

Exploring Organisational Culture within the context of a
Community Sports Organisation

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Dissertation

AUT Business, Economics & Law

Sport & Recreation

A dissertation submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Business

2020

ABSTRACT

Culture is an intangible concept, known but unseen. It is inherently linked to the success of an organisation. Organisational culture is increasingly a focus for sport management practitioners and academics, yet little research has been conducted to understand this ambiguous and complex concept. Even less research on culture has been undertaken within the not-for-profit community sports organisational context specifically. This study addresses this glaring gap in the literature.

The dissertation is an investigation of organisational culture within a community sports organisation – Netball Waitakere. The aims were to understand how culture is perceived and experienced by members of the organisation, ascertain if culture changed over time, and explore whether culture was perceived differently by sub-groups that may exist within the organisation. The study was undertaken adopting a qualitative approach to unearth as yet unknown insights of this complex concept. A qualitative approach was adopted as little was known about the subject being investigated. Qualitative research methodology encourages the revelation of rich narratives and provides insights from the social constructions of the study subjects. Focus groups provided the platform for the purposive sample of Centre members to engage in a guided discussion to uncover their personal beliefs and feelings about culture.

Several dimensions of culture emerged that were distinctly present among the membership of the Netball Centre. Most prominent was a very strong sense of community. Three other themes that emerged were performance and winning, place attachment and divergent perceptions that related to possible sub-cultures, and lack of synergy. The findings of this research are of value to the sport sector, as the importance of awareness and understanding of culture and application to real world settings have been emphasised. Given the vast number of community sports organisations and their important role facilitating sport participation in the community, research unearthing organisational culture is of vital importance. The research also adds value to the body of literature on management of community sports organisations. Findings from this research may influence sports managers in their approach to running organisations and managing the people involved in them. For sport management scholars, this research contributes to an evolving understanding of sport organisational culture.

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ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

Signed by student: Karyne Ross

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere and heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Michael Naylor, who guided me throughout this paper with a generosity of spirit, knowledge and wisdom. Dr Naylor's unfailing positivity and constant inspiration has been invaluable in maintaining my perseverance to complete this dissertation.

I would like to thank the Board of Netball Waitakere for their support of this research with communicating invitations and provision of the facility to undertake the focus groups and most of all, the members who gave freely of their time to participate in the study and share their experiences.

My sincere thanks and appreciation to Javeed Ali for facilitating the focus groups with such professionalism and conviviality.

I acknowledge AUTECH for their approval of the ethics application for this paper: Ethics Approval 19/226 Exploring organisational culture within the context of a community sports organisation.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Organisational culture remains a complex and ambiguous concept, with the common phrase “the way we do things around here” offering inadequate explanation (McDougall, 2017, p.50). However, simplistic definitions of culture appeal as they make this intangible and abstract concept more understandable (Igo & Skitmore, 2005).

The study of organisational culture gathered momentum through the late 1970's and early 1980's rapidly earning academic respectability (Alvesson, 1990; Maitland, Hills & Rhind, 2015). The concepts of symbols, myths, rituals and tradition that embodied culture generated vast interest for those both studying and practicing aspects of organisation theory (Alvesson, 1990). Much of the research during this period took place in the context of the business world, and not until the early part of the 21st Century did the study of culture make its way into the sporting environment (Maitland et al, 2015).

Theorists have suggested that culture is linked to organisational performance making it an important aspect in any organisation (Alvesson, 1989; Smircich, 1983). In the current competitive market, it is of utmost importance to sports organisations seeking financial stability and membership sustainability to understand culture and its impact. Generating understanding of this phenomena at community sport organisation level will provide sports managers and those charged with governing sports entities, more knowledge upon which to manage organisations and people. The concept of building strong, cohesive teams is inherent in the sports environment and translating this to the operational and management aspects of sport to enhance performance is of value to community sports (Schroeder, 2010). Organisational culture appears to be an area in which managers possess little understanding and knowledge, and hence this research attempts to provide some insights from a grass roots operational level (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng, 2018; Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015). Sport is an important part of New Zealand's social fabric and contributes 2.3 percent, or \$5.0 billion dollars annually to the gross domestic product (Sport NZ, 2015), therefore it is imperative that sports organisations are sustainable and continue to provide this service to our nation.

Currently, the sport-based management literature is in its infancy and remains fragmented with limited research in the context of community sports organisations (Maitland et al, 2015). Community sport not-for-profit entities present their own distinct setting for which culture must be better understood. In research it has been noted that

sport organisations have unique characteristics thereby implying there are unique aspects of culture within this specific context (Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Research has been undertaken on volunteer perceptions of culture in sport contexts, but the generalisability of that work is limited as volunteers comprise just one sub-group. These studies, as well as those conducted with professional sports teams or athletes have proven valuable, however they do not always address the organisation as a whole. This study provides a focus on the specific context of, and an holistic investigation into, the culture of a community sports organisation.

The researcher was a member of Netball Waitakere through her netball club, Te Atatu Netball Club, has been a Board Member and was employed as the General Manager from January 2016 to May 2019. She is currently employed by the regional sporting body, Netball Northern Zone, as Community Netball Manager and resides in West Auckland. The researcher therefore has a depth of knowledge on netball generally, and Netball Waitakere specifically. She is passionate about her local community, and about everyone having the opportunity to participate in grass roots sport. The researcher is curious about culture in organisations, believing it plays an important role in the success of the organisation, and the enjoyment and wellbeing of the people involved be they employees, volunteers, members or stakeholders. The opportunity to combine two passions, grass roots sport and the study of organisation culture shaped this paper.

The purpose of this research was to gain a deep and thorough understanding of the culture of Netball Waitakere, a community sports organisation located in Auckland, New Zealand, that provides netball and associated development programmes to a membership of approximately 6000. The study investigated if members were able to identify the existence of culture as well as describe it. In addition, the research design enabled an exploration of culture perceptions amongst different types of members or stakeholders. The two key research questions were

1. Ascertain if members are able to identify the existence of organisational culture and describe it
2. Identify if there were any differences in perceptions of culture from different stakeholder groups.

These questions were explored through two focus group sessions in which participants discussed their lived experiences through their association with Netball Waitakere, and their personal perceptions of those experiences (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). These perceptions and experiences related to personal beliefs and values which

fostered an understanding of what drives community member behaviour and overall engagement with the netball centre.

A qualitative approach was taken as there was little known about the existence or perception of culture within a community sport context. The aim of the research was to uncover insights pertaining to culture whilst remaining flexible within this real-world setting. Focus groups provided the platform for knowledgeable participants with a common connection to netball to have in-depth discussions, which extracted rich narratives drawn from their personal perceptions, feelings and beliefs. The study revealed that a defined culture does exist within this organisation and was closely related to the environment in which the centre was located. Four themes emerged from the study which can be linked to theoretical concepts of sense of community, place attachment, performance and synergy. The study offers an understanding of culture within this specific context and imparts useful insights for managers of local community sports organisations. It provides guidance on some of the elements of culture and the importance members place on certain elements. This study will enable sports administrators to initiate discussions with their members and governing boards to align values and beliefs for the benefit of achieving organisational goals.

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 delivers a literature review encompassing a definition of culture, levels and measurement of culture, its links to organisational performance and the context of not-for-profit sports organisations. Chapter 3 outlines the research context, methodology and methods applicable to this study. In Chapter 4, the findings from the focus groups are captured, grouped by the themes that emerged. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, implications, areas of future research, limitations specific to this study and a final conclusion.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture is increasingly a focus of researchers and practitioners across both business and sport. Organisational theorists have applauded companies and leaders that create strong cultures especially when linked to an organisation's performance. In team sport, building an inspired, winning culture is thought to be connected to success (Schroeder, 2010; Voight & Carroll, 2006). With such importance placed on the necessity to drive and operationalise culture, it remains a conundrum that so many business leaders, scholars, team managers, coaches and participants possess such little knowledge and understanding of it (Groysberg et al, 2018; Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015).

For the community sport sector, gaining any commercial or market advantage in an increasingly private provider and competitive environment is imperative (Legg, Snelgrove & Wood, 2016; Schroeder, 2010; Thiel & Mayer, 2009). Many not-for-profits face the challenge of declining funding and remain heavily reliant on a volunteer workforce. The ability of sports managers leading not-for-profit sports organisations to build inspirational cultures that create a sense of belonging and loyalty can be the lure needed to ensure recruitment and retention of membership and volunteers (Thiel & Mayer, 2009). This has a positive impact on local, community serving organisations ability to remain financially sustainable.

McDougall (2017) defines culture as “a dynamic process characterized by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practice across the members and generations of a defined group” (p.49). This definition encompassing the term “generations of a defined group” has a specific relationship to community sport organisations as history across family generations is common, hence this perspective is important in the context of this paper. Adding the term “practice” makes it real and applicable in a practical sense, not just theoretically. This practicality combined with the term “dynamic” encompasses the constant change and activity inherent in both sports organisations and today's business world (Igo & Skitmore, 2005; Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006). Use of the term “members” is specific to sports therefore making this definition most relatable in the community sports context. The layman's “the way we do things around here” also appeals in its' pure simplicity and casual approach to such a complex concept.

In the following section, various definitions of culture are presented exposing the complexity of the concept. A further exploration follows that provides deeper understanding by unearthing the levels or perspectives underlying the culture theory. It

includes discussion on measurement theories as a means of assessing organisational cultural value, and the importance of culture in relation to organisation performance.

Defining Culture

“Culture” is an increasingly important concept in the business and sporting world (Branson, 2008). It remains shrouded in complexity and ambiguity, characterized by ever-evolving dimensions which are open to interpretation (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007; Maitland, et al, 2015; Mills & Hoerber, 2013; Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Definitions of organisational culture have been offered by a plethora of researchers and there is not yet consensus on exactly how to characterise it. The following table highlights both the variations and consistencies of themes and phrases across definitions.

Table 1: Definitions of Culture

Reference	Definition of Culture
Louis 1981 as cited in Alvesson (1987,p.4)	“Culture refers to a shared system of values, norms and symbols. The term culture conveys an entire image, an integrated set of dimensions/characteristics and the whole beyond the parts”
Pettigrew, 1979 as cited in Alvesson (1987,p.5)	“Culture gives people a sense of what the reality in a particular setting is all about so they can act in relation to it “culture is the system of...publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at given time”
Morgan, 1986 as cited in Alvesson (1987,p.5)	“Shared meaning, shared understanding, and shared sense-making are all different ways of describing culture. We are really talking about a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways”
Mills and Hoerber (2013,p.482)	“Collectively shared forms of for example, ideas and cognition, as symbols and meanings, as values and ideologies, as rules and norms, as emotions and expressiveness, as the collective conscious, as behavior patterns, structures and practices”
Pettigrew, 1979 as cited in Mills & Hoerber, (2013,p.482)	“typically refers to shared meanings and assumptions that lead to a base understanding about how to operate within the culture”

McDougall, (2017,p.49)	“a dynamic process characterized by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practice across the members and generations of a defined group”
Deshpande & Webster, (1989,p.4)	“the pattern of shared values and beliefs that help individuals understand organisational functioning and thus provide them with norms for behavior in the organisation”
Flamholtz, 2001 as cited in Pinho, Rodrigues & Dibb (2013,p.377)	“the central notion is that the term culture refers to core organisational values and norms that have an influence on different variables in the organisational setting”

Alternate definitions refer to shared beliefs and expectations within the team, collective thinking, a system of shared meaning or the norms that knit a community together (Alvesson, 1989; Igo & Skitmore, 2006; McDougall, 2017; Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Culture definitions can be influenced by the industry sector, history of the organisation and other variables (Igo & Skitmore, 2006; Mohelska & Sokolova, 2015). In practice culture is often quoted in broad general terms as being “the way we do things around here” (McDougall, 2017; Schroeder, 2010).

