

Increasing Club Membership in Golf and Lawn Bowls  
in New Zealand: An Action Research Study

Katharine Hoskyn

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School of Sport and Recreation  
Auckland University of Technology

Supervisors: Associate Professor Geoff Dickson and Doctor Michael Naylor

## **ABSTRACT**

Declining sport club membership is a pervasive issue. The main research question of this thesis is how can a member-owned, non-equity golf or lawn bowls club increase adult membership in New Zealand, while sub-questions explore the retention and recruitment of adult members. This thesis comprises qualitative and quantitative studies of the wider environment for golf and lawn bowls and action research case studies within two clubs. The underlying pragmatist philosophy embraces contributions to both theory and practice. While pragmatism is not constrained to one paradigm, the dominant epistemology in this thesis is interpretative, given the issues are examined from many diverse perspectives.

This thesis makes four contributions to knowledge: 1) application of the customer retention concept of controllability to discontinued membership; 2) a seesaw effect in club membership, 3) a framework for balancing the membership seesaw; 4) application of the marketing orientation to a member-owned club. A club has good retention when none of the membership loss is preventable. However, a club may be surprised at the extent to which discontinued memberships are within its control. The seesaw effect articulates an overlooked truism that growth occurs when new members outnumber discontinued memberships. The framework for balancing the membership seesaw summarises factors influencing retention and recruitment. The marketing orientation in a member-owned club recognises the dual role of members as ‘customers’ and ‘marketers’, and places players as the central focus of club activity.

The practical contributions take two forms: 1) a process for clubs based on the action research used by the case clubs; and 2) successful initiatives from these studies. Membership is a club-specific issue, influenced by environmental factors, but the main drivers are within the club. The processes within this research can assist a club to diagnose membership ‘health’ and tailor initiatives to address the membership drivers within its control. The successful initiatives in this thesis were modification of membership categories, removal of discounts, addressing member irritations, attraction and support of new players and promotion of alternative forms of the sport.

Achieving growth in club membership is complex. Complexity increases when membership drivers are not well understood, information is fragmented, and a power imbalance exists among stakeholders with conflicting interests. However, the passion of club members for golf and bowls is strong. When this passion is combined with the fortitude to look thoughtfully at club processes, the seesaw can swing towards increased membership.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	ii
List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	xii
Attestation of Authorship.....	xiii
Acknowledgements.....	xiv
Related research outputs .....	xvi
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background and development of the research question .....	1
1.2 Research question .....	3
1.3 Significance of the research .....	3
1.4 Contribution of thesis.....	4
1.5 Golf and lawn bowls as the research context.....	5
1.6 Overview of methodology.....	6
1.7 Delimitation of thesis.....	7
1.8 Definition of key concepts .....	8
1.8.1 Defining membership and non-equity clubs .....	8
1.8.2 Defining participation by non-members .....	9
1.8.3 Defining recruitment and retention.....	9
1.9 Structure of thesis .....	10
Chapter 2: Philosophy, Methodology and Methods .....	12
2.1 Overview .....	12
2.2 Pragmatist approach.....	14
2.3 Methodology: Action research .....	14
2.3.1 Definition of action research .....	15
2.3.2 Rationale for action research.....	17
2.3.3 Type of action research.....	17
2.4 Paradigm .....	18
2.5 Position of the researcher.....	20
2.6 Theory .....	22
2.7 Data collection.....	23
2.7.1 Multiple method design .....	23
2.7.2 Selection of cases (clubs).....	25
2.7.3 Data collection.....	27
2.7.4 Action research in a thesis .....	29
2.8 Ethics.....	30
2.9 Quality.....	31

2.10	Reflection .....	32
2.11	Chapter summary .....	33
Chapter 3: Literature Review .....		34
3.1	Clubs and society .....	34
3.1.1	Membership trends .....	34
3.1.2	Club size and membership .....	38
3.1.3	Characteristics of not-for-profit sport clubs.....	39
3.1.4	Exclusiveness of clubs .....	41
3.1.5	History of sport clubs.....	43
3.1.6	Gendered institutions .....	44
3.1.7	Social networks and social capital.....	45
3.2	Marketing theory .....	47
3.2.1	Marketing orientation .....	47
3.2.2	Relationship marketing .....	50
3.2.3	Strategic marketing.....	51
3.2.4	Segmentation.....	53
3.2.5	Segmentation in sport .....	54
3.3	Player/member behaviour .....	57
3.3.1	General models of consumer behaviour .....	57
3.3.2	Sport-specific models of consumer behaviour.....	58
3.4	Customer or member retention.....	61
3.4.1	Customer retention rates and reasons for defection.....	61
3.4.2	Membership discontinuation in golf.....	63
3.4.3	Membership discontinuation in lawn bowls .....	65
3.5	Chapter summary.....	66
Chapter 4: Context.....		67
4.1	Lawn bowls organisation and membership in New Zealand .....	69
4.1.1	History.....	69
4.1.2	Organisation and initiatives.....	70
4.1.3	Membership patterns and trends.....	72
4.2	Golf organisation and membership in New Zealand .....	77
4.2.1	History.....	77
4.2.2	Organisation and initiatives.....	80
4.2.3	Membership patterns and trends.....	81
4.3	Position and profile of participation in outdoor bowls and golf.....	83
4.3.1	Position of outdoor bowls and golf.....	84
4.3.2	Profile of players .....	85
4.3.3	History of participation .....	86
4.3.4	Style and nature of participation.....	87
4.4	Macro environment in New Zealand .....	88
4.4.1	Sport New Zealand policy and issues .....	90

4.4.2	Population statistics .....	91
4.5	Media and online resources.....	92
4.6	Chapter summary.....	93
Chapter 5: Statistical Analysis of Membership Data – Descriptive and Predictive .....		95
5.1	Overview .....	95
5.2	Method .....	97
5.2.1	Background of the dataset.....	97
5.2.2	Data checking.....	98
5.2.3	Coding and recoding of data .....	99
5.2.4	Data analysis .....	100
5.2.5	Receiver operating characteristic curves .....	102
5.2.6	Sample.....	102
5.3	Results.....	103
5.3.1	Profile of discontinued members versus continued members.....	104
5.3.2	Predictors of discontinuing membership .....	107
5.3.3	Longitudinal analysis of members who discontinued in 2011.....	110
5.4	Discussion .....	112
5.5	Conclusions .....	114
5.6	Summary of chapter.....	114
Chapter 6: Qualitative Exploratory Study.....		116
6.1	Method .....	116
6.1.1	Data collection.....	116
6.1.2	Interview topic guide .....	118
6.1.3	Analysis of interviews .....	119
6.1.4	Quality.....	120
6.1.5	Sampling .....	122
6.2	Sample description and results for bowls players .....	123
6.2.1	Sample description for lawn bowls participants.....	123
6.2.2	Introduction to lawn bowls and joining a club.....	125
6.2.3	Changing membership club in lawn bowls.....	130
6.2.4	Leaving bowls and temporary absence.....	132
6.2.5	Issues influencing membership of bowling clubs .....	133
6.3	Sample description and results for golf players .....	135
6.3.1	Sample description for golf participants.....	135
6.3.2	Introduction to golf and joining a club .....	137
6.3.3	Introduction as a child.....	137
6.3.4	Introduction as a young adult.....	139
6.3.5	Introduction as an older adult.....	140
6.3.6	Changing membership club in golf .....	143
6.3.7	Leaving golf or temporary absence from the game.....	147
6.3.8	Club membership issues .....	148

