Washington & Patterson, 2011).

Indeed, through the abductive analysis of True Hockey's evolution, this study has simply extended the application of institutional work, resource dependency, and RBV to the context of youth sport. Employing an abductive approach to analysis fails to enhance the narrow scope offered by the institutional work perspective (Bouilloud et al., 2020; Munir, 2019). By attempting to explain as much of the case (i.e., True Hockey) through its theoretical underpinnings, an abductive approach to analysis further privileges agentic power over hegemonic power in the analysis of organizations. As a result, the implication of other dominating social structures like power, and socio-economic status, and social networks as well as the influences of an organization's consumers on its evolution were understudied in this case. Applying a grounded theory approach could have resulted in an advancement of theories underpinning the study or inductive creation of a new theory. Specifically, the open nature of grounded theory allows from the data to dictate the analysis rather the researcher's preconceived notions embedded in theory (Charmaz, 2006). For this case, applying a grounded theory

approach to analysis could have better depicted the environment surrounding True Hockey; thus, offering greater insights into decision-making process of the key actors who were the focal point of the study.

Implications for Practice and Policy

This research investigates a rare case in which a minor hockey organization has been successful at overcoming barriers to operate independently from the Hockey Canada system for a period of time. Although most contexts are accepting of entrepreneurs looking to service unmet needs with their ventures, within the context of sport, highly institutionalized systems have consistently discouraged entrepreneurial pursuits. Historically, dominant sport organizations have mobilized ample resources (i.e., human capital, financial capital, and media influence) to contest and ultimately eliminate any threats to their position (Nite, 2017; Nite et al., 2019). As described in this study, Hockey Canada has traditionally invoked a policy that labels private entrepreneurial organizations as "outlaws" and prohibits participation to anyone associated with these rival organizations (Campbell, 2019; Garbutt, 2018). Furthermore, Hockey Canada has shown a tendency to adjust its organizational boundaries to absorb "outlaw" organizations and leagues (Garbutt, 2018; Kalchman, 2010). As a result of the defensive behaviour by dominant sport organizations, unrest is growing regarding the traditional delivery of sport not meeting specific programming needs (Legg et al., 2016; Riehl et al., 2019; Torres & Hager, 2007). Therefore, applying lessons from investigating a case like True Hockey, in which an organization has successfully challenged the highly restrictive nature of the Canadian sport system, is timely for the sport industry.

The case of True Hockey offers key insights regarding organizational formation and growth management for entrepreneurs within the context of community sport. Similar to start-up

organizations in other industries, the successful launch of True Hockey was attested to securing key industry resources. Specifically, True Hockey was able to secure significant financial capital through its founders and construct its own sports complex to ensure that its stakeholders had convenient access to a facility. Within the Canadian hockey industry, ice-time is a valued commodity that is sold at premium prices; thus, organizations who can successfully secure consistent and convenient ice-time for participants often standout amongst a cluttered marketplace (Campbell & Parcel, 2013; Fitz-Gerald, 2019; Washington & Edwards, 2016). This characteristic of the Canadian hockey industry is a reflection that interorganizational relationships within the context of sport – especially, those between governing bodies and member organizations - are often shaped by resource dependency (Slack & Hinings, 1992; Legg et al., 2016; Vos et al., 2011). Therefore, entrepreneurial ventures that showcase self-sufficiency are more likely to be able to successfully launch against the shadow of dominant organizations.

Securing essential material resources can only be transitioned to prolonged organizational success if it is accompanied with effective managerial support (Bitektine, 2011; Suchman, 1995; Tolbert, 1985). Unfortunately, many start-up amateur sport organizations have bypassed the need to establish effective management practices in favour of securing recognizable coaches and elite athletes within their programs. As a result, youth athlete development has become a cottage industry dominated by former professional athletes looking to regain prominence by developing the next superstar athlete (Campbell & Parcels, 2013; Hyman, 2009). Indeed, amateur sport organizations – especially, within hockey – are intensely evaluated on their ability successfully guide players through key transition points in their sport development pathways (Edwards & Washington, 2015); however, as described by the paying customers (i.e., parents) of True Hockey, consistently displaying astute managerial practices and understanding of athlete

development are focal points when deciding where to register their child to play. Furthermore, as highlighted in the details of True Hockey's evolution, organizational success resulted in its legitimacy being challenged by local competitors and governing bodies. Such challenges could only be navigated by individuals with institutional knowledge of the entire hockey industry who were eager to educate prospective participants on advancing through the athlete development system.

Additionally, the case of True Hockey offers highlights the importance of governing bodies and members of the sport system establishing working relationships with independently operated sport organizations. Since the 1980s the consistently increasing attrition rates of youth athletes has been a major concern for all amateur sport organizations (Crane & Temple, 2015; Torres & Hager, 2007). In most cases, young athletes either quit their sport participation due to a number of social, physical, or psychological reasons or they register to participate with unsanctioned clubs (Hyman, 2009); thus, not being counted when national governing bodies compile their reports on registrants. For example, there are upwards 20,000 youth playing in unsanctioned leagues across Ontario outside of the national governing body's purview (Fitz-Gerald, 2019).

As acknowledged by a Hockey Canada executive in this study, national governing bodies are inherently interested in working with private enterprises (e.g., True Hockey) who demonstrate success consistently attracting and retaining participants. It is important to emphasize the fact that it is possible for relationships between powerful governing bodies and private amateur sport enterprises to be functional rather than the common characterization of being combative. As displayed here, through annual meetings with Hockey Canada and the Ontario Hockey Federation they were able to maintain much of their program offerings and

unique style of delivery. Furthermore, the longevity and stability offered by dominant sport institutions, like Hockey Canada, remains unmatched (Nite et al, 2019; Washington & Patterson, 2011); therefore, establishing a working relationship with such organizations should be considered a sound business decision.