These many and varied definitions indicate that organisational culture is complex. Adding further complexity, Girginov (2010) has distinguished between anthropological and humanistic culture. He argues that anthropological culture is homeostatic and plural, whereas humanistic is progressive and singular. An anthropological approach conceptualises culture as a learned behaviour that is socially communicated over time and a key to determining human behavior (Alvesson, 1990; Girginov, 2010). A humanist approach originates from the process of civilization, with layers of bureaucracy imposed by those wishing to establish power. Historically, culture was studied through the lens of anthropology, but over time those in other disciplines such as sociology and psychology have engaged (Alvesson, 1987; Girginov, 2010; Smith & Shilbury, 2004).

If one synthesizes the numerous definitions and related theory, consistent themes do emerge. The one key concept that is consistent, either explicitly or implied, is the notion of culture comprising a shared or collective understanding (Branson, 2008; Groysberg et al, 2018; Maitland et al, 2015). Many definitions mention *shared* values and beliefs, implying that for culture to exist it must be shared and understood by all participants of that particular group or organisation. This is logical given in this context we refer to culture within formal or informal groups of people, as opposed to individuals or singular entities. It is the sharing and interaction both within and between groups that gives it relevance and elevates its' importance. This however is not to imply that just

because culture is shared, it is completely accepted and not challenged by some group members (Branson, 2008; Igo & Skitmore, 2005; Mills & Hoeber, 2013; Smollan & Sayers, 2009).

The other consistencies across the culture definitions refer to the values which are couched in various terms – beliefs, assumptions, meanings, ideologies, expectations, way of thinking – the list is extensive and adds to the complexity of understanding the concept of culture. How these values are projected, presented by and through the organisation, lived and breathed, leads to the layers or levels of organisation culture, which is addressed subsequently.

The definitions of culture suggest that it exists to drive behavior and allow for group members to understand an organisation and how and why it operates the way it does (Pettigrew, 1979 as cited in Alvesson, 1987; Branson, 2008). Culture becomes an “employee manual” in some ways, dictating how individuals should act, think and ultimately make decisions (Branson, 2008; Pinho et al, 2014). Culture enables organisations to build a stable environment exerting control over its members by directing their behavior and thinking – in effect creating order for the long-term sustainability of the organisation and its members (Girginov, 2010; Smollan & Sayers, 2009). Utilizing culture as a means of controlling or directing behavior can be seen as a valuable tool in creating a well drilled team on board paddling their waka in the same direction – a common analogy used across both business and sport in New Zealand (Smollan & Sayers, 2009).

The well-intentioned statement “the way we do things around here”, captures the complexity and ambiguity of organisational culture (McDougall, 2017, p.50). It creates a vague and intangible background in contrast to the position of other researchers who are adamant that culture should be discussed in more specific and purposeful terms (McDougall, 2017). In this case, specificity refers to retaining focus on key components of culture rather than a broad, superficial approach that may create misconception and misunderstanding. Likewise, Pinho et al (2014) highlighted the everyday usage of the term *culture* and its importance to business, but also reinforced its complexity which they argued is the result of competing definitions.

The term *culture* is often used haphazardly in sport contexts. However, the inherent complexity of culture does lend itself to sport contexts which are themselves complex and dynamic. In fact, this may explain the recent trend of using culture as a lens to better understand sport and the importance of studying it in sport’s varied contexts including the grassroots.

Levels of Culture

To gain a more robust understanding of culture it is important to delve deeper and unearth distinct levels and varied perspectives. Models have been developed by Schein (1985) and Martin (1992) that identify different levels or multiple perspectives to aid with comprehension and build further knowledge of culture. Schein's (1985) model incorporates three levels consisting of an outer level of artifacts that are clearly visible, a middle layer of values that guides behavior, and at the core is underlying assumptions. Schein believes the underlying assumptions are the most important and that understanding these leads to correctly interpreting the values and artifacts of an organisation (Schein, 1985).

Artifacts incorporate all physical aspects of an organisation from its' architecture, manner of dress, logos, décor and in a sporting context team colors or uniform, myths and stories (Mills & Hoeber, 2013; Schein, 1985). These are all visible and are what can be seen, heard and experienced however typically difficult to interpret (Igo & Skitmore, 2005; Schroeder, 2010). Values are those practices that are reflected in group members behavior, their principles and expectations (Coyler, 2000; McDougall, 2017). These values provide a guide to new members and regulated patterns – in a sporting context training programs or achievement awards (Branson, 2008; Colyer, 2000).

The last level is underlying assumptions which have become embedded in the organisation over time, can be considered implicit and taken for granted existing below the conscious level of the group (McDougall, 2017; Schein, 1985). These thoughts, beliefs and perceptions become so entrenched they are difficult to change and provide stability and structure for the group (Baker, 1980; McDougall, 2017; Schein, 1985). A core theme of Schein's model is that there is consensus and consistency in the understanding of all levels of the culture (Mills & Hoeber, 2013; Schein, 1985). That is, that all group members agree and are harmonious in their shared understanding of the culture (Baker, 1980; McDougall, 2017).

Martin offers a comparative view of a multi-perspective model of culture outlining three interpretations of integrated, differentiated and fragmented perspectives from which to understand culture (Kavanagh & Ashkanasy, 2006; Martin, 1992; Mills & Hoeber, 2013). Integration explains the similarities within a group who all share a common consensus and whereby any deviation is seen as dissent and typically ignored. Differentiation explains the inconsistencies in how group members interpret values or beliefs and can lead to the creation of sub-cultures that whilst harmonious within themselves can often clash with each other. Fragmentation allows and embraces

ambiguity accepting it as a normal function of any organisation where there is little consistency or stable consensus with issues being dealt with individually in a constantly fluctuating state (Martin, 1992). A multi-perspective approach is based in the reality that humans are individuals who will interpret and create their own perceptions through their own experience. This leads them to challenge the status quo which can offer exciting opportunities for innovation and growth (McDougall, 2017).

Sub-cultures are created when groups within the main organisation develop their own set of values and beliefs. These can mirror the overall culture and are described as orthogonal subcultures who work in harmony within the dominant culture. Alternatively, countercultures compete with and challenge the dominant culture creating conflict and inconsistency (Colyer, 2000; Schroeder, 2010). Sub-cultures can be driven by geographic dispersity, product type or function. Schroeders' (2010) study of intercollegiate athletics provides a great example and explanation of how sub-cultures exist within the overall context of a wider organisational culture offering both consistency with the overall culture of its university however holding a set of values that sit outside the wider context but provide an opportunity for success of that department.

There is disagreement amongst scholars on the value of surface artifacts versus the deeper levels of culture. An attachment to visible and easily observable artifacts can hold vast importance to some group members and it is the individual perception of their value that binds them to their organisations' culture (McDougall, 2017; Mills & Hoeber, 2013). Utilizing a multi-faceted approach across all levels or perspectives and understanding these from each group members perspective offers a more indepth opportunity to understand any organisations' culture (Kaiser, Engel & Keiner, 2009; Mills & Hoeber, 2013).

In the context of community sport there is value in understanding these different levels, given the focus particularly on observable artifacts. Team colors, branded merchandise, home grounds and the myths & legends of past and present icons of any given code are all held in high esteem by sport participants, be they active or passive members (Kaiser et al, 2009). There is significant historical generational links traditionally within community sports organisations hence the legends and myths of the past provide a sense of belonging and whanau connection. Whilst these all serve to shape the culture of a sports organisation and has been shown to create sense of belonging and pride, there is potential that they can also create divisions within members or cliques of hierarchies (Mills & Hoeber, 2013). Any large group deals with variable personalities and at times different aspects of any given culture can be mis-interpreted or used for opposing purposes. In a community organisation largely driven by volunteers understanding the levels and being able to articulate them effectively to

influence the various groups within the organisation would prove useful and valuable in creating a positive, shared forward focused culture.

Measuring Culture

To understand culture and its significance to any organisation it must be both measurable and explainable. Any good business or coaching tool must be able to be explained, assessed and evaluated to add value to the performance of the organisation. There are numerous models, frameworks and theories available to measure culture, two of which, The Competing Values Framework and Culture Type Model, are discussed below.

The competing values framework allows for an exploration of culture effectiveness through a survey instrument (Colyer, 2000; Igo & Skitmore, 2005). There are four dimensions derived from the four major models of organisation theory, which incorporate inconsistencies and potential conflicts that exist in most organisations. They are: Rational goal model, Internal process model, Human relations model and Open systems model (Colyer, 2000). Figure 1 below expands on the various names and monikers attributed to these models and offers a descriptive culture type. It explains the competing values of people verses organisation; stability, control challenging flexibility, and means verses ends (Colyer, 2000; Igo & Skitmore, 2005). This culture type influences organisational effectiveness so long as the dominance is congruent with the overall characteristics of the organisation (Colyer, 2000).

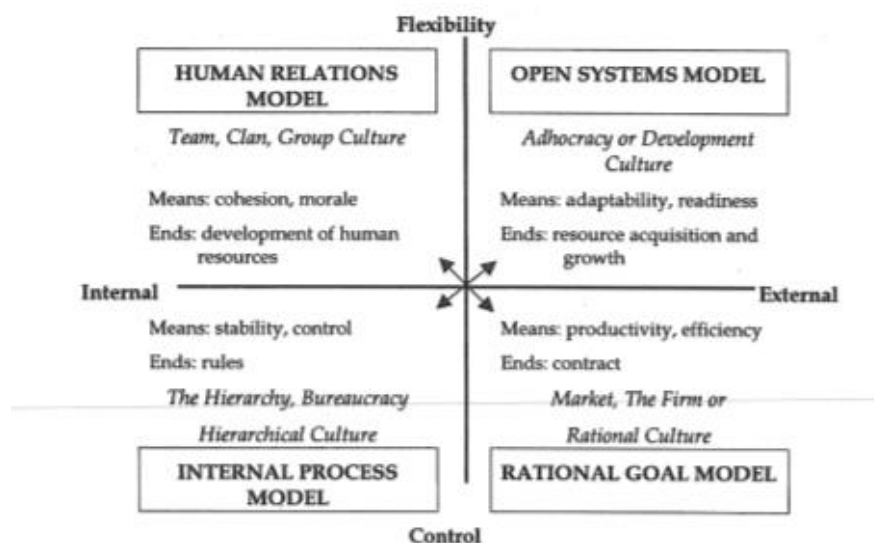


Figure 1: Competing Values Model, (Colyer, 2000)

This model allows for the identification of an organisation's cultural strengths and weaknesses. It offers an opportunity to compare one organisation with another more succinctly than when assessing culture based on artifacts which can be organisation specific (Colyer, 2000). Sport managers understanding of these competing values increases their ability to manage conflict and influence change (Colyer, 2000).

The purpose or motive for undertaking an assessment, and how an organisation will use the information gathered should dictate the type or method of measuring for exploring culture (Jung, Scott, Davies, Bower, Whalley, McNally & Mannion, 2009; Maitland et al, 2015). While there appears to be no consensus on the most appropriate or effective tool of measurement, consensus does exist that the best measure is that which is "fit for purpose" within the context it is being applied (Jung et al, 2009).

A dimensional approach homes in on specific variables, for example innovation or values. This has some limitations as values are typically learned at an early age and practices are acquired through life and socialization in the workplace hence focusing on just values may produce results of little value to a specific organisation (Jung et al, 2009). Typological focuses on descriptors and language that is prone to stereotyping, for example categories such as "trickster" or "jester". It also leads to judging the culture as good, bad, positive or negative – a narrow view which is contextually based depending on the current status of any given organisation (Jung et al, 2009).

Methodological approaches which are typically conducted by survey or self-report questionnaires consist of qualitative or quantitative data collection and analysis (Jung et al, 2009). Qualitative studies are time consuming, can be expensive but offer depth and detailed insights, whereas quantitative studies are easy to administer to large groups with a quick response to analysis, however, offer a broader set of results. It is suggested a multi approach utilizing qualitative to first gain insights on which to base quantitative questions offers a more robust result (Jung et al, 2009; Maitland et al, 2015).