6.3.9	Suggestions for golf clubs.....	153
6.4	Sample description and results for golf club personnel .....	154
6.4.1	Sample description for golf club personnel .....	154
6.4.2	Introduction to golf.....	155
6.4.3	Deciding where to play .....	156
6.4.4	Membership renewal.....	156
6.4.5	Leaving a club .....	157
6.4.6	Paying green fees.....	157
6.4.7	Concept of lifecycle.....	159
6.4.8	Membership initiatives.....	159
6.5	Discussion .....	162
6.5.1	Cross-case comparison: Bowls and golf participants .....	163
6.5.2	Individual cases .....	169
6.5.3	Cross-case comparison: Golf participants and golf club personnel .....	170
6.6	Conclusions .....	171
6.6.1	Comparison with previous studies in this thesis .....	171
6.6.2	Implications for an individual club.....	171
6.6.3	Implications for golf and bowls overall.....	173
6.7	Chapter summary.....	173
Chapter 7: Action Research at Club A.....		175
7.1	Issue identification and investigation .....	176
7.1.1	Total annual adult membership – Longitudinal analysis .....	177
7.1.2	Membership categories .....	178
7.1.3	Membership turnover in 2015 .....	179
7.1.4	Investigation: Focus groups method.....	180
7.2	Investigation: Focus groups results .....	181
7.2.1	Best aspects of the club.....	181
7.2.2	Concerns about the club.....	183
7.2.3	Recruitment of new members .....	187
7.2.4	Retention of members.....	189
7.2.5	Individual comments.....	191
7.2.6	Investigation: Summary .....	192
7.3	Action – First cycle.....	192
7.4	Evaluation – First cycle.....	195
7.4.1	Total annual membership 2016 .....	195
7.4.2	Membership categories 2016 .....	195
7.4.3	Membership turnover 2016.....	196
7.4.4	Evaluation: Focus groups method .....	198
7.4.5	Evaluation: Focus groups results.....	198
7.5	Action – Second cycle .....	202
7.6	Evaluation – Second cycle .....	204
7.6.1	Total annual membership 2017 .....	204

7.6.2	Membership categories 2017 .....	205
7.6.3	Membership turnover 2017 .....	205
7.7	Overall evaluation and future actions .....	208
7.8	Conclusions .....	212
7.9	Chapter summary .....	213
Chapter 8:	Membership Study with Club B .....	214
8.1	Issue identification and investigation .....	215
8.1.1	Total annual membership .....	217
8.1.2	Membership categories 2014/2015 .....	218
8.1.3	Membership turnover in 2014/2015 .....	219
8.1.4	Document analysis .....	219
8.2	Action – 2015/2016 .....	223
8.3	Evaluation – 2015/2016 .....	224
8.3.1	Total annual membership 2016 .....	224
8.3.2	Membership categories 2015/2016 .....	225
8.3.3	Membership turnover in 2015/2016 .....	225
8.3.4	Evaluation of actions .....	226
8.4	Action – 2016/2017 .....	228
8.5	Evaluation – 2016/2017 .....	229
8.5.1	Total annual membership 2016/2017 .....	229
8.5.2	Membership categories for 2016/2017 .....	230
8.5.3	Membership turnover in 2016/2017 .....	230
8.5.4	Document analysis .....	231
8.5.5	Primary research .....	233
8.6	Overall evaluation and future actions .....	234
8.6.1	Content .....	234
8.6.2	Process .....	235
8.6.3	Premise .....	237
8.6.4	Future research .....	239
8.7	Conclusions .....	239
8.8	Chapter summary .....	241
Chapter 9:	Discussion and Conclusion .....	242
9.1	Connecting the studies .....	242
9.1.1	Comparison of club membership studies .....	242
9.1.2	Wider environment .....	245
9.2	Diagnosing the health of club membership .....	246
9.2.1	The seesaw effect in club membership .....	246
9.2.2	Understanding what is controllable .....	247
9.2.3	Balancing the seesaw .....	247
9.2.4	Retention (Members continue membership) .....	249
9.2.5	Recruitment (New members) .....	250

9.3	Complexity of club membership .....	251
9.4	Participation and membership focus.....	252
9.5	Marketing for member-owned sport clubs.....	253
9.5.1	Marketing orientation .....	254
9.5.2	Segmentation .....	255
9.5.3	Customer loss theory .....	256
9.6	Contributions of this thesis.....	256
9.6.1	Contributions to knowledge .....	256
9.6.2	Practical outcomes.....	257
9.7	Quality in the action research process .....	261
9.8	Limitations and delimitations of thesis .....	262
9.9	Future research .....	262
9.10	Position of the researcher at conclusion of thesis.....	263
9.11	Conclusion.....	264
	References .....	266
	Appendices .....	283
	Appendix 1 Ethics Approval.....	293
	Appendix 2 Media log.....	300
	Appendix 3 Vignettes of lawn bowls and golf players.....	312
	Appendix 4 Summary of survey results from golf club.....	315
	Appendix 5 Summary of online documents from bowling club.....	323

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Definitions of key concepts .....	8
Table 2. Participating clubs .....	26
Table 3. Data collection methods used in each study .....	27
Table 4. Quality criteria for action research.....	31
Table 5. Adult membership of lawn bowls and golf clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand.....	36
Table 6. Business orientations as applied to a sport club.....	48
Table 7. Key characteristics of club member segments.....	56
Table 8. Key characteristics of non-club member segments.....	56
Table 9. Change in regional bowls club membership over five years.....	73
Table 10. Regional bowls club membership over five years .....	74
Table 11. Regional bowls membership over the past two years .....	76
Table 12: Adult membership of golf 1924–2003: Gender profile.....	78
Table 13. Adult membership of golf: National, North Harbour and Auckland .....	82
Table 14. Adult golf membership 2004–2017: Gender profile in Auckland region compared with national figures .....	82
Table 15. Adult golf membership compared with registered casual participation .....	83
Table 16. Level of participation in outdoor bowls and golf in 2013/14 .....	85
Table 17. Profile of participants in outdoor bowls and golf.....	86
Table 18. Starting to play outdoor bowls and golf compared with other sports .....	87
Table 19. Style and nature of participation in outdoor bowls and golf.....	88
Table 20. Evolution of the current sporting environment .....	89
Table 21. Ethnicity and age population statistics for Auckland suburbs.....	91
Table 22. Ethnicity statistics for suburbs surrounding focal clubs.....	92
Table 23. Continuation of membership for 2009 sample.....	103
Table 24. Comparison of continuing and discontinued members .....	105
Table 25. Age distribution of continuing and discontinued members.....	106
Table 26. Handicap, number of friends and location of games.....	107
Table 27. Variables in the logistic regression equation .....	108
Table 28. Classification table .....	108
Table 29. Classification table with cut value of 0.2 .....	109
Table 30. Classification table with cut value of 0.8 .....	110
Table 31. Three variable model compared with individual variables.....	110
Table 32. Number of games played in 2009 and 2010 .....	111
Table 33. Games played prior to discontinuing membership.....	112

Table 34. Interview topic guide items.....	118
Table 35. Quality considerations .....	121
Table 36. Description of sample of bowls participants.....	124
Table 37. Introduction to bowls and joining a club .....	127
Table 38. Membership history: Bowling participants with current membership .....	130
Table 39. Changing lawn bowls club.....	131
Table 40. Leaving bowls or temporary absence .....	132
Table 41. Description of sample of golf participants.....	136
Table 42. First introduction to golf as a child/teenager .....	139
Table 43. First introduction to golf as a young adult and joining a club .....	140
Table 44. First introduction to golf as an older adult and joining a club.....	141
Table 45. Started to play golf alone.....	142
Table 46. Membership history: Golf participants with current membership .....	144
Table 47. Changing membership club in golf: Single club change .....	145
Table 48. Changing clubs in golf: Multiple changes of club .....	146
Table 49. Discontinued playing or membership in golf .....	148
Table 50. Initiatives for membership .....	161
Table 51. Action research cycles with Club A.....	176
Table 52. Membership data 2006–2015.....	177
Table 53. Gender split for adult membership: 2006–2015 .....	178
Table 54. Membership categories for male and female members in 2015 .....	178
Table 55. Reasons for discontinuing membership in 2015 .....	179
Table 56. Suggestions for attracting new members.....	189
Table 57. Suggestions for retaining members .....	190
Table 58. Individual comments (in some cases with alternative views).....	191
Table 59. Description and development of first cycle of actions .....	194
Table 60. Membership data as at end of 2016 membership year .....	195
Table 61. Membership categories for men and women adult members in 2016.....	196
Table 62. Profile of discontinued members for 2015/6 .....	197
Table 63. Profile of new members for 2015/6.....	197
Table 64. Description and development of second cycle of actions.....	203
Table 65. Membership data as at end of 2017 membership year .....	204
Table 66. Gender split for adult membership 2012–2017.....	205
Table 67. Type of membership for men and women members in 2017 .....	205
Table 68. Reasons for discontinuing membership in 2016 and 2017.....	206
Table 69. Profile of discontinued members for 2016/7 compared with previous year.....	207