Together, private amateur sport organizations and governing bodies can repair a fractured sport system. As private sport enterprises continue to grow in both numbers and size it becomes inherently difficult for national governing bodies to institute changes focused on improving their respective sports (Fitz-Gerald, 2019). Assuredly, closed and highly restrictive sport systems have challenges in meeting the programming needs of all potential participants; however, as outlined in the LTAD such structures allow for an athlete-centered approach to development where stakeholder expectations are clear and attention safety is maximized (Canadian Sport Centres, 2005; Thibault & Babiak, 2015). Furthermore, a cohesive and connected sport system alleviates the influence of predatory entrepreneurs who have entered the marketplace. As noted above, youth athlete development has become flooded with entrepreneurs claiming they have the knowledge and programs to create the next star athlete. Unfortunately, a large number of the enterprises are driven by financial gains rather than servicing the interests of young athletes and their families (Campbell & Parcel, 2013). Ensuring that young athletes and their families do not get taken advantage of while pursuing their athletic ambitions is something that organizations like True Hockey or Hockey Canada can agree upon.

Limitations and Future Research

In closing, it is recognized that this study is not without limitations. As a case study, the findings and conclusions drawn from this investigation of the evolution of True Hockey are not generalizable across the sports world. This project sought to understand the unique case of True

Hockey and contribute – even in an incremental nature – to the advancement of theory. Through the analysis of True Hockey, the understanding of the factors that contribute to the stability of sport organizations was furthered. Too often, the stability of sport organizations is attributed to an adhered to strict norms and regulations. This study highlighted that despite their depicted stability, sport organizations are evolving daily as result of the strategic responses delivered by organizational actors to their surroundings. Consistent with the institutional work perspective, the mechanisms instituted by organizational actors are intentional and calculated. Interestingly, the case of True Hockey offers insights that suggest actors within amateur sport organizations may rely heavily on mechanisms that either borrow or mimic successful practices from competitors in order to ensure their own organization's stability. Indeed, the aforementioned insights are not widely generalizable; however, they are novel and grounded in institutional theory which has been shown to be applicable to a number of sport contexts. As noted above, the popularity of private amateur sport enterprises continues to grow across all sport contexts. In addition to hockey, sports such as basketball, baseball, and soccer are inundated with private enterprises offering training programs to youth athletes (Hyman, 2009). Future research could investigate other sporting contexts to determine whether private enterprises in those fields evolve through phases or the application of institutional work mechanisms that are similar to True Hockey. Establishing a greater understanding of how amateur sport organizations can progress through the organizational life cycle enhances the ability for sport managers to challenge the past way of doing things in order to create the best possible sport experiences going forward. Furthermore, a number of privately operated amateur sport organizations continue to maintain viability despite refusing membership or alignment with the dominant organizations in their field (e.g., Ontario Blue Jays Baseball Club, Orangeville Prep). Investigating the resources and

managerial processes that allow these types of organizations to survive is worthy exploration for future studies.

Future research could also consider further studying the types of legitimacy that are pursued by novel sport organizations looking to penetrate closed sport systems or restrictive marketplaces. Consistent with the work of Zimmerman and Zeitz (2002), True Hockey's pursued multiple types of legitimacy in order to reflect the evolution of its stakeholder demands. Analyzing the perceptions of legitimacy held by stakeholders of other sport contexts could offer critical insights towards expanding the Canadian sport system to ensure that it meet the needs of more participants. Moreover, this study offered details regarding the different institutional maintenance mechanisms deployed by dominant and novel institutions within an organizational field. Further analysis of how maintenance mechanisms differ in terms of deployment across various contexts could also contribute to enhancing the management of a sport system.

Lastly, organizational actors and consumers were a critical part of True Hockey's institutionalization efforts. Institutional work literature (e.g., Dacin & Dacin, 2008; Lawrence et al., 2013; Scott, 2014) have described the importance of internal actors (i.e., custodians) who are relied upon to fix any institutional breakdowns; however, this past research has often failed to characterize these essential institutional actors beyond the maintenance mechanisms they deploy. This study highlights that the value of institutional custodians is directly related to their institutional knowledge of both the organization and its field. Further research of the characteristics of these institutional leaders could offer greater insights of the best practices for novel organizations to employ to achieve and retain legitimacy. In addition to astute internal actors, this study also showed that legitimacy can be drawn from the types of consumers an organization is able to attract and retain. As mentioned in previous chapters, contemporary

institutional theory literature considers institutions to be shaped by human cognitions. Therefore, further investigating how consumers shape the organizations they interact with could further the understanding of how sport organizations achieve legitimacy and remain stable. Within the context of sport, studying youth athletes' perceptions of the organizations in which they are members could offer critical insights into how organizations evolve and pursue legitimization. For example, throughout True Hockey's evolution, key organizational actors stressed the importance of attracting and retaining elite athletes to their program in order to enhance the organization's legitimacy**.** Capturing youth athlete perceptions has often been noted as an important pursuit for enhancing the product, program, and service delivery of sport organizations (i.e., Chard et al., 2015; Todd & Edwards, 2021; Wigfield & Chard, 2018); however, to this point minimal sport management researchers have taken up this opportunity.