A qualitative approach is derived from ethnographic influences and identifies patterns of behavior. These are gleaned from observation of participations, discussions or individual surveys. This interactive approach offers fast results and the ability to adapt and be flexible during the process. This allows for a greater understanding of the values and beliefs and the underlying assumptions of organisational culture can be uncovered (Jung et al, 2009).

Quantitative studies historically have not been adopted as the chosen method to study culture (Maitland et al, 2015). This trend is changing with interest in readymade generic tools that big companies or consultants can apply to any organisation. Quantitative data has its shortcomings as the scope of responses is limited and frequently do not unearth any unknowns, or reasoning behind answers provided.

An alternative model with distinct similarities to the competing values model is offered by Deshpande (as cited in Pinho et al, 2014). Assessing an organisation's culture using this tool indicates where on the continuum between control and flexibility it sits, and the extent of opposing values between internal and external influences (Pinho et al, 2014). These models can be used to identify the impact of culture type on the organisation and the comparative strength or weakness of those values (Pinho et al, 2014).

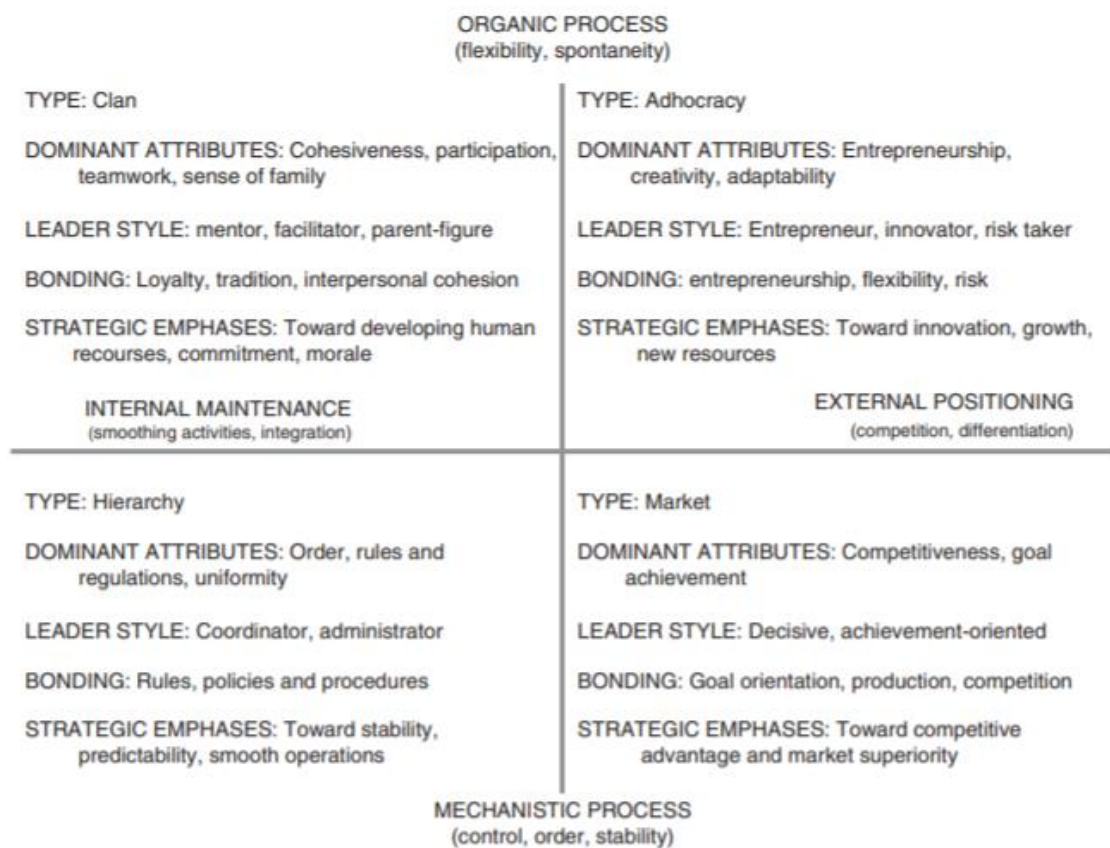


Figure 2: Deshpande Culture Type Model (Pinho et al, 2014)

Much as with the theory of culture, the methods or models of measurement offer complexity, and become a matter very much of choosing a particular lens on which to focus the particular aspect under investigation. Each research or assessment project is for a specific purpose and as mentioned above, choosing the right “fit for purpose” method will yield the most useful results. With little research having been conducted in the community sports context in relation to impact on culture, the models offer a starting point on which to base further studies. Choosing the correct model for this specific context will be paramount to the effectiveness of the research.

Culture and Organisational Performance

Culture can provide an organisation or team with an advantage over its competitors, enhance the organisations’ members experience and contribute to the organisation achieving its goals. It is a widely held view that culture is linked to organisational performance, whether that be in a positive or negative manner (Alvesson, 1989; Kilmann, Saxton & Serpa, 1986; Smircich, 1983; Weese, 1995). Using a sporting analogy, a team that is focused on a common goal, supports each other to be better and stays together over a period of time thereby having a greater understanding of each members idiosyncrasies and how they add value to the overall sum of the parts, is perceived to be a winning team with better chances of success in their given endeavour (Schroeder, 2010). Similarly, in an organisational sense, members who adhere to the common behavioral norms, share the common beliefs and subconsciously understand the hidden assumptions will bring a strong and positive influence on the organisation. An organisation whose members actively support the culture of the organisation, alongside the culture being tied to the overall mission and goals of the organisation, is considered a strong culture that will have positive impact. The impact can be felt through low absenteeism, low staff turnover, high productivity and a sense of wellbeing by employees (Kilmann et al, 1986; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Weese, 1995).

Conversely organisations that exude a negative or weak culture whereby members are disengaged, or the culture is not aligned with the organisations mission can be indicative of an overall poor performance. Employees find the environment can be toxic, or uninspiring leading to high turnover, disgruntlement with working conditions imposed by management and struggle to find synchronicity and harmony among members. Bringing about culture change to a positive environment is difficult and time-consuming but todays modern manager is acutely aware of the importance of building

culture from both a top-down and participatory approach (Groysberg et al, 2018; Kilmann et al, 1986).

Sporting organisations typically base performance on the on-field/court success of their premier elite teams. This success feeds through an organisation with employees, volunteers and members alike celebrating success which can generate a shared positive experience. This is in stark contrast to the commercial world where success is measured typically by the bottom line whereby the success of a solid financial quarter does not necessarily generate the same excitement and fanfare a public sporting win does. This cultural aspect of sports organisations is a critical reason why sports managers and bodies should undertake to understand the link of culture to successful performance.

Whilst culture research to date has focused on the internal perceptions and its' impact on the organisations' performance, a new concept is the external perception of how culture identifies an organisations' brand or image to its customers. This is defined as corporate image – "the total impression that the entity makes on the minds of individuals" (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007). This offers organisations the opportunity to influence the way people view their offering and to tie their culture to their marketing and sales plans, thereby increasing market share or retention of customers (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007).

Of interest in the sports field is the notion of image being portrayed by staff in one on one personal contact situations with clients. This staff-customer interaction is high and occurs regularly in the sports sector, most notably viewed as a service industry (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007). MacIntosh and Doherty (2007) study of a private fitness Centre in Canada validated that culture had a significant impact on its customers intention to remain members and their satisfaction with their membership. Findings also identified that quite often there is inconsistency or a disconnect between how outsiders view values and beliefs, and what leaders of the organisation wish to convey. It was also noted that values that were important to clients were not necessarily those that held the most importance in the view of the leaders of the organisation (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007). Potentially this could be a result of underdeveloped consistency and alignment of the organisations values across all levels of employees within the organisation, which is a critical management challenge (MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007).

Community sports organisations are front facing the public, or their members, constantly and volunteers quite often become the "face" of the organisation. Ensuring these volunteers are well versed and share the desired cultural values and mission of

the organisation becomes imperative to project the best impression of the organisation. This approach will aid the organisation in recruiting and retaining members and the public who enjoy a positive experience through quality interaction.

Culture in Not-for-Profit Community Sports

Local community sports organisations whom typically operate as not-for-profit entities creates a context different to that of the commercial or private sector. Community sports are typically volunteer run member based organisations that are created to deliver opportunities for sport participation within the local community (Thompson, Kerr, Carpenter & Kobayashi, 2017). The private sector sets goals related to profit and return on investment for its stakeholders, whereby the not-for-profit sectors' goals relate to fulfilling a societal need that is aligned with the values of its founders (De Hoogh, Den Hartog, Koopman, Thierry, Van den Berg, Van der Weide & Wilderom, 2005; Pinho et al, 2014; Kaiser et al, 2009; Thiel & Mayer, 2009;). Sports organisations also tend to be game achievement or success orientated and emphasize the overriding need to honor the importance of the team or overall group over and above the needs of the individual (Osterlund, 2013; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Warner, Tingle & Kellett, 2013).

The structure and operation of sports organisations continues to rely heavily on a volunteer workforce, and this alone creates a unique dimension when investigating culture compared to a mainstream all employee, hierarchical environment (Osterlund, 2013). Paid employees and volunteer workers must co-exist and work together (Colyer, 2000; Schlesinger, Egli & Nagel, 2013; Thiel & Mayer, 2009). Volunteers often wear more than one hat in that they overlap into different aspects of the organisation. They can be parent, participant, administrator or coach and through each of these roles develop a different lens on which to interpret the values and beliefs of the organisation, some of which at times competes with each other (Colyer, 2000).

These distinct groups of paid employees versus volunteer workforce, and the different categories of members leads to a higher possibility that sub-cultures will arise, as each separate group has their own subset of values (Colyer, 2000). These different sub-cultures can lead to dissention and tension between the two groups within the same organisation (Maitland et al, 2015). Volunteers are often long-standing members of the organisation whom treasure the historic traditional methods of running their sport

and are resistant to change thereby creating a challenge for moving into a professional era (Colyer, 2000).

The economic environment in which a sporting organisation sits also impacts on the style or culture values exhibited (Girginov, 2010; Kaiser et al, 2009). Girginov (2010) explains the difference with the market led sport profitability focus of North American's against the basic right to participate aligned with government responsibility in the European market. These different contexts drive the culture style that is required for sports organisations to be successful implying that society can dictate culture (Girginov, 2010; Skemp & Lehmann, 2016). Similarly, commercial enterprise is impacted by the economic and demographic environment in which they operate however community sports organisations, especially within New Zealand, are far more reliant on government support and direction, at both national and local level.

Chapter Summary

As a social-psychological phenomenon, organisational culture remains open to interpretation. However there is agreement in the extant literature that it is a shared experience among a group of people, created through shared beliefs and a common goal. Culture remains a complex issue and adding to the difficulty of understanding is the use of different terminology to describe beliefs or values. The human factor of individual perception and interpretation adds its' own inherent complexity to an already misunderstood concept. The axiom that captures culture as "the way we do things around here" reflects the breadth of coverage in the body of literature.

It is important to consider levels (Schein, 1985) within an organisational culture as they are often indicative. This is particularly relevant for sport contexts in which attention is often focused on artifacts representing various levels of culture. Sport is rife with artifacts ranging from team colours, home grounds, traditions and history. These provide sport entities with an individual and distinctive personality. Equally, related literature suggests that sub-cultures must be considered in any cultural analysis. These are a natural characteristic within the community sports context and often include volunteers, different categories of members and paid personnel. The research indicates that organisations ought to also consider the impact of culture on their performance, whether that relates to winning or financial performance. The not-for-profit sector is distinctive from the commercial for profit in that it is driven by its mission to serve its members and community, not generate financial returns. From the literature it's evident that culture can be used as a means of exerting control over behaviours. All in all, one can conclude from the related literature that a qualitative design is likely most

appropriate to capture the complexity of culture in a dynamic environment like community sport.