Table 70. Profile of new members for 2016/7.....	208
Table 71: Action cycles relating to participation and membership with Club B .....	215
Table 72. Activity June 2014–May 2015.....	217
Table 73. Membership data 2009–2015.....	218
Table 74. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B .....	218
Table 75. Change in membership during 2014/2015.....	219
Table 76. Description and development of action 2015/2016.....	224
Table 77. Membership data 2012–2016.....	225
Table 78. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B .....	225
Table 79. Change in membership during 2015/2016.....	226
Table 80. Description and development of action 2016/2017.....	228
Table 81. Membership data 2012–2017.....	229
Table 82. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B .....	230
Table 83. Change in membership during 2016–2017.....	231
Table 84. Comparison of membership studies .....	243
Table 85. Contribution to knowledge from this thesis.....	257
Table 86. Potential identification stage for future studies within a club .....	259
Table 87. Quality criteria as applied in this thesis.....	261

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Structure of thesis .....	11
Figure 2. Key elements of the research process as applied to thesis .....	13
Figure 3. An action research cycle .....	16
Figure 4. Triangulation of results .....	23
Figure 5. Relationship of studies in this thesis .....	24
Figure 6. Model of participant consumption and behaviour .....	59
Figure 7. Club membership and participation in sport .....	67
Figure 8. Receiver operating characteristic curve for golf membership discontinuation.....	109
Figure 9. The seesaw effect of club membership .....	247
Figure 10. Framework for balancing the club membership seesaw .....	249
Figure 11. Restatement of the marketing orientation for a member-owned club.....	254

## **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.

Name: Katharine Amanda Hoskyn

Date: 22 March 2020

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For examination, the referencing of club documents identified the two case clubs. Following examination, these references were removed in order to give these clubs anonymity.

Ethics Approvals and subsequent amendments:

- Approval number 13/357 Understanding sport membership and participation - where and how people play (Individual interviews).
- Approval number 14/84 Understanding sport participation and membership - focus groups in lawn bowls. (and subsequently amended to include golf).

Paid assistance:

- Transcribe Me undertook the transcribing of many of the interviews and all of the focus groups.
- Academic Consulting undertook the formatting and penultimate proofreading of the thesis. The final proofreading was undertaken by me.

## RELATED RESEARCH OUTPUTS

The following are research outputs related to this study.

Papers presented at conferences:

Hoskyn, K., Dickson, G. D., & Naylor, M. E. (2014, November). *Bowling with others: Decision-making by lawn bowlers*, Paper presented at the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand, Melbourne, Australia.

Hoskyn, K., Naylor, M. E., & Dickson, G. D. (2015, September). *Curving the golf ball: Predicting the renewal of golf club memberships*. Paper presented at the European Association of Sport Management, Dublin, Ireland.

Hoskyn, K., Dickson, G. D., & Naylor, M. E. (2015, November). *Getting to the first tee: A qualitative study of recreational golf players*. Paper presented at the Sport Management Association of Australia and New Zealand, Hobart, Australia.

All presentations were prepared and presented by Katharine Hoskyn. Geoff Dickson and Michael Naylor provided critiques of the presentations from which minor changes were made and contributed to the post presentation discussion in Melbourne and Hobart.

Katharine Hoskyn

Geoff Dickson

Michael Naylor

In addition, presentations relating to this thesis were given at postgraduate student workshops at the EASM conference in Turkey, September, 2014; EASM conference in Dublin, September, 2015 and the SMAANZ postgraduate workshop in Melbourne, July, 2016.

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

This thesis addresses a question of concern to the sports community and academics: how can sport clubs increase their membership? The question has perplexed and challenged those working in these sectors for almost four decades. Member-based non-sport clubs also have a vested interest in membership, which is declining in many organisations.

The two key outcomes of this thesis are (a) workable solutions as to how golf and lawn bowls clubs can increase their membership and (b) a contribution to the body of theoretical knowledge. An action research approach involving two clubs as case studies was used in the current research.

Consistent with the approach of Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), this chapter describes the background and development of the research question, the research question itself, the contribution of the thesis, the significance of the work and the rationale for selecting golf and lawn bowls clubs as the context for the research. The chapter then provides an overview of the methodology, the researcher's interest in the topic, delimitations of the study, key definitions and concepts, and finally, the structure of the thesis.

### **1.1 Background and development of the research question**

Central to the delivery of sport in Aotearoa New Zealand are approximately 15,000 sport clubs (Leberman et al., 2012; Sport New Zealand, 2017a). The network of clubs, regional bodies, national bodies and Sport New Zealand is well-established. Reports from Sport New Zealand and a number of sport organisations suggest that declining membership is a problem and that a change in approach is needed to maintain membership (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b; New Zealand Golf, 2014; Sport and Recreation New Zealand, 2009; Sport New Zealand, 2015i). An important characteristic of clubs is self-governance. While most clubs have an affiliation to a regional or national organisation, they remain largely independent in decision-making. Clubs often maintain facilities, equipment and club rooms, including changing rooms and space for social gatherings. The basic business model is that club members pay fees in exchange for access to facilities, opportunities to participate in sport and rights within the organisation.

Clubs are supported by regional and national organisations and are often members of these organisations. This membership may also include voting rights. Regional sport organisations are responsible for the strategic direction of a specific sport in their

geographic region through local competitions, representative teams, and the oversight and education of coaches and officials. A national sport organisation is responsible for developing the game throughout Aotearoa New Zealand at both community and elite levels (Leberman et al., 2012). It is not uncommon for clubs to collect membership fees on behalf of the national and sometimes the regional organisation, in addition to the club's membership fee. Thus, the club and its members have access to resources and support from the national and regional organisations.

The changing role and importance of clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand is evident in the documents of Sport New Zealand, the Crown entity responsible for sport. Sport New Zealand was established by an Act of Parliament to promote, encourage and support physical recreation and sport in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 1997, the Hillary Commission, the Crown entity responsible for sport between 1987 and 2001, affirmed the value of clubs with the statement that "clubs are the lifeblood of sport and active leisure in every New Zealand community. Clubs play a key role in every community" (Frater et al., 1998, p. 11). The successors to the Hillary Commission, Sport and Recreation New Zealand (2009) and Sport New Zealand (2012), continued to maintain this view. A Sport New Zealand representative stated that "clubs continue to be the lifeblood of community sport in New Zealand ... It is important that clubs continue to serve their communities at the grassroots level" (Wallace, 2012, p. 45). However, Sport New Zealand's Strategic Plans of 2012 and 2015 heralded a change of focus, with greater emphasis placed on encouraging participation outside of clubs (Sport New Zealand, 2012, 2015i). Clubs continue to be important in the delivery of sport, but with recognition that sport participation is no longer dependent upon sport clubs. The strategy now is to encourage people to play sport, regardless of whether it is inside or outside of sport clubs.

There is a need to understand the declining membership in sport clubs more thoroughly. While clubs are still pervasive, overall membership of sport clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand has generally been in decline for the past three or four decades. Limited academic research exists on sport club membership. There are substantial quantitative industry data relating to sport club membership from a number of countries and also from small scale studies commissioned by sport organisations. Government agencies such as Sport New Zealand also publish research, but considered collectively, data regarding sport club membership is fragmented.

The membership problem is somewhat compounded by generally negative coverage in the media and popular press. The narrative is relatively consistent and illustrates declining memberships and resultant financial problems in clubs. National and

regional organisations of golf and lawn bowls have also highlighted club-level membership problems in their publications.

A well-documented premise exists that declining club membership is linked to an increase in casual or pay-for-play participation (New Zealand Golf, 2014; Nicholson et al., 2010; Sport New Zealand, 2015i). Both terms refer to non-member participation in a sport. The nature of this casual participation varies from sport to sport and can be found in multiple forms within a sport.