Table 3. *Summary of True Hockey's Legitimacy Work and Stakeholders' Perceptions*

Action Taken by True Hockey	Phase of Evolution	Definition
Assessing Community Needs	Building Phase	Identifying a favourable environment to do business is essential to establishing a new venture. In the case of a new sport organization this takes the form of identifying a shortage in facilities and/or demand not being served for a specific type of programming.
Acquiring Resources	Building Phase	Key actors securing consistent access to essential resources – especially, sufficient sources of capital – are crucial to the success and maintenance of new venture. Within sport, failure to keep up with programming and facility costs can be detrimental to any organization.
Good Fortune	Building Phase	Luck plays an important role in creating opportunities in which key actors can take advantage of in order to enhance their organization.
Hiring Experts	Building Phase	Successfully launching and maintaining an organization within a highly institutionalized system (i.e., minor hockey) requires leadership from individuals with intricate knowledge of navigating the highly politicized and complicated field.
Instituting a Novel Athlete Development Philosophy	Growth Phase	Establishing and implementing an athlete

		development philosophy through unique programming in order to standout against the dominant organization within the field.
Hiring Experts	Growth Phase	Surrounding organizational leaders with support staff (i.e., program coordinators) who hold their own legitimacy within the field which allows them to effectively design and implement novel programming.
Building Membership & Business Partnerships	Growth Phase	Growing participant numbers by partnering with prominent members of the hockey community (i.e., skill coaches, independent hockey operators, prep school) to expand the organization's programming portfolio. This allows the organization to overcome a lack of nostalgia and tradition within the field.
Addressing Stakeholder Demands	Growth Phase	Listening to the feedback supplied by stakeholders and actively using it to enhance and/or develop programming. This helps ensure retention of participants.
Disconnecting Sanctions	Growth Phase	Competition Bureau Canada modifies how dominant organizations in a field (i.e., Hockey Canada) interact with smaller, competing organizations due to anti-competition complaints.

Building Membership & Business Partnerships	Competition Phase	Aggressively recruiting players to fill programs by targeting those who were fed up with the Hockey Canada's strict eligibility rules that limited participation. Additionally, recruitment involved the pursuit of other independent hockey organizations to join the leagues created by True Hockey and secure consistent competition for registrants.
Mimicry	Competition Phase	The pursuit of sanctioning from a governing body (i.e., Hockey Canada, American Athletic Union) in order to quell parental concerns around enrolling their child(ren) in an unsanctioned hockey program.
Addressing Stakeholder Demands	Competition Phase	Leveraging facility ownership to add AA/AAA competition and development opportunities to True Hockey's programming portfolio. This allowed for the retainment and recruitment of highly skilled players away from the neighbouring organizations.
Leveraging Stakeholders' Dissatisfaction with Dominant Organizations	Competition Phase	Convincing a number of stakeholders to join True Hockey due to consistent bias team selection and management practices taking place at neighbouring organizations.

Expanding the Novel Athlete Development Philosophy	Competition Phase	Completing the True Hockey development pyramid by adding a junior hockey franchise as the elite top piece. Despite the pyramid's similarity to Hockey Canada's model True Hockey's staff pushed the organization's program *pricing structure*, approach to *scheduling*, and *team management* as distinguishing features of their development model.
Controlling Messaging to Defend the Organization	Competition Phase	Defending the organization against Hockey Canada policies and marketing ploys from local rival organizations designed to deter parents from registering their children with independent hockey organizations.
Mimicry	Stabilization Phase	Abandoning independent hockey to become a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada. Becoming sanctioned sparked a rapid transition process in order to ensure True Hockey aligned with Hockey Canada's policies, processes, and ensured the organization's teams were ready to compete during the 2018-2019 season.
Adopting Hockey Canada's Development Practices	Stabilization Phase	Becoming a sanctioned member of Hockey Canada required True Hockey to take programming cues from the national governing body; however, the organization has worked to ensure that sanctioning has had a limited impact on other key

		organizational features like all-in-one pricing, team management, and scheduling strategies.
Charting a New Course	Stabilization Phase	Undertaking new leadership who employed a new vision for the organization that focused on continued growth but prioritized long-term financial sustainability.
Building Relationships with Neighbouring Minor Hockey Organizations	Stabilization Phase	Accepting a proposition from the neighbouring Panthers organization that called for a consolidation of programming that allowed both organizations to maximize their efficiencies. This aligns with the long-term vision of True Hockey to consolidate all hockey programming within their constituency; however, one neighbouring organization remains a holdout.
Maintaining the Original Focus of the Organization	Stabilization Phase	Prep hockey remains a grey area under Hockey Canada's jurisdiction; thus, True Hockey continues to look for ways to leverage its prep hockey portfolio to continue challenging the traditional way in which hockey players develop.
Controlling Messaging to Standout in a Competitive Marketplace	Stabilization Phase	Shifting the focus of messaging from legitimizing the existence of the True Hockey to validating the programs that the organization offers (i.e., highlighting stakeholder accomplishments.)

Perceptions of Legitimacy from Key Stakeholders

Element	Focus of Perception	Definition
Managerial Expertise & Support	Business Processes	Astute management is required to ensure that True Hockey delivers on all of its promises and maintains its premium designation. Specifically, stakeholders expected management to be knowledgeable about the athlete development system, equitable, well organized, and easily accessible.
Organizational Transparency	Business Processes	Essential to a positive minor hockey experience is limiting the impact of internal politics on key organizational decisions like coach selection, team selection, and facility usage times.
Evidence of Internal Investment	Business Processes	Regularly reviewing the on-ice product to determine where managing group could invest to increase satisfaction across all age group.
Familiarity	Athlete Development Programming	Stakeholders seek programs that have a notable sense of trust and/or credibility in which to enrol their child(ren). Being accredited with a recognizable governing body, like Hockey Canada, accomplishes this desired sense for stakeholders.
Coaching Expertise	Athlete Development Programming	The type of coaches that an organization is able to recruit are a sign of its legitimacy. Regardless of age group, coaches are regularly recognized for making or