There is very limited research exploring culture in the context of community sports organisations (Kaiser et al, 2009; Osterlund, 2013). Studies have been conducted in American university sport contexts or at National Sport Organisation level but the organisational environment of community sport organisation is fundamentally different. Further research in this specific context is needed to fill the gap and would be useful to both managers within community sport as well as scholars attempting to better understand culture across sport.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Context

In New Zealand, Netball is the number one women's sport and the second largest team participation sport with over 140,000 registered members and more than 300,000 participants annually ("Netball Interest on the decline", 2018; Netball New Zealand, 2020). The system is led by the National Sporting Organisation, Netball New Zealand, underneath which sit five Regional Sports Organisations sorted geographically into Zones. The Zones' service 83 local Netball Centres, at which clubs and schools are affiliated members (Netball New Zealand, 2020).

Netball offers competition and development at a local level through each netball centre. Representative netball is based on various age group teams chosen to represent their centre at specific national tournaments, which creates a competitive nature at national level. Centres hold winning a national title in high regard, and national publicity adds to the value of winning at this level (Netball Waitakere, 2019; "New Zealand Under 19 netball tournament in Invercargill wraps up", 2019).

This study focused on Netball Waitakere, a large netball centre located in West Auckland and affiliated to the Netball Northern Zone. Netball Waitakere was established in the late 1960's as the Henderson Waitemata Netball Association. It is now the third largest centre in the Auckland Region, and Netball Northern Zone (Netball Northern Zone, 2018), with more than 6500 participants each year (Netball Waitakere, 2018; Netball Waitakere, 2020).

The original city council area known as Waitemata, was amalgamated into Waitakere City in 1989. In 2010 Waitakere City Council was merged into the single entity of Auckland City Council. The colloquial nickname "westie" was coined due to the geographic location in relation to the rest of Auckland (Wikipedia, 2020). The population was made up of mainly blue-collar workers with a socio-economic mix reflecting lower than average incomes (Wikipedia, 2020). The population reflects a higher than average percentage of Maori and Pasifika than across Auckland as a whole (Stats NZ, 2018).

Netball Waitakere has evolved over 50-years from a volunteer led model, to an Executive Committee to the current structure featuring a Governance Board, paid staff and a team of volunteers. The physical structures within the environment have also changed over time. The Centre was first administered from a caravan, then relocated prefabs in the 1970's, followed by an architecturally designed pavilion that was officially opened on 5th April 1981 (Netball Waitakere 50th Jubilee Facebook Page). This building

was the heart of the Centre until its removal in 2009 to make way for the \$5.3million structure that is Te Pai Centre that exists today ("Funding confirmed for Netball Waitakere centre", 2007).

The pavilion, as it was known, had a large open plan space that included the bar. This was open to all members during competition times, and the bar was heartedly patronised after Saturday afternoon matches. The pavilion was frequently used by local community groups such as weight watchers, and many members hired the centre to celebrate special family occasions like 21sts. Unfortunately, it became rundown and uneconomical to renovate, hence the construction of the facility now onsite.

The new facility is a landmark on Te Pai Place due to its visibility from the main route of Lincoln Road. The building and courts are commonly referred to as "Te Pai" by locals and netballers alike. When the new building was completed it was "big and flash" and members were not allowed to utilise it the same way they had with the old building. The function room was upstairs and not accessible to members on competition days with a smaller room downstairs reserved for officials, and no inside space for members to congregate. A temporary bar was run out of the officials room with seating only available in the small café area of the indoor arena.

Methodology

The intent of this study was to gain a deep understanding of culture as a social dimension of Netball Waitakere's community of sport participants. The study explored participants lived experiences through their association with Netball Waitakere, and their personal perceptions of those experiences (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). These perceptions and experiences relate to how their beliefs and values have been formulated, what drives their behaviour and their overall engagement with the sport.

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because of its potential to unearth rich narratives (Gray, 2018; Legg, Snelgrove & Wood, 2016; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). The study adopts a constructivist position in that meanings are constructed and created by interactions within the world. Social actors influence meanings which are constantly being reviewed over time and through different interactions (Grix, 2002; Johnston, 2014). How people make sense of the world, is a construction of individuals and their personal interactions within different environments (Gray, 2018). This approach is most appropriate for this research as it seeks to understand members perceptions, feelings and emotions of which there is no current

reality, as the reality and truth for each person will be different. The meanings will be constructed by the members and their interactions with both the organisation and fellow members (Gray, 2018; Grix, 2002; Johnston, 2014).

Qualitative research is relevant for situations where there is little known, there is a strong desire to thoroughly explore a problem, or where it is desirable to gain new insights into an existing topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Gray, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018). It is an exploratory style of research characteristically flexible and contextual as it is conducted in a real-world setting and at the same time addresses social aspects of a phenomenon (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Gray, 2018; Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013). Social research can be interpreted as having no scientific basis but is better understood as everyday knowledge, generated through the personal experience of individuals (Calder, 1977; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

Qualitative research is a rich field of enquiry with a vast number of approaches (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). Each of the many data collection methods have advantages and disadvantages, however it is the research question and context of the environment in which the research will take place that influences the preferred method. A common method for undertaking group research is the focus group approach with these groups being defined as a “collective activity” or “organized discussion”, hence this method was applicable in this study. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Randle, Mackay & Dudley, 2014).

Focus groups can facilitate the collection of diverse and information rich responses that can lead to an understanding of peoples’ feelings and perceptions. Synergy and group dynamics add another layer of complexity whereby the interaction between the group members allows for feedback and expansion of thoughts offered within the group (Gray, 2018; Lin, Chalip & Green, 2016; Randle et al, 2014). Groups naturally generate a wider variety of discussion as different personalities and sharing of experiences provide opportunities for bonding over commonalities, or disagreement over points of difference. Group interaction is encouraged, talking to each other with the researcher initiating and guiding interaction (Calder, 1977; Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Lin et al, 2016). This technique provides the researcher with more valuable depth of information than what may be elicited from a single person conversation.

Participating in research may generate feelings of being subjects under experimentation. Focus groups that bring together a group with commonalities, in an environment that is natural to that common group can generate a relaxed ambience that allows free flowing contribution by participants (Randle et al, 2014). Another

advantage is they can generate discussion and allow for a variety of views to emerge as participants are able to explore the topic as a collective. They have time to consider their responses as others in the group talk therefore a deeper or more thoughtful view may be offered (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Gray, 2018). Focus groups can create synergy and enthusiasm with a snowball effect of increasing the depth and breadth of the topic under discussion (Hall & Rist, 1999; Randle et al, 2014).

There are disadvantages of group discussion in that there is the risk of the conversation veering off topic or one or two group members dominating the conversation. At times the researcher has little control over the outcomes or content generated. Groups can prove intimidating for shy people to speak up, and for those with alternative views peer pressure may dissuade them from voicing their true opinions and thoughts (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; Gray, 2018; Guest, Namey, Taylor, Eley and McKenna, 2017).

Another criticism of the focus group method raised by Calder (1977), was the possibility that results obtained are subjective. Calder (1977) argues that a different set of participants, or a different moderator, may well generate a completely different set of data (Calder, 1977). Various studies comparing focus groups with individual interviews cited different results, from the quantity of data themes produced, the breadth and context of each method, however in general similar concepts and conclusions were reached through each method. It is noted as an area requiring further systematic research to truly understand the strengths and weaknesses of each method (Guest et al, 2017).

The organisation being researched provides a defined context and environment through which meanings and beliefs could be considered as constructed by the social interactions of the population of the netball community. The qualitative approach taken strived to extract the meaning of experience as it is lived and felt which is what this research study attempted to ascertain about the members of this netball community (Calder, 1977; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

Research Methods

Sample

Netball Waitakere was the local community sports organisation chosen in which to undertake this research utilising focus groups. The population sample was chosen

from members or stakeholders of Netball Waitakere as their association with the netball centre is a common interest.

A purposive and homogenous approach was taken to create the focus groups. Purposive sampling has been found to be the most common sampling strategy in focus group studies and within the sport and recreation field (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2011; McHugh, Deal, Blye, Dimler, Halpenny, Sivak & Holt, 2019). This allows the creation of groups who have shared common experiences albeit from different lenses however will lend to positive group dynamics and in-depth discussion. Three or four different groups were purposively selected to cover the range of stakeholders who are deemed information rich subjects that can provide important perspectives on the chosen topic (Gray, 2018; McHugh et al, 2019; Warner, Dixon & Chalip, 2012). The groups, that would include volunteers and non-volunteers, were identified as

- 1)Employees
- 2)Board members
- 3)Members longstanding – 5-15years +
- 4)Members new – less than 5 years.

Participants in the study were invited to attend one of two separate focus groups to discuss aspects of organisation culture as they related to their experiences of being members of Netball Waitakere. Invitations were sent by the organisation via email to its member database, reinforced by a social media post on Facebook and a link to the invitation on their website. Initial dates were set for September, just after the busy winter netball season, but due to challenges with communication between the researcher and key contact in the organisation, these had to be delayed until October 15-17th 2019.

The original intention was to create four purposively selected groups of members. However, this was unachievable due to time and communication constraints with both the organisation and its members. It is possible that members were apathetic to participating in the study due to it being off-season and as volunteers their available time is limited. The imposed ethical limitations on direct contact by the researcher created reliance on the organisation to generate enthusiasm and engage the membership.

Data Collection

Two focus groups were eventually held with a combination of members across both groups, the impact of which is noted in the limitations. The participants were a range of members that had a long history at Netball Waitakere, were employees or Board Members and new members to the Centre, detailed in Table 2. All participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet, and signed a Consent Form, as required by AUTC Reference 19/226.

Table 2: Sample Characteristics

Focus Group Participant	Characteristic
1	Member long standing
2	Member long standing
3	Member new
4	Member new
5	Member new
6	Member long standing, Board Member
7	Member long standing, Employee

Each session lasted between 60 – 90 minutes with participants all engaging and contributing to the conversation. Conversation was lively, convivial and respectful. The groups were small in number with 3 or 4 participants in each, however it is possible that better interaction was generated due to smaller numbers of participants who are knowledgeable and highly involved (Warner et al, 2012). Throughout the sessions the facilitator asked open ended questions, regularly asking further probing questions to gain further clarification or generate greater discussion on particular points as they arose.

A series of questions, as listed below, were used as initial prompts by the independent facilitator to generate discussion amongst the group.

1. What words would you use to describe this netball centre
2. Describe the personality or character of this netball centre
3. Discuss your favourite characteristic of this netball centre
4. What value is fundamental and distinctive to this netball centre since its founding
5. What makes this organisation feel different or unique from other netball centres
6. How does this netball centre celebrate successes and achievements
7. Have you perceived a change in culture over your time in the community
8. Do you think culture is perceived differently among players, parents, board members, staff and those who are new to the centre

The focus groups were facilitated by an independent facilitator to remove any bias or perceived power imbalance of the researcher hosting groups, due to their previous and ongoing engagement in the netball sector. A fellow Master of Business colleague who is employed in the sport sector and hails from West Auckland conducted the groups due to his knowledge of sport and the local community. The Independent Facilitator signed a Confidentiality Agreement, as required by AUTECH reference number 19/226.r. The focus groups were recorded from which transcripts were prepared by the researcher.

Analysis

Analysis of the transcripts was undertaken using a thematic approach designed to draw meaning from the responses of focus group participants. This method is used to identify and analyse patterns or themes within a data set and can aid interpretation of aspects of the topic being researched (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). It is a useful approach in summarising large data sets, highlighting both similarities and differences. Another advantage of thematic analysis noted by Braun and Clarke (2006) is it may generate “thick description” of a data set along with unanticipated insights. A theme is a concept of importance found within the data relating to the research topic and which signifies a form of patterned response within the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gray, 2018).