To enhance understanding of the rise of casual or pay-for-play participation, the initial research question for this thesis was: “How can sport clubs increase membership in an environment of casual participation?” However, in the early stages of the research project, it became apparent that the relationship between club membership and pay-for-play participation is complex and that this form of participation is not the only variable underpinning the decline in club membership. It also became apparent that the question needed to be more sport specific, as several dimensions of the research could not be generalised beyond the context of the two sports. The unique nature of golf and lawn bowls contributes to both the success and the problems experienced by these clubs. Therefore, the initial research question was reconsidered and modified.

## **1.2 Research question**

The key question for this thesis is: How can a member-owned, non-equity golf or lawn bowls club increase adult membership in New Zealand? There are two sub-questions: (a) How can a club retain existing adult members? and (b) How can a club attract new adult members?

## **1.3 Significance of the research**

The study is significant because the traditional revenue-generation model for sport clubs is premised upon club membership. A decrease in sport club membership therefore threatens the financial viability of sport clubs. Either the membership decline needs to be reversed or clubs must seek alternative business models to ensure their financial sustainability.

The financial viability of sport clubs is heavily reliant on membership fees. A comprehensive study of United Kingdom sport clubs showed that membership fees were the largest single source of income, accounting for, on average, 35% of club income (Sport and Recreation Alliance, 2011, 2013). This finding is similar to six sports in Aotearoa New Zealand for which membership fees represented on average 37% of

income (Cordery & Baskerville, 2008, as cited in Cordery & Baskerville, 2012). However, the reliance on membership fees is not consistent across sports. For golf, membership fees account for a significantly higher proportion (69%) of revenues (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012).

The importance of the club structure in Aotearoa New Zealand is threefold. First, the network of clubs, regional bodies and national bodies is well-established in Aotearoa New Zealand. Sport is organised through a club-based structure in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as in Australia, Britain and several European countries (Eime et al., 2009; Nicholson et al., 2010). While club membership has declined, annually 27% of those participating in sport do so through clubs (Sport New Zealand, 2015b).

The second reason for maintaining the membership model is that membership provides intangible benefits to the local community, such as social networks that facilitate friendship and other benefits for individuals. Social psychologists consider clubs to be important for facilitating friendship. Argyle (2001) and Ulseth (2004) demonstrated the importance of clubs in general, and sport clubs in particular, as a meeting place for friends and as a source of friends. Friendship is important because it is correlated with happiness (Argyle, 2001). Strong social networks contribute to physical health and a lower death rate, as has been extensively reported over a number of years (Argyle, 2001; Berkman & Syme, 1979; Cohen, 2004). Ulseth (2004) compared sport clubs and fitness centres and found that new friendships were much more common in sport clubs for both men and women. A decline in membership reduces the potential contribution by clubs to the development of a sense of community and social networks (Coalter, 2007).

The third argument for maintaining the membership model is that sport clubs provide opportunities for volunteering (Dickson et al., 2017) plus Burrmann et al. (2020). Volunteers in this context are people who actively help to run a club on an unpaid basis. They help with administration, coaching, catering and a range of similar activities. The majority of volunteers are club members (Nichols & Shepherd, 2006). Volunteering is an important contributor to a sense of community (Dickson et al., 2017). Volunteering in sports is often perceived as a positive experience and can increase volunteers' overall happiness (Finkelstien, 2009; Kumnig et al., 2015).

#### **1.4 Contribution of thesis**

This thesis makes theoretical and practical contributions. Membership is a club-specific issue, influenced by environmental factors, but the main drivers are within the club. Four theoretical contributions are: a) Identification of a seesaw effect in club membership, b)

A framework for balancing the membership seesaw; c) Application of the marketing orientation to a member-owned club and d) Application of the customer retention concept of controllability to discontinued membership. The practical contributions take two forms: a) a process for clubs based on the action research used by the case clubs and b) successful initiatives from these studies. The processes within this research can assist a club to diagnose membership ‘health’ and to tailor initiatives to address the membership drivers within its control.

## **1.5 Golf and lawn bowls as the research context**

The research context for investigation of the research question is golf and lawn bowls clubs. A number of factors influenced the selection of these sports, in particular the willingness of organisations to work on this type of project, the membership trends over the past two decades, and their review of facilities as suggested by Sport New Zealand. Pragmatically, both New Zealand Golf and Bowls New Zealand were keen to support membership projects. Both organisations provided introductions to potential clubs for the study.

Clubs in both sports experienced a decline in membership. National membership in golf had declined for 10 of the 11 years prior to 2018 (New Zealand Golf, 2011, 2017) and, similarly, lawn bowls experienced decline in 10 out of the 11 years prior to 2018 (Bowls New Zealand, 2012, 2013b, 2014, 2016, 2018). Both New Zealand Golf and Bowls New Zealand have demonstrated a desire to reverse declining membership and are open to change (Bowls New Zealand, 2012, 2013b; New Zealand Golf, 2012). Both organisations have introduced interventions in recent years, but with more emphasis on participation than membership.

Both sports have a substantial base of participants. Golf has the tenth highest adult (over the age of 16) participation rate based on the Active New Zealand Survey, with 318,000 players in 2013–2014 (Sport New Zealand, 2015b). It has the sixth highest participation rate among people over the age of 50 years. Lawn bowls (referred to as “outdoor bowls” by Sport New Zealand) has 91,000 players, of whom 28,000 are over the age of 75 years, making it the activity with the second highest participation in this age group after walking, in a country with an ageing population (Sport New Zealand, 2015a). The profiles of players in golf and lawn bowls are different and addressed further in Chapter 4. Since demographic differences can influence sport decisions, it is useful to investigate two sports with different demographic profiles.

Longitudinal membership data is available for these sports in Aotearoa New Zealand related to the research questions. In addition, New Zealand Golf has a database of player behaviour and membership information that covers every member and lapsed member extending back over a decade. This enabled longitudinal analysis of individual members.

Clubs in both sports rely on facilities that are traditionally operated and owned by clubs primarily for the benefit of their members. However, most clubs allow non-members to use the facilities, for a casual fee. Therefore, if non-members are playing regularly, it is most likely to be at a club facility at a casual rate, after they have made an active decision not to be a member. Opportunities to play these sports away from a club facility are limited, unlike tennis, for example, where numerous non-club tennis courts are available. Both sports are considered to have too many facilities for the number of players and size of Aotearoa New Zealand (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b; O'Connor Sinclair, 2013). Bowls New Zealand and New Zealand Golf were among the first organisations asked by Sport New Zealand to formulate a facilities strategy, mainly with the aim of rationalising the number and type of facilities.

## **1.6 Overview of methodology**

The approach used in this project was action research. Action research refers to “social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organisation, community or network (‘stakeholders’) who are seeking to improve the situation” of the network or community (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 7). This study offers guidance to golf and lawn bowls clubs to improve the retention and recruitment of members.

Greenwood and Levin (2007) referred to three required elements in action research: research, action and the participation of stakeholders in the research process. Following the determination of a problem, stakeholders identify and plan some form of action or intervention. The intervention or action is then implemented by stakeholders in the participating group; this is followed by a research-based assessment of the result or impact of the intervention. Reflection on the result can be used to identify future action or a further cycle of research (Cardno, 2003; Costello, 2011; Denscombe, 2014; Ferkins et al., 2005; Gray, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Ivankova, 2015; Kumar, 2002; Somekh, 2006).

Action research is an ideal process for community development because of the stakeholder input (Gray, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Kumar, 2002). It is

particularly appropriate for not-for-profit sport organisations owned by members and for which some form of change is required. Members of the organisation have input into the change, which they then manage. With action research, members are encouraged to take some responsibility for declining membership rather than blaming external forces.

In this thesis, a pragmatist approach was taken. Pragmatism is not constrained by any research paradigm and involves methods that work in a given situation. An interpretative action research approach was used (Willis, 2007; Willis & Edwards, 2014), with multiple methods of data collection. The aim was to investigate the issues from multiple perspectives.

## **1.7 Delimitation of thesis**

Addressing sport club membership decline is a very large topic, so it is important to identify delimitations. This study was delimited to gathering and understanding the perspectives of people within the two sports, adult membership only, and to some extent membership rather than participation.

The research focused on the perspective of people within only the two focal sports. Within the thesis, secondary research provides a perspective from outside golf and lawn bowls, but no primary data were collected from people who have never played either game.

This research focused solely on adult club membership. The study did not investigate club membership for junior athletes, which in itself is a complex research topic. Nor did the thesis examine the transition of junior members to adult membership.