		breaking a child's sporting experience.
Skill Development	Athlete Development Programming	A key mark of a legitimate minor hockey program is whether parents and coaches can visibly see that players improve through a season. For most stakeholders, an essential sign of improvement is whether an organization's teams are competitive against top teams in their respective leagues.
Fun & Enjoyment	Player Experience	A sign of legitimacy for any youth athletic program is whether it is difficult to motivate participants to attend program-related activities (i.e., practices, games, team functions). Additionally, fun and enjoyment is also linked to whether the athletes are being challenged enough in their experience.
Socialization	Player Experience	Stakeholders want to see athletic skill development accompanied with the enhancement of off-field habits and personal skills.
Discipline	Player Experience	Stakeholders prefer youth programming that instills a sense of discipline in young athletes – especially, teenagers.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide for True Hockey Executives & Staff

Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this study is to use institutional theory to explore the creation and evolution of True Hockey. This is a voluntary research study, if you are ever uncomfortable or do not wish to proceed you are allowed to leave at any time without any consequences. Let's get started.

1. Tell me about your past involvement in hockey (e.g., playing, coaching, volunteering).

2. Tell me about your role with True Hockey.
    a. Probe: How many years have you worked at True Hockey, and in what capacity?
    b. Probe: What interested you in the organization?
    c. Probe: Why did you accept the role you were offered?

3. From your perspective, why was True Hockey created?
    a. Probe: What is the goal of the organization?
    b. Probe: Who does the organization serve? How (i.e., programming offered)?

4. How has True Hockey evolved over time?
    a. Probe: What are key moments in the organization's history?
    b. Probe: What have been the trends in participation recruitment and retention?
    c. Probe: How has the programming and number of teams evolved?

5. What distinguishes True Hockey from other minor hockey organizations?
    a. Probe: What are the benefits of playing or coaching in True Hockey programming?

6. From your perspective, what is the purpose of True Hockey rebranding and business image transformation?
    a. Do these changes impact organizational goals, values, programming? If so, how?

7. Please describe True Hockey's relationship with the minor hockey's governing bodies (i.e., Hockey Canada, Ontario Hockey Federation, ALLIANCE)?
    a. Probe: How have these relationships changed over time?
    b. Probe: What role, if any, do you think these relationships play in True Hockey's success as an organization?

8. From your perspective, how is True Hockey perceived by:
    a. Players?
    b. Parents?
    c. Coaches?
    d. Volunteers/community members?
    e. Rival organizations?

9. In your opinion, have the perceptions of any of these stakeholders changed over time?
    a. If so, how and why do you think perceptions have changed?

b. If not, why do you think perceptions have remained the same?

10. To this point, what have been the biggest challenges faced by True Hockey? How have they been dealt with?

11. Internally, what must True Hockey focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?

12. Looking to the future, what must the Canadian minor hockey system focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?
    a. Probe: Do you see any role for True Hockey in addressing any of the issues that you have mentioned?

13. Do you have any final comments about True Hockey and/or your experiences with the organization that you would like to share?

Appendix B: Interview Guide for Coaches

Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this study is to use institutional theory to explore the creation and evolution of True Hockey. This is a voluntary research study, if you are ever uncomfortable or do not wish to proceed you are allowed to leave at any time without any consequences. Let's get started.

1. Tell me about your past involvement in hockey (e.g., playing, coaching, volunteering).

2. Tell me about your past experiences as coach.
    a. Probe: How many years have you been coaching?
    b. Probe: What programs have you coached for?

3. When and how did you find out about True Hockey?
    a. Probe: What was your original perception of the organization?
    b. Probe: How have your perceptions changed over time?

4. What has your experience been like coaching with True Hockey?
    a. Probe: Why did you choose to coach for True Hockey?
    b. Probe: Biggest strength of the program?
    c. Probe: Biggest challenge of the program?

5. From your perspective as a coach, why was True Hockey created?
    a. Probe: What do you perceive the goal of the organization to be?
    a. Probe: Who does the organization serve? How (i.e., programming offered)?

6. From your perspective as a coach, how has True Hockey evolved as an organization?

7. What distinguishes True Hockey from other minor hockey programs?

8. How would you describe True Hockey's relationship with the minor hockey's governing bodies (i.e., Hockey Canada, Ontario Hockey Federation, ALLIANCE)?
    a. Probe: How have these relationships changed over time?
    b. Probe: What role, if any, do you think these relationships play in True Hockey's success as an organization?

9. How would you describe the experiences that your players have?

10. From your perspective as a coach, how has True Hockey been perceived by:
    a. Parents?
    b. Volunteers/community members?
    c. Rival organizations?

11. In your opinion, have the perceptions of any of these stakeholders changed over time?
    a. If so, how and why do you think perceptions have changed?
    b. If not, why do you think perceptions have remained the same?

12. What must True Hockey focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?

13. What must the Canadian minor hockey system focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?
    a. Probe: Do you see any role for True Hockey in addressing any of the issues that you have mentioned?

14. Are you aware of True Hockey undertaking a rebranding effort?
    a. Probe: If so, do you care to share any thoughts on this change?
    b. Probe: If not, explain to rebrand to them.

15. Do you have any final comments about True Hockey and/or your experiences with the organization that you would like to share?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Parents

Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this study is to use institutional theory to explore the creation and evolution of True Hockey. This is a voluntary research study, if you are ever uncomfortable or do not wish to proceed you are allowed to leave at any time without any consequences. Let's get started.