Through the initial process of transcribing the recordings the researcher became familiar with the data set. The transcripts were read a further two times alongside reviewing of the recordings to ensure the context of transcription was correct. Identification of themes is undertaken through the process of thorough reading and then rereading of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Notes were taken on key phrases and topics raised by the participants with particular sentences of conversations being underlined and pages tagged with post it notes on the hard copies of the transcriptions. These key words and phrases were noted on two large A3 pages, one for each focus group, which were then reviewed to identify any similarities and differences.

Just like definitions of culture, a variety of words and descriptors surfaced, however there were similarities in the intent of these. The two pages were cross-referenced and both the transcripts and recordings were again referred to double checking context and intent. These key words and phrases were then able to be classified by grouping the

similar concepts and its associated wording or phrases into categories. This type of coding process becomes part of the data analysis by arranging meaningful groups of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gray, 2018). Each category was then further consolidated from which four distinct themes emerged. The emergent themes both reflected related literature and captured new ideas from the novel context.

Summary

This research project is placed in the context of Netball Waitakere, a non-profit local community netball organisation. The research is undertaken qualitatively involving two focus groups from which analysed transcripts identified the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The overarching aim of this study was to understand organisational culture within a community sports organisation by drawing meaning from community members. Four themes have emerged from analysing the data which were collected across two focus groups conducted at Netball Waitakere. The theme that emerged most emphatically was 'Sense of Community'. 'Place Attachment', as well as 'Performance and Winning' emerged, while 'Divergent Perceptions' was less obvious but still noteworthy.

Sense of Community

Almost all focus group participants conveyed a feeling of connection amongst members in one way or another. Reciprocal trust, tradition, a feeling of family and respect came through prominently. They feel this has created an environment of belonging, where members look upon the netball centre as their home that is welcoming, and a safe, familiar place. The overwhelming feeling was one of a sense of community or belonging to Netball Waitakere.

Participants noted that many members have only ever played or been associated with this one netball centre, and that whilst members may move centres due to work or family reasons, inevitably a vast majority return to the Centre, most often bringing their children with them. There are wider opportunities for members to play at other Centres as motorways and transport systems have improved over the years. There are two other large Auckland based centres that are relatively close in distance, however participants indicated that Netball Waitakere was providing a stronger pull for members to come and play here. Members in both groups commented on the generational link stating *"some of us who went away for a few years and then still came back"* and *"what stands out for me is you have the ladies that played here when they were younger that go to follow husbands away for work commitments elsewhere and for some strange reason they always make it back here"*. Building on these rich narratives another member clearly articulated that personal feeling of belonging commenting *"it's just that connection you have to this place and the people associated with it...and because that brings on your warm fuzzies...you're drawn back to it"*.

There was a strong feeling of tradition and generational association. Coming to netball and watching your mum or your grandchild play was a family tradition and the

day had certain rituals built around it. A participants' recollection of their childhood experience was captured as follows: *"I remember when I played...the pie with chips...that whole ritual...take the grandkids with the kids"*. Part of the ritual included netball providing a sanctuary for Mums at home to have some time out and fun with their friends as netball can be their only outing during the week. A long-term member commented *"A lot of women find this place a scapegoat for the day. Like this is Mum's day!"* and *"They feel good with their friends. So you've got a sense of community. It's almost like a sanctuary"*.

Members stated that commonalities were their passion for netball, their competitive nature on the court, and their love for what they call their netball whanau (family). A common passion for netball was obvious alongside a commitment to both the Centre and the sport. A participant who is a new member commented *"commitment, loyalty and passion is what I think most of us have and the centre has. We are passionate about the game – we are hard out committed"*. Across both focus groups whanau and tikanga Maori came through very strongly. A long-term participant of Maori descent noted *"This is our whenua, we are here 7 days a week. There is a lot of manaaki (support) and we take care of each other"*. *"We look after the place because it is our whare"*. This was supported by yet another participant who stated *"Cultural wise there's always been that sense of community, that sense of family"*. A further comment shows the strength of Maori influence at the centre stating *"we've got this cultural thing going on and Netball Waitakere probably produces it more than the other netball centres"*. Another observation from a long-standing member was *"the commonality is more than just netball – it's the relationships that you build in netball"*. This was reinforced by a follow up comment from the same participant saying *"if someone dies from this centre it doesn't matter how long you have been here, the whole centre goes. I think it is so good that we can come together and recognise that we do care about that family"*. An important comment from a participant in the other focus group was *"you become invested. We're rich with people that are invested and wanting to be part of this place"*.

Whanaungatanga (in Maori culture) is translated as a close connection between people; a kinship, or a relationship through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging (maoridictionary). This was a concept that every participant in the study believed in and felt very strongly about. Participants commented that the culture of the netball centre was a direct reflection of the West Auckland community within which they are located, as identified by the following comment *"It comes back to that inclusive nature, you know, whanaungatanga. A warmth that you don't necessarily get anywhere else"*. *"We've got a lot of manaaki in*

our community. The commonality is more than just netball". This was reinforced by a member in the other focus group who noted *"I suppose it's like whanaungatanga". "It's home for me, for us – a continuation of the communities that you already live in"*.

Members reflected on the competition aspect of sport, and how they can be competitive on court, but one whanau off court, all here to progress the development and growth of netball in the community. Across the two groups there were differences of opinion on whether historically the competitiveness was more important than the relationships and caring for each other. One group felt the competitive nature historically was more fierce, with clubs less inclined to share knowledge and show mutual respect, which was reflected in the following statement *"I think it's healthier now. You still want to bash each other but you actually care. 20 years ago you would just want to bash them, but relationships are much healthier now, on and off the field"*. The other group felt the mutual respect and caring was always evident, as well as the competitiveness of clubs and that this has been a constant, stating that *"that's been a constant...the competitiveness has always been there"*.

Comments were made about how, much like a family, you are competitive but ultimately everyone is here to make the game a better spectacle for everyone. An interesting observation from one of the newer members summed this up as *"some people you are going to rub up the wrong way..it's a family..you're not going to agree with everyone within your family but you get over it"*. The feelings of both love and frustration was summed up by another participant commenting *"sometimes someone is driving me nuts and you just want to strangle them and next minute you want to hug them – that's how we are"*.

The study revealed that Netball Waitakere was considered a vibrant place that had a character of its own. Whilst it reflected the Maori and Pasifika cultural roots of the West Auckland community, it was diverse in terms of both ethnicity and personalities of members. A pertinent comment from a newer member reinforced this message; *"what adds to the personality and character and vibe of the place is that you know, we don't have all sheep here"*.

Place Attachment

Participants reflected on the Centre being “home” and “our where” and this transitioned into a discussion of the impact of the new facility on the culture of the organisation. The attachment of netball community members to the “place” emerged as an important theme relating to culture.

The construction of the Te Pai Centre in 2009 changed the physical environment for members. The new building was big and flash, and members were initially barred from using many of the function spaces. Study participants clearly articulated the impact this had stating it *“It locked you out because you didn’t want to interact with it because you weren’t sure that you were allowed to interact with it”*. Another participant identified a similar feeling stating *“we don’t feel the same because when we have our games out here, and the bars not open because you’ve got private functions happening so you’ve only got to six o’clock...they kick us out”*.

The study revealed some differences of opinion on the impact of the new building, with one medium term participant saying *“I think the people have changed more than the facility part”*. In contrast another participant who is a longer term member said *“the facility changed the people because this facility is ours, we felt good about it”* in reference to the old pavilion.

Focus group participants identified that the cost to hire the Centre was increased, and they assumed that this was due to it being more expensive to both run and maintain. They strongly conveyed that the new hire fees made it too expensive for the clubs to use it. The following comments illustrates how participants felt about the new building: *“Upstairs looked pretty cold and sterile...it was driven for corporate and that’s not West”*; *“They said this is a business, and I said I thought it was our where?”* and *“the money of this building did make a change to its members. We were scared to do things cos it would cost us”*.

For those participants who were long-standing members the historical experiences and memories evoked strong emotional ties to the old pavilion. An extremely emotive and telling comment from a long term participant in relation to Te Pai Centre was *“you know it looked great but give me that old building any day”*.

Ultimately members still felt a strong holistic attachment to the Centre. It was noted that they were lucky the centre still existed, and whilst the physical building may have changed the Centre itself remained pretty much the same. A participant still felt very strongly about their attachment to the Centre saying *“It’s probably the place that I know...probably one of the leading constants in my life”*.

Another long-term participant expressed their feelings of gratitude saying *“to have it still here, thirty odd years later, you know it’s not exactly the same, it’s a different building, but ultimately it’s knowing it always there, it’s home for me”*.

The physical closeness of so many netballers in one place plays a part in bringing people closer together. Unlike rugby or football fields where it is such a vast area and you go from field to field at different venues, whereas at netball even if games are at the same time you get to see people you know as there are so many games going on at one time at the same place. A newer member identified this difference across codes by saying *“you get to see so many people in the one area for just the afternoon – this kind of brings people closer together”*.

Performance and Winning

Focus group participants conveyed that performance and winning on the national stage were essential aspects of Netball Waitakere culture.

The participants talked in great depth about the high performance pathways made available through Netball Waitakere. Specifically, anecdotes were recounted relating to the recognition or lack thereof of Centre players who had gone on to higher honours and the historical perception of the Centre’s competitive ability regionally. Like many sports the drive to succeed is strong and player movement chasing the opportunity to be talent identified was an important discussion in the focus groups.

Members articulated attitudes and perception linking recent initiatives with performance and winning. These initiatives have included the implementation of academies, strong player welfare policies and strategic alignment across the organisation to focus on representative programs that breed success. Historically it was felt the Centre representative teams had a self-defeatist attitude and a feeling of not being good enough to compete with other bigger Centres. This has changed with representative teams and the Centre membership seeming to be more positive about national competitiveness, as highlighted by one participants comment *“we’ve always been good enough...it’s just the self-belief and now, we as a community are believing in that more”*.

Study participants alluded to the perception of this centre being the “poor cousin” to larger more established centres in the Auckland region, and the loss of quality players to these centres as they chased their individual dream of becoming Silver Ferns. This was reflected in comments such as *“Our Centre moved up*

competition wise. We got stronger and we're a Centre that others are fearful of" and "I remember when Netball Waitakere was the poor relation. Our clothes were yuk".

In 2019 Netball Waitakere Centre won the Under 15 Age Group Championship and the Netball New Zealand National Under 17 Championship. The focus group participants identified these as very important and long-awaited achievements which they attributed to improved development programmes and recent policy changes that were not always well received by the wider membership.

The study participants discussed the importance of athletes being able to play locally and attend their local schools and still participate in a quality competition that provides them with a development pathway to higher honours. A study participant involved at performance level highlights the importance of retaining athletes with the following comment *"supporting kids going to their local school – that's huge. Knowing we don't need to go to a different school to be a Silver Fern"*. Another participant agreed stating *"We can go to our local school just up the road to save Mum and Dad lots of money and lots of stress. We can play at our local champion netball centre and be a part of it. That spells sustainability, that is the future"*.

An emotive quote from one participant highlights the connection between tradition, history and a championship winning side, when commenting in relation to the Centres 2019 Under 17 National Title win *"it is just rewards for all those other people that have been here, and no longer with us...that's the success to me, when I see Life Members jumping for joy"*.

One group briefly discussed the difference between development netball and others who just come to play the game. In this group a participant raised the analogy of the funnel, commenting *"and XX you know keeps everyone grounded, and it's not all about them (reps) and not all about the little funnel... you gotta have the base that you gotta look after otherwise there is no funnel"*.

Participants in the focus groups discussed how success is recognised at or by the Centre, with varying degrees of positivity. Some participants bemoaned the lack of recognition of athletes that had gone on to higher honours, Franchise or Silver Ferns, who were not identified as having started their netball careers at Netball Waitakere. One participant who felt very strongly about this commented *"our Centre doesn't follow up or recognise and advertise that this centre does have Silver Ferns"*.