The most complex delimitation was the distinction between increasing membership and increasing participation. There is a distinction between participation (i.e., people taking part in an activity) and membership (i.e., people belonging to an organisation related to the activity). However, the two concepts can be related when a club initiative is aimed at increasing membership by encouraging new players to participate in the sport. Conversations about these two concepts are easily intertwined. If nearly all current participants are members, the only way of increasing membership is to increase participation. If the level of participation in the activity declines, the pool of participants who can become members is smaller.

This delimitation was complicated by the current strategy of Bowls New Zealand, and New Zealand Golf of aiming to increase participation rather than membership. This research focused on club membership. However, it was not possible to consider the topic

in isolation from participation, especially in relation to recruitment. This delimitation was managed by maintaining focus on the membership implications of participation.

## 1.8 Definition of key concepts

Several concepts incorporated in the research question need to be defined. Given that in earlier literature, membership has been positioned as being in competition with non-member participation, it is important to consider the definition of that concept as well. In addition, the concepts of retention and recruitment from the sub-questions need defining.

### 1.8.1 Defining membership and non-equity clubs

This section explains the concepts of a sport club, membership and adult member, as well as the technical term of non-equity, member-owned organisation (Table 1).

Table 1. Definitions of key concepts

Concept	Definition
Club	<p>“An association dedicated to a particular interest or activity; an organisation constituted to play matches in a particular sport” (<i>Concise Oxford English Dictionary</i>, 2011, p. 272).</p> <p>“Small not-for-profit society whose purposes are to provide competition structures and athlete development programs, and coaching and official training opportunities” (Sam, 2011).</p>
Member	A person, country or organisation that has joined a group, society or team ( <i>Concise Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 2011, p. 891).
Adult member	A member over the age of 18 years.
Member-owned clubs	A club owned by the members, typically not-for-profit, in comparison to a profit-focused club that may be owned by an investor, proprietor or company (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2006; Perdue & American Hotel & Lodging Association Educational Institute, 2007).
Non-equity	A non-equity membership structure is evident when a member leaves a club, at which time the member is not reimbursed for any part of an entrance fee, if one was paid (Ferreira & Gustafson, 2006; Perdue & American Hotel & Lodging Association Educational Institute, 2007).

Dictionary definitions of “club” are general and highlight the notion of having a specific purpose. This is understandable as clubs exist in many spheres of life. Clubs in sport contexts evolved from similar organisations in other spheres of life (Vamplew, 2013). Sport clubs are clearly a significant form of club for the Oxford Dictionary to make specific reference to them.

The dictionary definition of member provides interesting nuances. It incorporates the notion that members took an active step to join the club, and also recognises that organisations rather than people can constitute membership. Another important aspect of

membership is outlined in Chapter 3—that membership has boundaries separating people who belong and people who do not (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

The clubs covered by this thesis are member-owned in the sense that the members technically have control over the running of the club. However, this ownership does not extend to any personal financial interest in the sense that members cannot sell their interest in the club.

### **1.8.2 Defining participation by non-members**

Non-member participation in sport has been measured only in recent times (Bowls New Zealand, 2012; New Zealand Golf, 2016), with no data about the significance of this phenomenon in the past. However, since membership of sport clubs generally grew in earlier decades (Barlow, 2005; New Zealand Golf, 2011), non-member participation may not have been a concern. Non-member participation in sport is common (Nicholson et al., 2010), but the impact of non-member participants on a sport is contested and may not be as significant as national organisations believe (O'Connor Sinclair, 2013).

A range of expressions are used to describe those who participate in sport but are not a member of a club. The phrase “casual participation” is probably used most frequently in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, it is problematic because multiple meanings and interpretations are possible. To minimise confusion, throughout this thesis, any form of participation by people who do not belong to a golf or lawn bowls club is described as “non-member participation”. These individuals may still use facilities at a sport club, but often pay higher rates for use of the facilities than the members pay. Alternatively, they may use public or other facilities.

### **1.8.3 Defining recruitment and retention**

A discussion about increasing membership contains two quite distinct parts: recruitment and retention. Recruitment of members occurs when members join an organisation and is successful when new members join a club or lapsed members re-join the club. The term “attraction” is sometimes used to describe this process. New members can be recruited to a club in several ways:

- a) by encouraging membership among non-members who already take part in the activity
- b) by encouraging members from other clubs to join the club in addition to or instead of their existing club
- c) by encouraging new participants in the sport and recruiting these people to join the club.

Retention occurs when existing members renew their membership. The opposite of retention is when members do not renew their membership. They are described in this thesis as discontinuing members. Discontinuation of membership can be an active process, such as when members give formal notice that they are resigning their membership, or it can be a passive process, such as when members do not renew their subscription and provide no notification.

## **1.9 Structure of thesis**

This thesis has a theoretical component, a general issue identification, two action research studies, followed by discussion and conclusions (Figure 1). The literature review follows the discussion of the philosophical and methodological underpinning for three reasons. First, it provides a more logical flow of information from literature to context, as much of the context chapter is a logical extension of the literature. Second, the approach recognises literature as input into the action research process, as advocated by Grainger and Taylor (1995). Third, the sequencing enables the literature to be presented with an appropriate philosophical framework.

The general issue identification is presented in three chapters. Chapter 4 contains analysis of the secondary data about membership trends in golf and lawn bowls. Chapter 5 is a quantitative analysis of golf club membership discontinuation. Chapter 6 is a qualitative study of player behaviour and attitudes towards golf and lawn bowls membership. These sections of the thesis demonstrate the emergent nature of action research. The quantitative membership discontinuation analysis was originally intended to provide the basis for a specific intervention to improve retention. However, the golf club did not feel able to use such a generic study within the context of their club. Similarly, the qualitative study was intended to identify interventions for encouraging membership among players. However interventions arising from this study could not be undertaken in the time frame of this thesis.

Nevertheless, the general issue identification provided useful input into the action research cycles with two clubs. The two clubs are:

- Club A (Chapter 7)—A golf club that increased membership over the course of the thesis, using a traditional action research approach. All interventions arose from evaluation of the club's current situation and addressed specific issues.
- Club B (Chapter 8)—A lawn bowls club that achieved an increase in membership prior to the study. The increase was short-lived. In recent years, the club has experienced membership decline.