1. Tell me about your past involvement in hockey (e.g., playing, coaching, volunteering).

2. Why did you enroll your children in hockey?

3. When and how did you find out about True Hockey?
    a. Probe: What was your original perception of the organization?
    b. Probe: How have your perceptions changed over time?

4. Why did you enroll your children in True Hockey programming?
    a. Probe: How does True Hockey differ from other minor hockey organizations?

5. How would you describe the experiences that your children have had playing for True Hockey?
    a. Probe: Based on these experiences, would you be willing to register your child for True Hockey programming for future seasons? Why or why not?

6. How would you describe True Hockey's relationship with the minor hockey's governing bodies (i.e., Hockey Canada, Ontario Hockey Federation, ALLIANCE)?
    a. Probe: From your perspective as a parent, how important are these relationships to enrolment decisions?

7. What must True Hockey focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?

8. What must the Canadian minor hockey system focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?
    a. Do you see any role for True Hockey in addressing any of the issues that you have mentioned?

9. Are you aware of True Hockey undertaking a rebranding effort?
    a. Probe: If so, do you care to share any thoughts on this change?
    b. Probe: If not, explain the rebrand to them.

10. Do you have any final comments about True Hockey and/or your experiences with the organization that you would like to share?

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Regional and Provincial Minor Hockey Executives

Thank you for joining me today. The purpose of this study is to use institutional theory to explore the creation and evolution of True Hockey. This is a voluntary research study, if you are ever uncomfortable or do not wish to proceed you are allowed to leave at any time without any consequences. Let's get started.

1. Tell me about your past involvement in hockey (e.g., playing, coaching, volunteering).

2. What is your current role in (*insert specific governing body*)?

3. What has your experience been like working with (*insert specific governing body*)?

4. What role, if any, do entrepreneurs play within the minor hockey system?

5. What is your perception of entrepreneurial organizations that exist outside the Hockey Canada system?
    a. Probe: Are these organizations good for hockey?
    b. Probe: Are these organization bad for hockey?

6. What processes or policies must be followed for entrepreneurial ventures to become members of the minor hockey system?
    a. Probe: How have these processes and policies changed over time?
    b. Probe: What are the consequences if these policies and processes are not followed?

7. When and how did you find out about True Hockey?
    a. Probe: What was your original perception of the organization?
    b. Probe: How have your perceptions changed over time?

8. Can you talk me through the history of True Hockey's relationship with (*insert specific governing body*)?
    a. In 2018, why was True Hockey officially granted acceptance to join the ALLIANCE and OHF?

9. Is (*insert specific governing body*) open to other entrepreneurial ventures, similar to True Hockey, joining its organization? Why or why not?

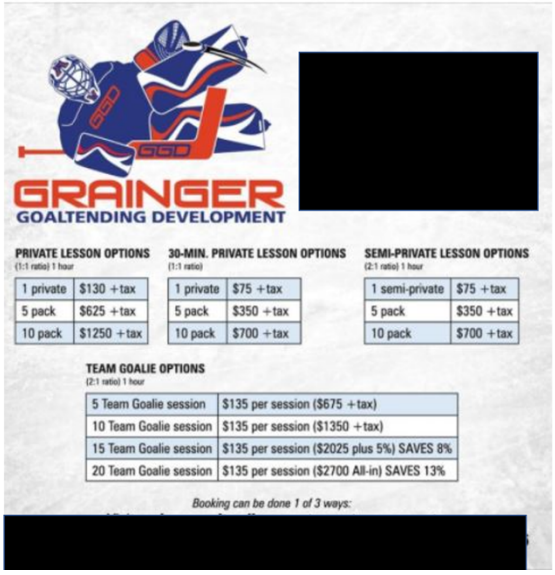
10. From your perspective, what must the Canadian minor hockey system focus on or improve to ensure its continued success?
    a. Probe: Do you see any role for local minor hockey organizations (i.e., True Hockey) in addressing any of the issues that you have mentioned?

11. Are you aware of True Hockey undertaking a rebranding effort?
    a. Probe: If so, do you care to share any thoughts on this change?
    b. Probe: If not, explain the rebrand to them?

12. Do you have any final comments about True Hockey and/or your experiences with the organization that you would like to share?

Appendix E: Sample Partnerships Established During Growth Phase

For all the goalies: Our partners at Grainger Goaltending Development offer the following rates for their sessions [redacted]
Contact them at the info below.



Kids don't just become outstanding players without a plan. The Jr. [redacted] program embraces the train to play model that has been so successful in Europe. It is based upon a scientific approach to hockey rather than a cultural or political approach. To support this model we have partnered with BUKAC Hockey, a world renowned hockey development organization based in the Czech Republic. With their assistance we have developed a detailed and science based syllabus to assist our coaches in training our players at each age level to maximize their hockey skills development.

Learn More at: [redacted]

Appendix F: Competition Bureau Canada Ruling on Hockey Canada

Government of Canada | Gouvernement du Canada

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MENU

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- Legal actions and opinions
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Hockey Canada outlaw leagues

In July 2008, the Competition Bureau received a complaint regarding Hockey Canada's bulletin A09-02, which outlined sanctions against so-called "outlaw" hockey leagues, referring to leagues that operate outside the auspices of Hockey Canada, and in that sense in direct competition with them.

The Bureau examined the bulletin and concluded that some aspects of the sanctions gave rise to issues under section 79 of the *Competition Act,* otherwise known as the "abuse of dominance" provision.

The Bureau contacted Hockey Canada to explain its concerns with the potential anti-competitive aspects of the sanctions. The ensuing dialogue led Hockey Canada to eliminate or substantially modify, as appropriate, the sanctions so as to address the Bureau's concerns.