However other participants suggested the Centre as a whole shared in an individuals' success, giving them (the members) a sense of pride in belonging to Netball Waitakere by playing at the same centre as successful franchise athletes. A

participant in a different group noted in relation to a franchise athlete “*You know when they see her here..oh hey that’s xxx..there is a sense of pride from her coming from our Centre..they tell their cousins and friends ...Oh she’s at my Centre and I saw her on Saturday...so it is a shared success in all respects*”. A member in the same focus group built on this observation by saying “*All our successes are community successes...even with our U17’s, every single one of those girls have been influenced by these schools and clubs – so it’s a success for us all*”. This group felt it was proof again that success could be achieved by staying and playing at your local netball centre and this provided inspiration and role models to younger generations.

Divergent Perceptions

Netball Waitakere is a large and diverse organisation that caters to a range of people who are involved across different levels and in various capacities. Related to this, another theme emerged that identified divergent perceptions in relation to culture. The focus groups noted a difference in perception of culture related to the extent of an individuals’ interaction with the Centre. Secondly the groups disagreed when discussing the Governance Boards’ connectivity to the membership. And thirdly, the participants found consensus regarding culture as a reflection of the local community.

Study participants commented on how an individuals’ extent of interaction in and around the Centre guides their perception of its culture. This was outlined clearly by one participants statement “*perception is totally different depending on what level you deal with at the centre*”.

Players and parents have a more direct connection with their club or school, rather than the Centre itself. This was reflected in one participants’ comment that “*the players don’t get to see the politics, don’t get to hear it. They just come to play*”. Parents get to know other people around the Centre through being on the side line week in week out watching their daughter play, so they start to recognise and say hello to parents from other clubs. A relevant comment was “*a lot of parents just come to watch – they don’t get involved*”. Evolving this concept another comment was “*as a parent you would probably only hear what you hear from your child*” implying no direct contact is had with the Centre itself.

Focus group participants noted that there are also many members who just come to play their game and then go home...they have no other involvement with the Centre. Participants in both groups identified this saying “*our ladies just come and play*”.

their 40minute game and then they are gone” and “perception is totally different depending on what level you deal with at the centre”.

Those that play, and coach or umpire, or are club administrators remain around the courts for longer, know more people and get more invested in what is happening at the Centre as a whole. A very involved participant said *“when you been here for that long...no-one comes here for just 40minutes – you get stopped more...Hi! Chat chat chat...”*.

Newer clubs to the centre had different perceptions and appeared to not be so acquainted with historical or entrenched negativity as one of the participants who is a newer member in the study identified stating *“what ever happened behind the scenes was not exposed to us”*. They also felt that *“new people are more appreciative”*.

Focus group participants articulated distinctly different perceptions about connectivity between Centre governance (the board) and its members (school teams or clubs). One perception was that *“they (the Board) don’t even get amongst us themselves”* and *“it (board) doesn’t fit into the kaupapa*....they don’t understand it”*. (*kaupapa translation is principle or purpose, MaoriDictionary).

This group felt that good Board members are people that are passionate about netball and the West Auckland community, signalled by the comment *“people that are passionate about what we are all fighting for”*. They went on further to comment *“there is a huge disconnect due to not getting the right people on the board here”*. Furthering the discussion, the group revealed their perception of good people would include those that are business savvy, leaders, have financial acumen and understand the code of netball. This was an interesting insight given that none of those personal attributes would necessarily address the perceived disconnect that had been identified.

In complete contrast a participant in the other focus group said *“it’s easier because we’re all on the same page....we want what’s best for the Centre and the community”*. Another also commented that *“the board are out and about, they are everywhere”*. This group agreed the Board was very passionate about the Centre and had achieved some significant changes through team effort. This was reinforced by one of this groups’ participants stating *“it’s definitely a team effort, and that connection amongst everyone. We’re all here for the same reason and we are all on the same journey”*.

Whilst the groups revealed some significant differences in perception, conversely there was an aspect on which there was consensus. An agreed perception of Netball Waitakere was that it reflected the local community within which it is located.

The initial comment from a participant *“we get along with what we have and do the best we can”* was built on by another stating *“it’s part of the culture..making do with what you have but you still aspire knowing you can do as good as anyone else”*. Furthering the notion another participant was more forthcoming stating *“not glitzy are we”*. The agreed perception extended to infer that whilst Netball Waitakere is now more professional they were still prepared to be flexible around some processes. This became apparent through study participants commenting *“there’s some parts of it that are informal...it’s not slick...not as processed”* and *“the process is there and we can walk outside of it now and again”*. A newer participant finally captured the sentiment stating *“we don’t colour inside the line”*.

Summary

In summary four themes emerged:

1. Sense of Community
2. Place Attachment
3. Performance and Winning
4. Divergent Perceptions

These themes are discussed further in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION & IMPLICATIONS

This chapter provides a discussion of the findings and also includes a range of implications that practitioners in the community sport sector may find useful. The study investigated two key research questions which were for members to be able to identify the existence of organisational culture and describe it, and to identify if there were any differences in perceptions of culture from the various stakeholder groups.

McDougalls (2017) definition of culture as “a dynamic process characterized by the shared values, beliefs, expectations and practice across the members and generations of a defined group” (p.49) is highly relevant to the culture of Netball Waitakere which has been brought to light in this study. The findings of this study reveal the presence and understanding of many of these cultural elements by members of this local community sports organisation. This study also highlights the variance in perception of culture by different stakeholders however divergent is an issue that must be acknowledged by the organisation.

This study has implications for those in charge of community sports organisations having identified areas of strategic and operational importance for both managers and governance boards. To ensure the success of their organisations it would warrant managers being well versed in their knowledge of culture, and embrace those skills needed to maximise its’ impact and embed cultural concepts across their organisation.

Sense of Community

This study highlighted the strong feelings of belonging and connection members have to and within Netball Waitakere. All participants expressed strong emotional bonds to the Centre which in Maori can be expressed as *Turangawaewae* – translated as “place where one has rights of residence and belonging through kinship and *whakapapa* *” (*whakapapa – genealogy, lineage, descent), (MaoriDictionary). Members identified the personal relationships and *manaaki* that nourishes their involvement and passion for both netball and this particular netball centre. These relationships have been built over time on a tradition that has been passed through the generations of netballers involved with the Centre over its’ 50 years. This strong bond is described in Maori culture as *Whanaungatanga* – a kinship, shared experiences and working together providing a sense of belonging (Thompson et al, 2017). These

findings represent the rich narrative that was unearthed from participants in both focus groups.

The collective emotional connections articulated by the participants in this study can be interpreted using the theoretical concept of sense of community. This concept describes an environment that is created by a group of people who are working together for a common cause or come together to undertake an activity that binds them in a social world they create (Kellet & Warner, 2011). A formal definition of sense of community (SOC) is “Sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging and being important to each other, and shared faith that members’ needs will be met by their commitment to be together” (Chavis, Hogge, McMillan & Wandersman, 1986, p.25). Sense of community is therefore a pillar of the culture within Netball Waitakere and potentially at other sport clubs.

Netball Waitakere has a strong sense of community amongst its’ members and this aspect of the wider culture quickly becomes obvious to new participants and clubs joining the Centre. Members’ common passion for netball and the geographical location of West Auckland has provided an environment which has expanded their personal relationships and heightened their sense of belonging to this community organisation. Significant feelings of ownership, safety, having common values and beliefs, and strong emotional bonds are essential within the sense of community and therefore the culture of the netball community more broadly.

It is helpful to consider the current findings within the seminal sense of community model put forth by Chavis et al, (1986). In that model, sense of community is conceptualised as having four elements: membership, influence, shared values and fulfilment of needs, and a shared emotional connection. Membership of a community reflects attributes of boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging and personal investment (Chavis et al, 1986), all of which the study indicated were present at Netball Waitakere. The Centre meets the needs of its members by “providing a sanctuary” and through members shared values and passion for netball. Strong emotional connections are evident between the members of Netball Waitakere built through their positive interactions, honouring of members and sharing of important life events.

The overwhelming importance of sense of community signals a critical aspect that community sports organisations must ensure is actively promoted and developed to contribute to their success and sustainability.

Place Attachment

In the current study, focus group participants articulated a notable attachment to the physical place at Netball Waitakere, even though this had changed over the years. The comment was oft repeated that Netball Waitakere felt like “home” or “our where”.

The concept of “home”, a place where individuals feel safe, have a sense of ownership and belonging and create personal memories can extend to various physical locations (Charleston, 2009). Theorists have labelled this Place Attachment – defined as “attachment to place is a set of feelings about a geographic location that emotionally binds a person to that place as a function of its role as setting for experience” (van Campenhout & van Hoven, 2014, p.1091). Sports clubhouses provide an opportunity for social interaction shrouded in its own traditional culture that influence a sense of belonging for club members (Scannell & Gifford, 2010; van Campenhout & van Hoven, 2014). Sport stadia or grounds can become landmarks within their local communities, both from a visible physical sense and as a representation of their local community (Charleston, 2009).

The new facility at Netball Waitakere, commonly referred to as “Te Pai”, has become a local landmark and well-known icon across West Auckland. In the context of sport there is evidence that there can be a stronger place attachment to older stadia, as explained in Charlestons’ (2009) study of English Football clubs. This highlighted that supporters as well as participants are emotionally linked to clubs and particularly their home grounds. They experienced a feeling of belonging or territoriality and valued the personal memories associated with the stadium. Many football stadiums had been renovated or moved to new locations on the back of safety concerns in the 1990’s. Supporters of older stadiums felt a stronger sense of “home” and were more attached than supporters of clubs that had new stadiums (Charleston, 2009).

This study emphasised the strong sense of attachment members of Netball Waitakere had for the old pavilion, the memories that evoked and history associated with it. The Centre was a social hub where friendships were built off the court and many significant family events were celebrated. Whilst members appreciate all that the big, flash new building has to offer, they felt less emotionally connected to the new building. The initial barriers faced with limited access and higher costs to rent created a disconnect for members. Over time they have come to appreciate that such progress has a financial impact and being fit for purpose comes at a cost.

This professional and financial environment present in today’s sports clubs lends towards maximising return on investment, especially when high investment has taken place to build or renovate sports facilities. Sports administrators seek to identify

and develop new streams of revenue to cover the cost of facilities and ensure a financial return or financial sustainability to their stakeholders (Lee, Parrish & Kim, 2015). To this end many new sporting facilities are designed to incorporate key features or services that can support a variety of functions and events. This opens the scope of opportunity to widen revenue streams beyond just the sport programme itself (Lee et al, 2015). Netball Waitakere's new facility was built to be more than just a place to play netball, but a facility that would service the wider community and create new financial avenues for the organisation. It also brought the Centre's facilities up to a similar or higher standard of others across the Auckland area. Notably the study participants celebrated that after some turbulent years of financial difficulty the Centre still existed, for which they were extremely grateful.

Balancing increasing professional requirements and financial viability with traditional volunteer led structures is a challenge for all community sports organisations. The ability to maintain members personal attachment when upgrading or replacing facilities must be considered by sports managers to ensure members are taken on the journey and transfer their emotional connection accordingly.

Performance and Winning

In the current study the value and pride of winning on the national stage emerged as an important aspect of the Centre's culture. The focus group participants spent considerable time discussing the representative program, the steps that had been taken to improve competitiveness and the joy at becoming national champions in two age groups. The overwhelming focus on competition and winning at the representative level was in stark contrast to the current sporting philosophy in New Zealand. Five of New Zealand's major codes have created a public awareness campaign called "Keep up with the Play" which is targeted to youth sport deliverers placing importance on fun and skill development to retain youth in sport. This initiative is driven by the philosophy of Balance is Better and aims to change behaviour affecting youth sport (Sport NZ, 2020). Key messages include non-early specialisation and removal of representative teams under the age of 18 years of age, involving children in sport at any level with a focus on fun, and player welfare through over training and playing.