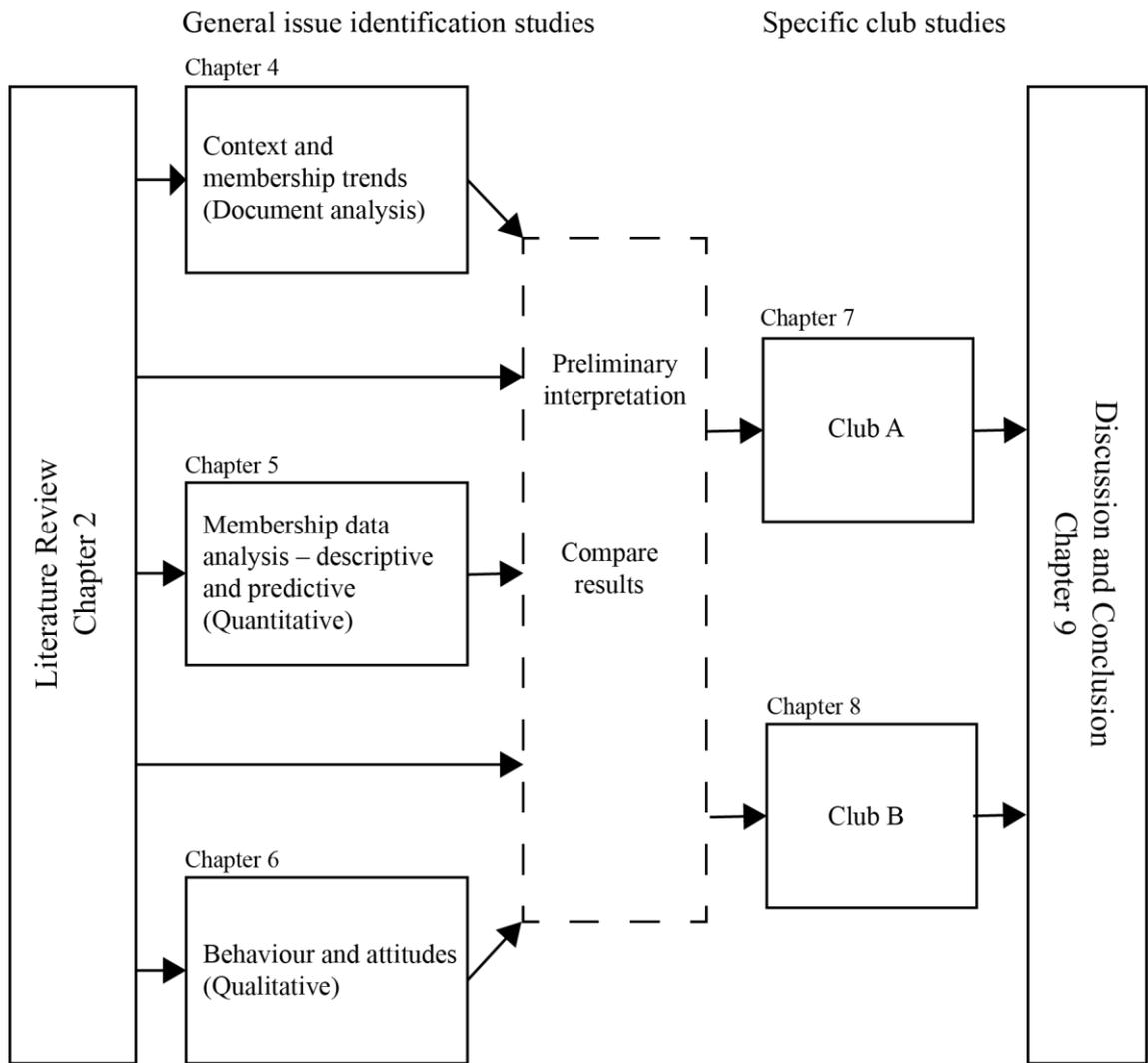


Figure 1. Structure of thesis

## **CHAPTER 2: PHILOSOPHY, METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

This thesis investigated how member-owned golf and lawn bowls clubs can increase adult membership, with a focus on both retention and recruitment of members. Chapter 2 is a description of the overall research philosophy and methodology. A pragmatist philosophy underpinned an action research approach to golf and lawn bowls. The research commenced with consultation at the two national organisations and progressed to direct engagement with two clubs in Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. In conjunction with these four sport organisations, the current state of club membership and past membership-related initiatives were reviewed. Actions aimed at increasing membership were identified, implemented and evaluated. An abductive approach to developing and testing theory ran through the process.

The key elements of this research design are outlined in this chapter. These are the pragmatist approach, methodology, paradigm and position of the researcher, approach to and role of theory, overview of data collection methods, ethics, quality and reflection.

### **2.1 Overview**

Key elements of the research design for this thesis are an action research study with multiple methods of data collection based on a pragmatist approach with a constructivist and predominantly interpretative perspective that develops and tests theory (Figure 2).

The interrelationship between research elements is often shown in a linear diagram with epistemology and/or ontology as a starting point (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014; Grix, 2002, 2010). These diagrams seem to suggest a clear relationship between the elements and research traditions, when in fact the connections between research traditions are anything but clear. However, Crotty (1998) and Grix (2010), along with Grant and Giddings (2002), acknowledged that the research philosophy or paradigm may not necessarily be the starting point, and that congruence between elements is paramount. The methods need to be appropriate for the methodology, which needs to be consistent with the handling of theory and the paradigm. The research components in Figure 2 are therefore depicted in a circle with a two-directional relationship between the elements (L. Giddings, personal communication, May 1, 2015). The whole process is guided by ethical considerations and underpinned by rigour. Reflection is also important throughout the process.

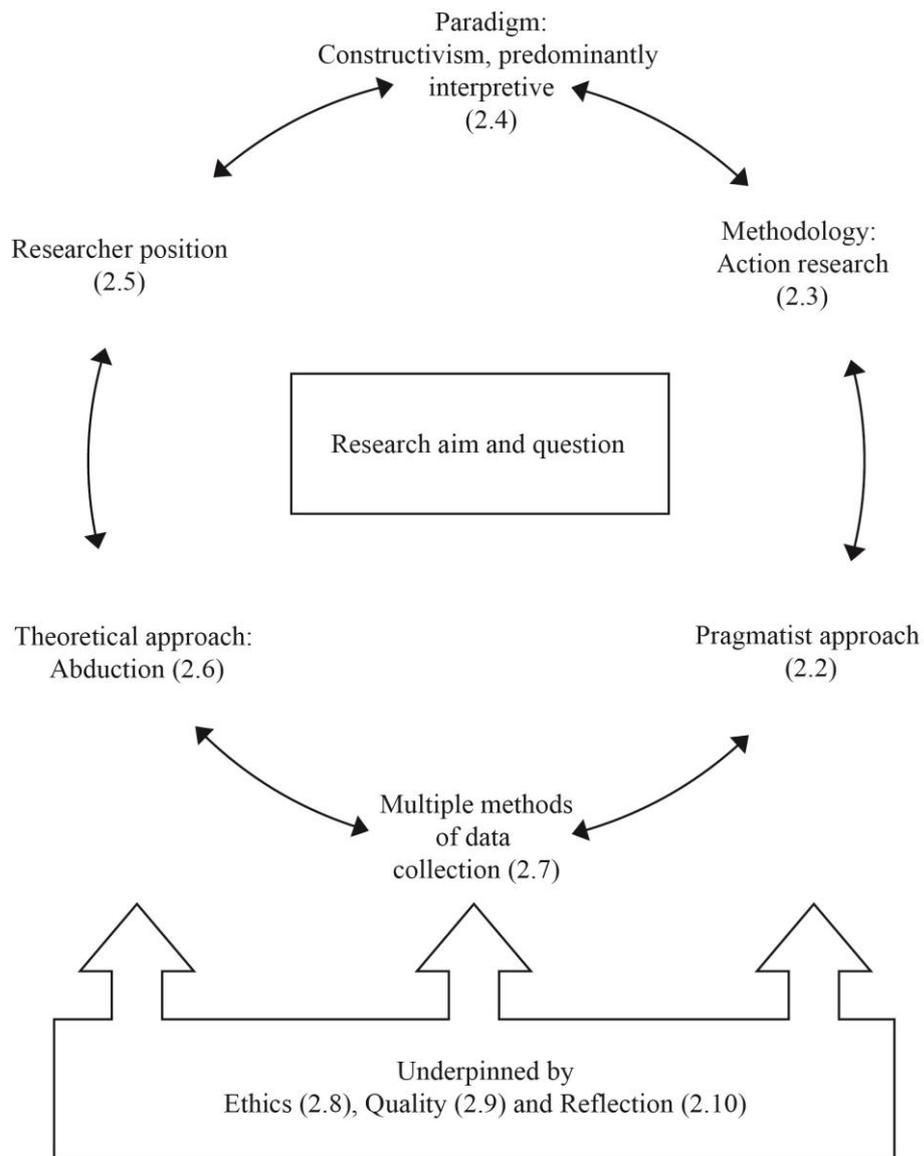


Figure 2. Key elements of the research process as applied to thesis

The research aim and question are central to the whole process (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Crotty, 1998; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Grix, 2002). This research relates to sport organisations keen to identify practical solutions, so it is not surprising that pragmatism is the philosophical approach guiding an action research project featuring multiple methods of data collection. The compatibility of action research, pragmatism and multiple or mixed methods is well-documented (Gray, 2014; Hammond & Wellington, 2013; Ivankova, 2015; Morse, 2003, 2010; Morse & Niehaus, 2009). Pragmatism advocates the use of the most appropriate methods, is not constrained by any paradigmatic approach and is strongly linked to multiple or mixed methods.

The compatibility of the concepts in Figure 2 is completely consistent with a study by Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), who endorsed the fit between mixed methods and a pragmatist approach, with narrative and numeric data, both inductive and deductive logic

and an integration of thematic and statistical data in analysis. Each element depicted in Figure 2 is discussed in this chapter and applied to this thesis.