The revised bulletin containing the new sanctions was posted on Hockey Canada's Web site.

This issue was formally resolved in May 2009.

Appendix G: Hockey Canada Action Bulletin on Independent Hockey Operations

HOCKEY CANADA

Action Bulletin d'action

[redacted]

To: Directors
Member Presidents
Member Executive Directors
Council Chairs
Life Patrons
Hockey Canada Staff

[redacted]

[redacted]

SUBJECT: NON-SANCTIONED LEAGUES – LEAGUES OPERATING OUTSIDE THE AUSPICES OF HOCKEY CANADA

Overview – The LTAD Model

As the governing body of amateur hockey in Canada, Hockey Canada is committed to offering the best development programs in the world. Hockey Canada and our Members have invested significant resources in the development of officials, coaches, administrators and players countrywide. We have a committed strategy toward a cohesive long term athlete development (LTAD) model and we feel our programs are second to none in sport.

The LTAD model is intended to optimize athlete development and performance. Excessive on-ice activity, particularly in high-intensity games may: (a) hinder athlete development; (b) cause repetitive strain injuries and (c) lead to athlete burn-out. The LTAD model sets out specific parameters for weekly on-ice participation, to ensure that players are not over- competing and under training and have sufficient time for rest and recovery. The goal of the LTAD model is to keep as many players playing at as high a level as possible for as long as possible.

Hockey Canada's LTAD model includes a competitive stream and a recreational stream. The model is age appropriate, with increasing levels of on-ice activity (games and practices) as an athlete grows older. Players within the same age group engage in different levels of on-ice activity, depending on the stream in which they are participating.

The commitment level required to play on a team that is eligible to compete for a Regional

or National Championship is significant. Under the LTAD model, an athlete participating at the competitive level as a 15 year old will, on average, be on the ice at least four times per week during the hockey season. That frequency can increase even further for Junior aged players.

Non-Sanctioned Hockey and its Impact on the LTAD Model

Despite, or perhaps because of, our success in delivering quality programming throughout Canada, other organizations operating outside our structure form leagues from time to time that offer various levels of amateur hockey programming. These "non-sanctioned" organizations do not support the development of Hockey Canada or Member programs. Further, they operate with limited, or no consideration to the impact of their programs on minor, junior, senior, adult recreational hockey, officiating development, female hockey, coaching development or administrator development in Canada. These Non- Sanctioned Leagues choose instead, in many instances, to utilize resources already developed by Hockey Canada and its Members.

Because these Non-Sanctioned Leagues operate outside of our structure, Hockey Canada has no way of ensuring that those Leagues implement many of the fundamental safeguards inherent in Hockey Canada programs and the LTAD model. Those Leagues may not be using the same Playing Rules that Hockey Canada has implemented to protect player safety and may not provide adequate insurance for their participants. Hockey Canada also cannot ensure that the quality of play in these Leagues matches the level advertised.

Definitions

"Bench Staff" means coaches, assistant coaches and trainers.

"Cut-Off Date" means September 30 of the hockey season in question.

"League" means a Non-Sanctioned League.

"Non-Sanctioned League" includes any amateur hockey league that operates in Canada outside the auspices/sanctioning of Hockey Canada, or in any other country outside the auspices/sanctioning of the Member National Association of the International Ice Hockey Federation in that country. This currently does not include summer hockey leagues/teams, adult recreational hockey leagues/teams, high school hockey, college or university hockey, and/or hockey schools.

"Participate" means to engage, knowingly or otherwise, in an activity within a Non- Sanctioned League that could only be engaged in within Hockey Canada if the participant was properly registered on the Hockey Canada Registry. Such activity includes, without limitation, playing, managing, coaching, officiating, or acting as a trainer.

Consequences of Supporting or Participating in a Non-Sanctioned League

Hockey Canada respects the right of every individual at the beginning of each hockey season to choose between participating in a league sanctioned by Hockey Canada, or in a Non-Sanctioned League.

Participating in both a Non-Sanctioned Hockey League and a sanctioned league, however, is inconsistent with the LTAD model, particularly for players and Bench Staff in Hockey Canada's competitive stream. Every individual who makes the choice to Participate in a Non-Sanctioned League, therefore, must understand the ramifications of that choice on their ability to participate in Hockey Canada's programming, as described in greater detail below.

Players Participating in a Non-Sanctioned League in Canada

1. In recognition of the high level of commitment required from players participating in the competitive stream under our LTDP model, Hockey Canada Regulation M.3 only allows those players to register with one team, if that team is eligible to compete for a Regional or National Championship. Consistent with those Regulations, any player who chooses to participate in a Non-Sanctioned League after the Cut-Off Date will be ineligible to register with or affiliate to a Hockey Canada team that is eligible to compete for a Regional or National Championship for the remainder of that season, subject to paragraph (2) below.

2. Notwithstanding the consequences listed in paragraph 1), any player who Participates in a Non Sanctioned League after the Cut-Off Date and ceases that Participation at some point during the hockey season, is entitled to seek early reinstatement of their privileges within Hockey Canada prior to February 10 by appealing to Hockey Canada's Non- Sanctioned Hockey Reinstatement Committee, which may grant early reinstatement only if it is satisfied that: (a) special circumstances exist; and (b) the player seeking reinstatement will not be displacing a player from the team of the roster he or she is seeking to join.

3. In an effort to be as inclusive as possible, and in recognition of the fact that a lesser commitment level may be required of players not playing on a Regional or National championship eligible team, the provisions of this section IV.A shall only apply to players who are seeking to play on teams are eligible to compete for a Regional or National Championship. In accordance with Hockey Canada By-Law 10.2 Members shall have the right to apply the policy more restrictively, as described in section V of this Policy, to meet the unique program delivery issues within their respective geographic regions.