Netball Waitakere development staff have created a strong netball academy and representative program, and it is imperative that all sports codes have a

component of development to their programmes. Sport development programmes focus on increasing participation in the code and enhancing the quality of performance of participants in their sport. Some development programmes are aimed at providing opportunities for the most talented young athletes to follow a pathway to elite sport, and perform to their full potential (Green, 2005; Siedentop, 2007). It would appear that currently Netball Waitakere remains intent on providing these pathway programs.

One participant acknowledged the sport pyramid theory and the importance of its implications for the Centre. The sports pyramid is a well-known analogy and theory in sport development that makes the assumption that a broad base, or mass participation will supply a large quantity of athletes who wish to progress to an elite level of sport. The pyramid comprises three components – athlete recruitment, retention and transition (Green, 2005). The base level of the pyramid can be aligned with a number of objectives in that mass participation can positively impact health promotion, have a positive economic benefit, and lastly provide a large pool of athletes who move to competitive sport to finally transition into high calibre international competitors. To progress up the pyramid athletes must be aware of the opportunities available and supported as they transition to learning new skills. The culture of mass competition – the base – is very different to the culture at advanced levels of codes (Green, 2005).



Figure 3: Pyramid Model of Sport Development (Green, 2005)

Building on the key themes of the 'Keep up with the Play' initiative, removing identification and specialisation of talent at an early age is a key focus of the 'Balance is Better' campaign promoted by Sport New Zealand (balanceisbetter.org.nz). This initiative was driven by the decline in youth sports participation in New Zealand, with factors of overly competitive coaches and parents, the drive to win at all costs and

taking youth sport too seriously cited as rationale for the drop off rate (Walters, Payne, Schluter & Thomson, 2015). This has challenged the tradition of early talent identification, junior development programmes and the push for youth to choose and specialise in one sport (balanceisbetter.org.nz). It is appreciated that youth enjoy being competitive and like winning however not to the extent that it becomes the only reason they participate in sport. Research suggests the exultant value of winning at all costs and over-competitive sporting environments is imposed and created by adults (Siedentop, 2007; Walters et al, 2012). The focus group participants in this study were all adults over the age of 16, hence it may be of interest for the Centre to undertake its own survey of younger members to ascertain their perceptions of Netball Waitakere's culture of performance and winning.

The study made mention of a newer development program the Centre had implemented for Year 7 and 8 age children called PDP – Player Development Program. This is a national program created by Netball New Zealand to replace representative netball in this age group, in line with 'Balance is Better' philosophy. The program aims to be open to all in this age group and focuses on improving skills at any level and enjoyment, comradery and enjoying netball. Research has shown that elitism and inequality becomes a factor in sport participation when resources are targeted to one sector of a sporting population at the demise of another or when winning on the international stage becomes an obsession (Ryan & Martin, 2013; Siedentop, 2007). A notable example in Siedentops (2007) study explained how in the American school system only two teams of athletes will participate in basketball which equates to 24 athletes of a possible 2000. The remaining 100-200 other interested youth have little opportunity to develop or participate. School boards have passed decisions to sustain 12 coaching resources that work with 60 football athletes and not one board member questioned how those resources might be utilised to further the participation opportunities of the rest of the college youth (Siedentop, 2007). This underscores the inequity of funding elite programs over mass participation. Equally the High Performance Sport system in New Zealand buys into the "manufacturing of champions, hopefuls are spotted young, and less talented methodically weeded out" ethos (Ryan & Martin, 2013).

Netball Waitakere's culture of performance and winning excited many with their national title wins in 2019 however the long-term effects on youth participation and retention in the game are worthy of serious consideration. The sporting sector worldwide is showing strong signs of increasing participation for all and a desire to lessen the early specialisation focus on talent development in children. This will be a

major consideration to strategically change thinking and embed this new philosophy into community sports organisation cultures.

Divergent Perceptions

The study unearthed a prominent divergence in perceptions that seems to form an important part of the culture of the netball community. The differences in perceptions of culture was felt across the range of people involved in the organisation and identified that the extent of personal involvement was a critical factor in determining how invested or aware of culture members may be. This may represent that distinct sub-groups exist amongst the Centre's membership and stakeholders.

With such a large membership it was apparent that a sizeable segment interacted purely on a user only basis with little buy in to the culture thereby potentially not sharing the overall values and beliefs of Netball Waitakere. This finding is of importance to the governance and management of the organisation, as the definitions of culture imply a sense of shared beliefs and values manifested by a group drawn together through a common goal (Cole & Martin, 2018). This lack of engagement may impact the organisations' ability to successfully implement or achieve its goals as research has shown that active support of an organisations culture, or a strong culture, will have a positive impact (Kilmann et al, 1986; Smith & Shilbury, 2004). It is acknowledged that culture has informal and formal aspects which can have both positive and negative impact on achieving the desired outcomes (Cole & Martin, 2018). An organisations culture are those aspects that are prominent and strongly influence the direction of the organisation. Synergy within the organisation – everyone in the same waka paddling in the same direction, builds shared purpose resulting in increased productivity and likelihood of success (Cole & Martin, 2018).

The study raises the question as to whether there is synergy within Netball Waitakere. However, for those heavily involved in the organisation there appeared to be a shared purpose and alignment across the levels of the organisation, but again the study revealed differences in this perception of synergy between the Governance and its membership. Embedding positive cultural aspects into an organisation is an importance aspect of governance and management, and most effective when applying a top-down and participatory approach (Kilmann et al, 1986).

Conversely the study did identify consensus that Netball Waitakeres' culture echoes that of the community in which it is located. This become apparent through the

focus group discussions as the original idea expressed was expanded and agreed upon by other participants. For those study participants who live in the area their interaction with the local community and its environment may have influenced their social construct and personal reality of West Auckland culture. Community culture can be identified through assessing the interrelated aspects of physical environment, population and social organisation which all provide information to garner a greater understanding of a community (Skemp, Dreher & Lehmann, 2016).

Understanding the local community, their nuances and demographics in which sports organisations are located will be helpful for sports managers and governance boards to ensure their beliefs and values are aligned with the local community culture.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was undertaken in the context of one local community sport organisation, potentially limiting the findings of this study as relevant to this organisation only. As noted in the discussion the culture of this organisation was considered a reflection of the community in which it was located. Studies undertaken of netball centres in different geographical and demographic areas may generate cultural aspects that are specific to those areas, as a replication of their local community culture. The findings may be of relevance to other not-for-profit sporting organisations located within the same geographic area. Community sports organisations share many commonalities however it may be difficult for this study findings to be generalised across netball, or other codes, as they are context specific.

For netball to gain a wider consensus and understanding of the cultural nuances of their code further research of different sized centres in different communities, including rural locations and smaller cities, would be required. Sports codes within the West Auckland geographic area may wish to utilise this qualitative study as a base from which to further investigate culture within their own organisations. There is opportunity to gain further insights into the existence of any sub-cultures, their alignment or otherwise with the organisations overarching goals and the impact of this, which was not addressed in this study.

Focus groups as a research method pose some limitations through the number and size of participants, and this study encountered some difficulty in communicating with the sample population. Due to ethics restrictions the onus was on the organisation itself to encourage and engage its members to participate, where unfortunately the

benefits and objectives of the study were not well communicated, nor were a priority for the organisation. Had the researcher been able to promote the project this limitation may have not occurred. The original intention was that four different sample groups would be gathered for four separate focus group sessions, but due to the difficulties mentioned two combined sessions were held, however there were participants from each of the original four groups involved.

As Calder (1977) identifies, there is the possibility that some results from focus group research could be subjective. There is a distinct possibility that a different group of participants, in this study perhaps those members that are not heavily involved or are associated purely with schools, may offer a different set of data and findings. The other variable impacting findings from focus group is the reliance on a facilitator to guide the discussion, effectively probe further on key areas of importance to the study and ensure equal input from all participants.

Qualitative research that is conducted in an exploratory style must remain flexible as it is driven by the participants, their environment and responses. In this study flexibility around timing and size of focus groups was required. The actual sessions were lively where passion for the sport came to the fore, and participants built on concepts as they were tabled enabling a rich and deep narrative and understanding to emerge. Whilst at times perceived as non-scientific the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to understand the personal experience of the individuals, and for the groups as a collective (Calder, 1977; Tomkins & Eatough, 2013).

This study revealed a strong sense of community was felt by all members, and this is an area that would benefit from further research. There is a plethora of research on sense of community amongst volunteers however a study specifically on participants as members of an organisation would be of interest to sports managers. Further understanding of how members sense of community can be created and sustained through organisation personnel or environmental change would benefit the community sports sector in retaining participants and building loyalty to their organisation.

The community sports sector remains heavily reliant on volunteers therefore providing practical tools and knowledge of the culture concept is imperative to build the capability of sports organisations. It would be beneficial to have research that provides an understanding of how culture relates to, and within, their organisations, and the critical steps required to build culture. Analysing successful implementations of culture, identifying the factors needed and journey undertaken would be invaluable to the community sport sector. These types of studies would provide sport managers with

insights into the implementation of culture and how they may use this to improve their own organisations' performance.

For academics, both in the field of research and in the classroom, building knowledge on the theory of culture as it applies across the whole sporting spectrum can only provide future sport students with current fit for purpose tools that will enhance the sports industry.

CONCLUSION

In this study organisational culture was explored within the context of Netball Waitakere, a local community sports organisation. Of the four key themes that emerged related to culture, the strength and staunchness of sense of community stood out. Place attachment was apparent and somewhat expected although not considered within the original literature review prior to commencing the study. Commentary reflecting the theme of performance and winning was emphatic and is an area which should be considered promptly as it misaligns with the current philosophy of sport in New Zealand which is trending away from this. A lack of synergy amongst members was evident as well and this is an area for further investigation from the organisation.

The strength of sense of community from within an organisation located in a highly Maori and Pasifika populated area aligns with traditional cultural values. The principles of Tikanga Maori are incorporated and clearly evident at Netball Waitakere. The organisation has paid staff and a Governance Board but remains heavily reliant on volunteers. It is a well-researched concept that volunteers embrace sense of community within the organisations they serve, therefore it is not surprising that sense of community was found to be evident in this context. The strength of sense was quickly apparent and is a valuable aspect of culture vastly important to the members of the centre. That members are so passionate and loyal bodes well for the retention and commitment of members to this Centre.

A theme not originally considered in the literature review that emerged from the study was that of place attachment. The strong emotional bonds members felt to the previous physical facility, referred to as the pavilion, provides insight to sports managers of the ties to the physical attributes and artifacts of a member led organisation. This opinion was felt more strongly by long-standing members suggesting history and tradition are important. Generational links are inherent in local community sports organisations and endow a strong sense of loyalty that binds future generations

to one organization. It would be advantageous for sports managers to ensure appropriate importance is placed on cementing these traditional bonds and attachments within their membership.

The most surprising theme to emerge was that of performance and winning. There is a plausible environment of exhilaration in any sports organisation when their teams are winning which is shared across all members. This shared elation of winning can further strengthen culture as members are collectively part of a positive experience. Whilst every organisation wishes to perform effectively, and winning is inherently linked to sport, the importance and value placed on the Centre's representative achievements was compelling. The study findings only related to winning at the game as an aspect of performance and did not delve into performance of the organisation in a business sense. For a sports organisation that services 6000 members the value of focusing on the top echelon is debatable. Even more compelling is how this aspect of culture is in direct contradiction of New Zealand's current national sporting philosophy for non-specialisation in youth sport and increasing participation and retention through fun and enjoyment.