## **2.2 Pragmatist approach**

Action research, concerned with practical outcomes in a real-life setting, is inherently a pragmatist methodology. Both practical and theoretical outcomes can result from a pragmatist approach to research. The process involves finding workable, “fit for purpose” solutions for a problem, in conjunction with an interconnection between theory and practice (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p. 125). A pragmatist focuses on the importance of the research question over any methodological or philosophical preference. A researcher using this approach is likely to use multiple methods of data collection that have been selected based on appropriateness to answer the question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Methods can be combined in creative ways to investigate a research problem as thoroughly as possible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The current research design was creative, combining statistical analysis, in-depth qualitative interviews, focus groups and document analysis. This approach provided a range of quantitative and qualitative data and enabled a thorough exploration of club membership, as seen through the eyes of club members and administrators.

The design of this thesis was guided by the important aspects of pragmatism as identified by Johnson and Gray (2010). First, pragmatists generally do not consider dichotomies. An example is the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, which is regarded in this thesis as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. A research study does not need to be described as solely qualitative or quantitative. Qualitative elements can be included in a quantitative project and vice versa. Second, if knowledge arises from the interaction of the person and the environment, it is important to consider the influence of context on a person’s behaviour. Third, knowledge can be constructed and also result from empirical discovery. Fourth, values are inherent in the inquiry. Fifth, the ontological view is pluralism, which means that reality is complex and can be experienced differently by several people in the same setting. Finally, theory is judged on its usefulness in predicting, explaining or influencing change rather than on whether it is true or false. This was an important consideration at the deductive stages of this thesis.

## **2.3 Methodology: Action research**

This section covers a definition of action research, the rationale for using action research for this thesis and the type of action research used.

### 2.3.1 Definition of action research

Action research is a term that is “anything but unanimously and clearly defined” (Carboni et al., 2007, p. 51). It is “a family of practices” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1) or a strategy for social research rather than a specific method (Denscombe, 2014). There are numerous and wide-ranging definitions of action research (Ivankova, 2015; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

The definitions presented in this section each emphasise different aspects of action research practice: (a) collaboration, (b) integration of theory and action, (c) and improvement of a situation and (d) the potentially emergent nature of the research. A social research definition of action research emphasises the collaborative nature and reason for the study with “social research carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organisation, community or network (‘stakeholders’) who are seeking to improve the participants’ situation” (Greenwood & Levin, 2007, p. 3). Coghlan and Brannick (2014), in an organisational and business context, emphasised the integration of theory, action and problem-solving in their definition of “a family of related approaches that integrate theory and action with a goal of addressing important organisational, community and social issues together with those who experience them” (p. ix). Shani and Pasmore’s (2010) definition begins with a comment about the emergent nature and the integration of two types of knowledge: “action research may be defined as an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organisational problems” (p. 208). In this context, the term “emergent” is explained as “an unfolding story, where data shift as a consequence of intervention and where it is not possible to predict or to control what may happen” (Coghlan & Shani, 2014, p. 525). This means the process is not predetermined but subject to development along with the increased understanding of the researchers (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

In addition to there being multiple definitions of action research, several authors include a wide-ranging set of essential characteristics. The characteristics of action research are as important as the definition, and are described by Cardno (2003) as “a methodology embedded in a unique system of values and practices” (p. 10). Greenwood and Levin (2007) referred to three essential elements in action research: action, research and participation of the community or stakeholders. Coghlan and Brannick’s (2014) defining characteristics are that it is research *in* action rather than *about* action—a collaborative partnership and a sequence of events with an approach to change and

problem-solving. Research *in* action refers to a deliberate cyclical process of planning, action and evaluation, with research and action interconnected as shown in Figure 3, rather than research as an external observation of action. Action research is often described as a cyclical process (Cardno, 2003; Ferkins & Shilbury, 2010; Gray, 2014; Kemmis et al., 2014; Kumar, 2002; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Somekh, 2006).

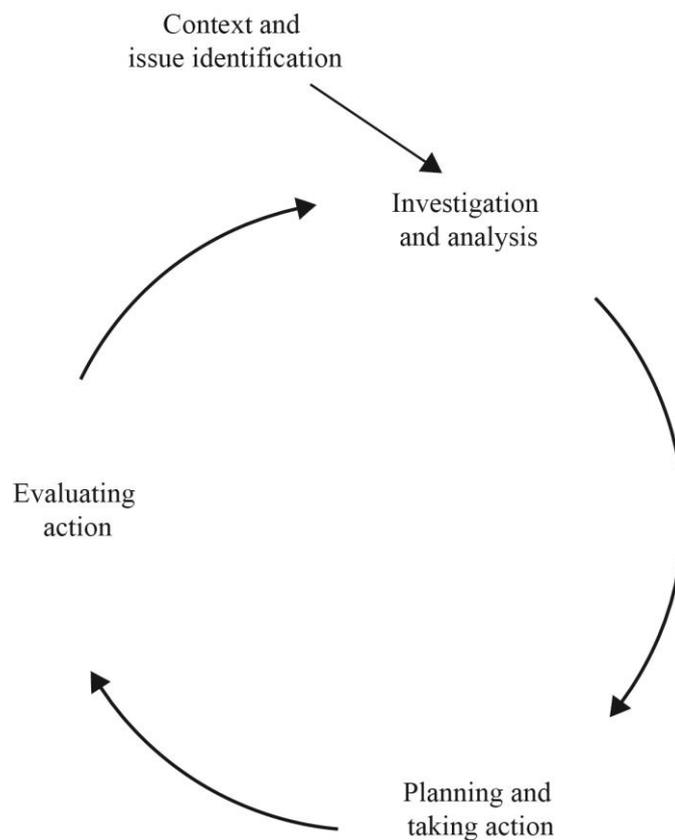


Figure 3. An action research cycle

Adapted from Cardno (2003); Coghlan and Brannick (2014).

In keeping with the pragmatist philosophy, action research begins with the identification of the context and the issue to be investigated. An action research cycle then consists of investigation and analysis, during which data are gathered and collaboratively analysed. This enables the second stage of planning and taking action to improve a situation, sometimes called an intervention. The third stage is collaborative evaluation of the action or intervention by the research team and participants. During this stage, reflection on the result can be used to identify future action or a further cycle of research (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Kumar, 2002; Somekh, 2006).

Along with the cyclical nature of action research, the importance of reflection has been emphasised (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Costello, 2011; Denscombe, 2014; Kumar,

2002; Myers, 2013). Coghlan and Brannick (2014) advocated a complementary cycle of reflection in conjunction with the action cycle.

### **2.3.2 Rationale for action research**

The primary reason for engaging in action research in this thesis is the participatory nature of the methodology. The participation of stakeholders in the research process makes action research an ideal process for community development (Gray, 2014; Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Kumar, 2002). It is particularly appropriate for not-for-profit organisations that are self-governing and in which some form of change is required. Members of the organisation have input into the change that they then manage. Stringer (2014) identified that a strength of action research is that it is a process that accepts diverse views of different stakeholders and finds ways of incorporating them into “mutually acceptable ways of understanding events that enable them to work towards a resolution of the problem investigated” (p. 39). Stringer’s viewpoint proved to be important in this thesis.

Action research encourages a review of how the operation of an organisation can be improved beyond its current state. Advocacy for action research within sport management was expressed by Chalip as early as 1997 in the introduction to a special issue of the *Journal of Sport Management* that contained seven action research studies. Twenty years later this advocacy was reinforced by Hoeber and Shaw (2017). The method was used by Ferkins et al. (2005) and Ferkins and Shilbury (2015) in relation to governance; by Vail (2007) to increase participation in tennis; by Chalip and Hutchinson (2017) for youth development; and by Chalip et al. (2017) and Hoskyn et al. (2017) for increased participation. Chalip (1997) challenged sport organisations and community “to think beyond what sport is; ... to think about what sport might become” (p. 5). Chalip and Hutchinson (2017) later noted that using action research to enable ongoing research and development for sport may help to fashion an improved system of sport (p. 43). In part this may be due to the potential of action research “to positively affect communities beyond the academy” (Hoeber & Shaw, 2017, p.6).

### **2.3.3 Type of action research**

A plethora of terms have been used to describe different approaches within the family of action research. Many of these terms do not convey understanding about the way the research should actually be conducted. Definitions of these terms often lack clarity.