Players Participating in a Non-Sanctioned League Outside Canada

Hockey Canada's Regulations prescribe the manner in which players are permitted to move from teams registered with other Member National Associations (MNA) of the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) to Hockey Canada. For leagues that choose not to register with the Member National Association in their country, Hockey Canada must implement appropriate measures to control orderly player movement from those leagues to Hockey Canada teams.

Any individual who participates in a Non-Sanctioned League outside Canada after the Cut- Off Date, and wishes to register with any Hockey Canada team after the Cut-Off Date must follow the reinstatement process described in section IV.A.2 above.

Non-Player Participants (Bench Staff)

Hockey Canada believes that it is important for its Registered Participants, particularly those involved in the game in the competitive stream, to subscribe to and support the principles found in the LTAD

Model. This includes Bench Staff, who are expected to be role models for the players, and champions of the LTAD model. If a non-player Participant chooses to Participate in a Non-Sanctioned League after the Cut-Off Date, they will not be permitted to be a member of the Bench Staff of any Hockey Canada team for the remainder of that season.

Non-Player Participants (Officials)

On-Ice Officials, including referees and linesmen, are representing Hockey Canada when they officiate Hockey Canada sanctioned games. It is expected, therefore, that they will be strong supporters of Hockey Canada's LTAD model and will not generally engage in officiating in Non-Sanctioned Leagues. If any Official chooses to officiate Non-Sanctioned League games, that participation may be taken into account in determining whether that Official will be granted assignments for Hockey Canada sanctioned programming for the remainder of that season.

Further Restrictions re. Non-Sanctioned Hockey

Members may implement more restrictive Non-Sanctioned Hockey policies for Divisions and Categories of hockey that do not compete for Regional or National Championships. Any Member implementing such a policy must take appropriate measures to ensure that no player who has Participated in a Non-Sanctioned League after the Cut-Off Date, is able to play on a team that is eligible to compete for a Regional or National Championship, either through registration with, or affiliation to, that team, for the remainder of that season, without following the reinstatement procedure described in section IV.A.2 of this Policy.

Other Considerations

This Policy should only be applied to individuals who are Participants in Non-Sanctioned Leagues. A parent or sibling should not be prevented from participating fully in Hockey Canada programming solely because their child, brother or sister is playing in a Non- Sanctioned League.

As the governing body of amateur hockey in Canada, and in the interests of bettering the game of hockey in our country, Hockey Canada recognizes that its mission to lead, develop and promote positive hockey experiences, extends to the sharing of its expertise with anyone who might benefit from it, including those who have chosen to Participate in hockey programming in a Non-Sanctioned League. Individuals should be permitted to participate in Hockey Canada coaching, officiating, and trainer clinics, therefore, even if they are currently Participating, or intend to Participate, as a coach, official, or trainer in a Non-Sanctioned League. Members may wish to consider charging Participants in Non-Sanctioned Leagues a higher fee for these clinics, as a means of illustrating the value of being a Registered Participant of Hockey Canada.

The consequences described in this Bulletin will remain in effect even if the Non-Sanctioned League or team folds, or the Participant is released, suspended or fired from that League or team

Appendix H: Blog Post Widely Shared by True Hockey Personnel

The Hypocrisy of USA Hockey And Hockey Canada – Afraid Of Competition And That's A Problem
July 25, 2016

The United States and Canada thrive on diversity. Our countries were founded on the core belief that diversity will fuel the growth of thought, innovation, and choice.

If Henry Ford had never had any competition from the Dodge brothers, or General Motors, what would the auto industry look like today? Burger King or McDonalds. T-Mobile, Verizon, ATT, and all the others. What would our world economy look like without choice?

Never before in the history of commerce has one business called its competition, "outlaw". Outlaw being defined as;

"a person who has broken the law and who is hiding or running away to avoid punishment"

For years, "outlaw" has been a phrase used in Canada to describe independent, and now AAU sanctioned hockey. "Outlaw" has not been so readily used in the United States because people know it will get them sued and they will likely incur significant financial losses for using it publicly, but it is used in back rooms and in private conversations.

Every day I read emails, and statements on Twitter and Facebook saying "outlaw" hockey this or "outlaw" hockey that. Statements from people I like, know and do business with.

Why? Why would anyone feel the need to describe a perfectly legal business as "outlaw"? Why would anyone, or a group of anyone's describe a persons right to choose as "outlaw"? Why, when diversity is the foundation of our economy and our very culture, would anyone want to see that diversity and a right to choose be eliminated?

There is only one answer. FEAR.

People fear the unknown. They fear change. More than anything though, in business, we all fear the potential that our competition, will actually present a more reasonable or better alternative for the consumer. We all fear that our money, control, authority, or singular voice will be eliminated.

While some may take my writing as an affront today, it is truly not intended to be. It is only intended to provoke thought and discussion. Discussion that in my opinion is long over due.

Imagine if Henry Ford would have been the only automaker. We certainly wouldn't have a company like Tesla Motors today. Imagine if IBM were the only company building computers. There would be no Dell, and no Apple. Imagine if there had been no WHA, and the Edmonton Oilers would not have become part of the NHL. How different would history be?

If you ask the CEO of any major company they will tell you that competition, and diversity in the marketplace is good for business. It fosters new ideas, innovations, and technological advances.

The idea that the same set of core truths is not applicable to hockey is laughable. Bauer and CCM prove these truths to be just that, true.

Hockey Canada and USA Hockey are afraid. They are afraid of AAU Hockey and independent hockey. Why?