The fourth theme to emerge was the notion that culture perceptions seemed to differ across the membership. These divergent perceptions manifested themselves through a notion related to the extent of a members' involvement with the Centre, in that the more involved a member was, the more aware and embedded in the culture they became. The concept of divergence was also found in differences of opinion on cultural synergy. The study showed differences in relationship to the synergy between the governing body and members, an area the Governance Board may well wish to confront. There is potential that sub-cultures exist within the Centre, and channeling these sub-cultural groups and understanding the impact of the levels of culture is a challenge the organisation management needs to address to ensure a focus is retained on the common goal.

There are limitations in every realm of research. This study was limited by its context both in terms of a singular sports code, and singular organisation within that code. A qualitative research approach utilizing focus groups poses certain well-known researched limitations. The logistical limitations are evident but manageable and can be easily addressed in future studies. The opportunities for future research are endless, however a focus on further research to understand members perceptions and alignment within the community sports context would be invaluable to the many not-for-profit sports organisations within New Zealand.

This study accentuates the importance and influence of culture within community sports organisations creating a valuable platform from which sports managers can identify their own gaps in knowledge. These findings highlight the importance of culture and should encourage sport managers to assess their own organisational culture, and its' impact from their members perspective. All sports codes are competing not just against each other, but also with an abundance of new recreational activities available in today's digital world. Sport managers' ability to create advantages to enhance market share and drive participation, and retention of members, is critical to ensuring long term sustainability of community sports that provide such an important aspect of our society.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

AUT

TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

17 August 2019

Michael Naylor
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Michael

Re-Ethics Application: → 19/226 Exploring organisational culture within the context of a community sports organisation

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 7 August 2022.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. → The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the [Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research](#) and as approved by AUTC in this application.
2. → A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. → A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. → Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
5. → Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. → Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

■

■

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: → karyne252@xtra.co.nz

APPENDIX B: TOOLS

Focus Group Protocol

1. Set Up

- a. Set up room with chairs in a semi- circle facing the projector/whiteboard
- b. Set up refreshments to the side (tea,coffee,water,snacks,serviettes)
- c. Set up sign in table
- d. Check air conditioning/room temperature & lighting

2. Arrival of Participants - Facilitator

- a. Tick off names on Focus Group attendance record
- b. Explain consent form and collect signed form from each participant
- c. Give each participant a sticky name label – first name only
- d. Welcome participants to partake of the refreshments and make themselves

comfortable

3. Start of session

- a. Health & Safety notice (as provided by venue)
- b. Refreshments provided – help yourself as and when needed
- c. Facilitator – introduce yourself; thank everyone for attending, reminder of sessions are being recorded.

4. Run Sheet

Introduction

Agenda for the evening • Time allowed 2½ hours • Help self to refreshments throughout the session • Thank everyone for coming

The Topic: Culture • An overview of what it is and the importance to organisations

Definition: Example – “the way we do things around here”; artifacts and traditions; values and beliefs

The Session: Open sharing and discussion encouraged • Questions are prompts only as a starter • Encourage everyone to have a voice • Ensure there is conversation generated amongst the participants rather than just talking at the facilitator • Keep the group on track on topic but allow for deviations that are relevant to the research question

The Prompt questions:

1. What words would you use to describe this netball centre
2. Describe the personality or character of this netball centre
3. Discuss your favourite characteristic of this netball centre
4. What value is fundamental and distinctive to this netball centre since its founding ?
5. What makes this organisation feel different or unique from other netball centres ?
6. How does this netball centre celebrate successes and achievements ?
7. Have you perceived a change in culture over your time in the community?
8. Do you think culture is perceived differently among players, parents, board members, staff and those who are new to the centre?

Closing Wrap up summary key points: Thank everyone for their respect, consideration and participation

5. Pack Down

Researcher will pack down venue and lock up once session is complete and participants have left

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 02 July 2019 updated 1 October 2019

Project Title: Exploring Organisational Culture within the context of a Community Sports Organisation

Thank you for expressing an interest in participating in this research, as per the invitation you received from Netball Waitakere.

To refresh your memory below is a copy of that invitation:

My name is Karyne Ross and I am undertaking a Master of Business in Sport and Recreation Management. I was previously involved with Netball Waitakere initially as a Board Member and then as General Manager until my resignation on 30 June 2019. I am undertaking research that forms part of my Masters' qualification and I am writing to invite you to participate in this exciting project. This research involves being part of a Focus Group for a two-hour session to discuss your experiences within the Netball Waitakere community. These group sessions will be facilitated by an independent facilitator to remove any potential bias due to my previous association with the Centre.

To participate you need to be over 16 years of age. I'd welcome you to join your fellow netties in a vibrant and enjoyable session to talk netball in the context of Netball Waitakere. Please email me direct should you wish to express an interest in being involved, and a full information sheet will be sent to you with dates and context for the discussion.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research aims to uncover and understand what a community sports organisation member or stakeholder values or believes about the culture of the organisation they are associated with. The following questions outline what the research is attempting to discover:

How is culture perceived and experienced by those within a community sports organisation?

How has culture changed over time?

Are there any differences in culture perception and experience among sub-groups?

I wish to involve a cross section of members or stakeholders in this project so as to ensure I hear a voice from all those that participate at Netball Waitakere – be they coaches, umpires, administrators, volunteers, employees or volunteer Board Members. Having this cross section of people will aid in getting information from each different perspective depending on how they are involved with the Centre.

I would like the participants to be open minded and voice freely their own experiences at the Netball Centre and enjoy the experience of talking about netball amongst their fellow netballers.

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations to the wider sporting sector.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified as a member or stakeholder of Netball Waitakere whose opinion and input will be of great value and benefit to this research. Members or stakeholders are identified through the Netball Waitakere databases of players, coaches, managers, umpires and club or school administrators.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You are able to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between

having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may not be possible.

A consent form will be required to be completed and handed to the Independent Facilitator on arrival at the Focus Group session you attend. Details of the Focus Group dates and times are as follows:

Venue: Netball Waitakere, Te Pai Place, Henderson, Auckland

Thursday 17 October, 6pm start and Thursday 24 October, 6 pm start

What will happen in this research?

Each Focus Group will be facilitated by an independent and experienced facilitator who will guide the group through a series of discussion points. Focus groups will allow for participants to build on each other's ideas and comments with groups naturally generating a wider variety of discussion as different personalities and sharing of experiences provide opportunities for bonding over commonalities, or disagreement over points of difference. There are no right or wrong answers in discussion just your personal perception of concepts and experiences. Please see Appendix A for list of discussion prompts. The focus groups will be audio recorded for transcribing to ensure all data is captured correctly.

What are the discomforts and risks?

There are really no major discomforts or risks as the groups provide an informal and jovial setting upon which to discuss your experiences and thoughts on Netball Waitakere. You may find it extremely interesting to hear your fellow members views and the facilitator will ensure every voice is heard, and participants remain courteous and respectful of others' opinions at all times. Refreshments will be provided at each Focus Group in the form of tea/coffee/juice and light snacks. There is minimal risk you or your statements will be identifiable in the published findings as no names will be used, however due to the small nature of the groups and close knit community there is a potential for those participating in the groups to later identify a summary statement.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

The facilitator will ensure a productive and positive environment is created and maintained throughout all group sessions. To mitigate the potential of identification of individuals in findings the consent form contains a declaration concerning keeping group members identity and discussion points confidential so as everyone can feel safe about sharing their knowledge and stories.

What are the benefits?

There is a gap in the current sporting culture literature as most studies having been undertaken on high performance or professional sporting teams, a very different context to a local sports organisation dealing with diverse memberships and a mix of paid staff and volunteers. The findings from this research may be used by sport managers, and Netball Waitakere as an organisation to inform their strategic planning and overall management of the organisation. Other community based sports organisations have already expressed an interest in this research to assist them with building capability for local clubs. A copy of the summary of findings including a link to the dissertation will be available to Focus Group participants, and will be shared within the local sporting sector including our local RST, Sport Waitakere.

Myself as researcher will gain the benefit of completing my dissertation as the final assessment in gaining my Master of Business in Sport and Recreation Management and the pleasure of increasing my knowledge in this area of organisational culture and change which is a personal passion of mine.

You may enjoy the benefits of discussions about your chosen code, netball, with fellow colleagues and find ways to utilise any immediate insights for the benefit of your own clubs or schools. It is also a wonderful opportunity to give back to your own Centre and share amongst your colleagues.

How will my privacy be protected?

Individuals will not be identified by name, club or school in the final research paper and confidentiality declarations from all other participants will assist with privacy protection. Data is stored at AUT and destroyed after 6 years following AUT research protocols.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

There is no financial cost to participate in this research. There will be a time commitment of 2-3 hours during the month of October to attend and participate in a Focus Group session.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

All focus group participants will be offered the opportunity to receive a summary of findings that includes a link to the dissertation.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Michael Naylor, michael.naylor@aut.ac.nz, Ph 9219999

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of ATEC, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference. You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details:


Karyne Ross Email: karyne252@xtra.co.nz Phone Mobile: 021333591

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Michael Naylor, michael.naylor@aut.ac.nz, Ph 9219999

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2019, ATEC Reference number 19/226.

Consent Form example


TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKĀU RAU

Consent Form

Project title: → **EXPLORING ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A COMMUNITY SPORTS ORGANISATION**

Project Supervisor: → **DR MICHAEL NAYLOR**

Researcher: → **KARYNE ROSS**

☐ → I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 02 JULY 2019.

☐ → I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

☐ → I understand that identity of my fellow participants and our discussions in the focus group is confidential to the group and I agree to keep this information confidential.

☐ → I understand that notes will be taken during the focus group and that it will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

☐ → I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.

☐ → I understand that if I withdraw from the study then, while it may not be possible to destroy all records of the focus group discussion of which I was part, I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

☐ → I agree to take part in this research.

☐ → I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature: →

Participant's name: →

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date: →

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2019 AUTEC Reference number 19/226. Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Facilitator Confidentiality Declaration



Confidentiality Agreement – Independent Facilitator

Project title: **EXPLORING CULTURE IN A COMMUNITY SPORTS ORGANISATION**

Project Supervisor: **DR MICHAEL NAYLOR**

Researcher: **KARYNE ROSS**

☒ I understand that all the material I will be discussing is confidential.

☒ I understand that the contents of the Consent Forms, tapes, or interview notes can only be discussed with the researchers.

☒ I will not keep any copies of the information nor allow third parties access to them.

Intermediary's signature: 

Intermediary's name: Javed Ali

Intermediary's Contact Details (if appropriate):
021 183 5876
javed@cybna.com

Date: 17/10/19

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

**Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 7 August 2019 .final approval was granted
AUTEC Reference number 19/226.r**

Note: The Intermediary should retain a copy of this form.

April 2018

page 1 of 1

This version was last edited in April 2018

Letter of Support Netball Waitakere



6 July 2019

Auckland University of Technology (AUT) Ethics Approval Board
c/o AUT City Campus
55 Wellesley Street East
AUCKLAND 1010

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Post Graduate Research Proposal – Karyne Ross

We acknowledge that Karyne Ross is now at the research stage of completing a Master of Business in Sport and Recreation Management at AUT, and the area of research to be undertaken is exploring culture in a community sports organisation.

Netball Waitakere (www.netballwaitakere.co.nz) is a community sports organisation with nearly 6000 members, and have been providing quality netball services to the wider West Auckland community for just over 50 years.

Karyne has requested support from the Netball Waitakere Board (the Board), to allow the research to be undertaken with particular groups within the Netball Waitakere membership.

The Board endorses and supports this request and look forward to working with Karyne over the coming months.

Should you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned on 027-438-6117 or finance@netballwaitakere.co.nz.

Yours sincerely,

Angela Masiutama

Board Member and Finance, Audit and Risk Chair – Netball Waitakere Incorporated

"Inspiring lifelong participation and excellence in the sport of Netball"

Te Pai Place, Henderson, Auckland 0654
PO Box 104-160, Lincoln North, Auckland 0654
09-838-6856