Why, when every successful society and economy is based upon diversity and choice, would Hockey Canada and USA Hockey be afraid of competition? Where does this fear come from?

The fear comes from one very easy to identify place.

There is a base fear of losing control of what is essentially a monopoly, and a fear of losing the money that comes with running that monopoly.

But are USA Hockey and Hockey Canada really in control? Is AAU hockey and other independent hockey really considered "outlaw" by everyone else?

The answer is a resounding NO.

The National Hockey League, is, in the end who all of us look to as the standard bearer for what is and is not acceptable. Whether they get is right all the time is another story, but they lead the way.

So, if the NHL drafts a player from Michigan High School Hockey, we simply accept that it is alright. Yet, Michigan High School hockey is not under USA Hockey sanctioning.

When the NHL drafts and signs players from the three Canadian Major Junior leagues, it is simply accepted as the norm. Yet, none of these Major Junior leagues are members of Hockey Canada or USA Hockey, they are merely partners.

When the NHL drafts and signs players from NCAA Hockey it is again accepted as normal. Yet NCAA Hockey is not under USA Hockey.

When Hockey Canada and USA Hockey promote their players to develop it is simply as it should be. When these players leave the confines of Hockey Canada and USA Hockey to join Major Junior teams and NCAA programs, they are celebrated as success stories.

The system works according to all of the press releases we receive at TJHN. The system works when Hockey Canada and USA Hockey programs promote their players to Major Junior Hockey and NCAA Hockey that are both not sanctioned programs.

But the system does not work when the player choses to leave on his own for another non sanctioned program like AAU or independent hockey? Under the hypocritical rules of Hockey Canada, because all three Major Junior Leagues are not sanctioned, they are only partners, no players should be allowed

to move down from the CHL to any Tier II or Junior A or Junior B teams after September 30th of the playing season. Why? Because they have a written rule that says if you play in a non sanctioned program after September 30th, you have to sit out the rest of the year in Hockey Canada and apply for reinstatement!

How shocking that players and their choices are vilified publicly and privately? The organizations they join are called "outlaw"? Are the players in those leagues then "outlaws"? Are they somehow given amnesty when and if they return to what USA Hockey and Hockey Canada consider to be non "outlaw" programs? Do they get a certificate declaring them rehabilitated?

The hypocrisy exhibited by some people in positions of power as it relates to this issue is astonishing. It's embarrassing really.

In our sport, one that is a leader when preaching about issues such as cultural diversity, acceptance of LGBT persons, and the development of disabled persons; how do we not accept other people's right to choose?

AAU, and Independent hockey has some very good operators, just like USA Hockey and Hockey Canada. They also have some terrible operators, just like USA Hockey and Hockey Canada.

A sanction from one governing body or another is no warranty on the quality of the program. It is no statement on whether the product is good, or if the product has been inspected for safety.

If any sanction was a warranty or statement of quality, none of the USA Hockey or Hockey Canada programs would have any problems or would ever go out of business.

So, what is my point with all of this?

Those of you that keep on talking about, complaining about, and worrying about what AAU and Independent hockey does are exposing your fear. You are shouting to the world that you do not completely embrace the policies of diversity and choice that you publicly proclaim. You announce to the world that you are a hypocrite.

Many of you are now asking or thinking I wrote this today in support of AAU or Independent hockey. Some of my friends at USA Hockey and Hockey Canada are now thinking I am jumping ship and will not support their initiates. Neither of these thoughts would be correct.

Hypocrisy, when discovered in any form, in any organization, always ends up pushing people away from their initiatives.

I wrote this today because I support Hockey. Regardless of the label placed upon it. Whether it be in an NHL arena or in your driveway. It's a game, and we all have a right to choose when, where and with whom we want to play. Isn't that the message all people and organizations in hockey should be delivering? Or, would the thought that "hockey is hockey" be considered "outlaws."

Appendix I: Grandfather Rule for Residency Requirements

ONTARIO HOCKEY FEDERATION

[redacted]

To: [redacted] Grandfathered Players and affected Minor Hockey Associations

Re: Clarification on Tryouts for Grandfathered Players to the [redacted]

Last year the [redacted] joined Hockey Canada through [redacted]. There were several non-residential players to [redacted] that were grandfathered to continue to play with the [redacted]. This list is contained in the [redacted] and updated each year.

There have been questions that have arisen from Associations and Grandfathered Players about tryouts for the 2019-2020 season. Collectively as the OHF, [redacted] and Minor Hockey Associations that have Players Grandfathered it is our responsibility to ensure that the Players are provided with the correct information to make informed decisions. The following are the key points of clarification for Players and Associations about Grandfathered Players and their Status:

1. Grandfathered Players are provided the option to choose if they want to continue to be grandfathered or return to their residential centre at the end of each season.
2. Grandfathered Players once they tryout at AA or below in their residential centre negate their grandfather status.
3. Grandfathered Players are eligible to tryout in their home residential Centre/Zone at AAA and maintain their grandfathered status if they do not commit at AAA.
4. Grandfathered Players to retain their Grandfathered Status must return to the [redacted] following AAA tryouts.
5. Grandfathered Players that sign with a AAA team negate their Grandfathered Status.
6. Grandfathered Players get their Permission to Skate for AAA tryouts from the [redacted] if intending to retain their Grandfathered Status. If the Player has no intention to retain their Grandfathered Status the Player would get their Permission to Skate from their home residential Centre.
7. Associations should ensure that they are clear with Grandfathered Players that if they step on the ice below AAA they negate their grandfathered status.

If there are any further questions please don't hesitate to contact the [redacted]