In keeping with a pragmatist philosophy, rather than identifying a general descriptor, this chapter focuses on two typologies. The typologies relate to (a) levels of organisation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Willis & Edwards, 2014) and (b) paradigm

(McCutcheon & Jurg, 1990; Myers, 2013; Willis, 2007; Willis & Edwards, 2014). These typologies give greater understanding of the nature of the research and implications for research design and practice.

Considering first the level of organisation, this thesis involves sport clubs, that sit in the middle of a continuum. The continuum ranges from a study of individual practice through to team level, then organisational level, and finally community level (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014; Willis & Edwards, 2014). Clubs are clearly organisations. However, they are part of the golf or lawn bowls community and interact with regional and national organisations. Thus, the community surrounding the organisations cannot be ignored. This raises the issue of an “embedded system”, whereby an apparently local problem is heavily influenced by larger systems that a local group may believe are beyond its ability to manage (Waddell et al., 2015, p. 536). Waddell et al. (2015) suggested that multi-level research can be helpful, and this advice was heeded in the design of the current research.

The current research approach features multi-level analysis (Grix, 2010) comprising micro-level analysis, with an attempt to explain and understand the behaviour of individuals (the players), and macro-level analysis, to understand the system within the organisation (the club). With pragmatism placing emphasis on the need to understand a situation, the foundation phase of this thesis was substantial and included three studies that established understanding of the context in which the clubs operate.

The second typology relates to paradigm. The epistemology guiding action research can be positivist/post-positivist, interpretive or critical/emancipatory; (McCutcheon & Jurg, 1990; Myers, 2013; Willis, 2007; Willis & Edwards, 2014). The action research in this thesis was predominantly interpretive at an organisational level. In keeping with the paradigmatic nature of pragmatism, other philosophies (positivist and critical) emerged when required. The rationale for describing this thesis as predominantly interpretive is discussed in the next section.

## **2.4 Paradigm**

Although a pragmatist approach is not constrained by any one paradigmatic approach, it is important to consider the main paradigm influencing the project and the possible influence of multiple paradigms. Paradigm is described by Hammond and Wellington (2013) as “the dominant framework in which research takes place” (p. 116). It covers the nature and value of knowledge (ontology) and how this is to be studied (epistemology), with these two concepts very closely intertwined.

The dominant epistemology in this thesis is interpretative rather than positivist/post-positivist or critical. Five defining characteristics of interpretative action research identified by Willis (2007) are evident in this thesis: it was conducted in a real-world setting, members of the relevant organisations and communities participated in both the research and decision-making processes, it was collaborative, phronesis (understanding as a basis for practical knowledge) was important, and theory and practice interacted. In addition, Grant and Giddings (2002) described the interpretative paradigm as “listening to people” (p. 16), with the researcher acting as a listener and interpreter of the perspective of participants.

Key characteristics for the other paradigms are only evident at some stages of the project. With a post-positivist approach, the involvement of the participants is more likely to occur following the implementation of an action determined by the researcher. The determination of an intervention by the researcher did not occur in this project. Nevertheless, one club agreed upon and implemented actions that had little relation to the findings from the issue identification and investigation phases. With an intervention that had its roots outside the action research process, some characteristics of positivist/post-positivist action research are evident. The statistical evidence and quantitative analysis also brought a positivist element to this thesis.

Critical or emancipatory action research aims to strengthen the weaker groups in a power relationship, such as some of the relationships found in sport club structures. The goal of this research was to increase membership rather than alter relationships within clubs. However, that issue was not the prime focus of the research. Willis and Edwards (2014) distinguished between “enabling” and “emancipation”. Enablement assists club members to find solutions, whereas emancipation strengthens weaker groups in an organisation. This thesis is more about enablement than emancipation. The need for emancipatory action in golf is identified in the discussion at the end of the thesis and is a recommendation for future research.

A critical paradigm is evident at several stages of the project, but that was not the main goal in this research. Critical theory shares many characteristics with action research and so can seem inherent in an action research project, especially in a multidiscipline field such as sport management. Hammond and Wellington (2013) described strengths of critical theory, which are evident in this thesis, as being its cross-discipline focus, concern about values, action-oriented focus and consideration of the way cultural forces can restrict people from realising change. Other aspects of critical theory are less evident, such as concern with normative values such as democracy, fairness and equity. The key

goal of critical action research is emancipation, which was not the prime goal of this thesis. The language in critical action research is often quite dramatic, such as “The goal is to empower those who are oppressed” (Willis, 2007, p. 277). Situations of inequity exist in sport clubs with an imbalance of power between members. Addressing this imbalance or inequity may improve a sport club, which may contribute to increased membership. However, achieving greater equality was not the prime goal of the research and is also not relevant in all situations where club membership is declining.

Closely related to epistemology (i.e., how a subject is to be studied) is ontology (i.e., the nature and value of knowledge). Ontological assumptions influence the way in which research is undertaken, from the formulation of the research question through to the design and analysis. Ontology relates to the nature of social entities and whether they can be objectively defined. Two differing views of knowledge are objectivism and constructivism. The ontology behind this thesis is constructivism. Constructivism implies that social phenomena are produced through social interaction and are in constant state of revision. Social constructions are produced by the perceptions of people involved in an organisation (Grix, 2002, 2010; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Therefore, different people can hold differing views about the same phenomenon. This ontological perspective is consistent with an interpretative research approach and with action research.

## **2.5 Position of the researcher**

A research paradigm is strongly linked to the position of the researcher in relation to the participants and how the beliefs and values of the researcher can influence the study. The researcher position has two important aspects: the position of the researcher in relation to the participants and the position of the researcher in relation to the research question (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The position of the researcher is particularly important when using an interpretative approach and action research in which there is such active engagement with participants. With multiple perspectives of a situation, it is important that researchers be aware of the potential bias their own position can bring to the design, implementation and analysis.

In action research, the relationship between the researcher and the participants is a collaborative one. Collaboration occurs between the researcher and those involved within the organisation or issue under investigation. In relation to the action research process in this thesis (Figure 3), key stakeholders were involved with the researcher in planning the investigation and the evaluation. Results from the research phases of the cycle were shared and discussed with stakeholders in planning the intervention. The

researcher assisted the stakeholders to identify an action, which was implemented by the stakeholders. Evaluation was also undertaken jointly. As well as working with the researcher, some stakeholders were formally interviewed as part of the research process. Thus, the researcher worked *with* organisations rather than observing and undertaking research *on* organisations. Some participants were similar to co-researchers since they were involved not only in the research discussions or interviews but also in the interpretation of the results, the development of action and the evaluation of that action.

For this thesis, the relationship with participants is best described using the concept of a “friendly outsider” from the continuum of Greenwood and Levin (2007, p. 124). This is similar to the definition of Herr and Anderson (2015): an “outsider working in collaboration with insiders” (p. 40). An outsider’s level of participation exists on a continuum. The continuum includes options, which give members of the organisation considerable input into decisions. Other options give the members of the organisation little input in final decision-making. The friendly outsider gives the stakeholders the greatest say in their own destiny, with the researcher as a facilitator (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Co-learning occurs with “local people and outsiders sharing their knowledge to create new understanding and working together to form plans, with outside facilitation” (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 51).

In each case study, the final decision-making about interventions rested with the clubs. The level of involvement of the researcher in the suggestion and planning of actions varied considerably across the cases, utilising several aspects of the role of a “friendly outsider” as discussed by Greenwood and Levin (2007). The three most relevant aspects are to (a) open up lines of discussion, (b) make evident tacit local knowledge and (c) help local people assess resources and recognise that they may be more expert than they believe. Greenwood and Levin (2007) noted that “often local organisations or groups are either stuck in positions that have hardened or have become pessimistic about the possibilities for change” (p. 125). A “friendly outsider” can help an organisation to believe that change is possible. This role is particularly important in an embedded system, when stakeholders believe change is impossible.

The position of the researcher in relation to the research question has an important role in identifying potential biases that the researcher may bring to the research process (Biesta, 2010). Values are inherent in the research question. The research question of increasing membership immediately places value on that form of sport participation. To be clear about the potential bias that I could bring to the research, a formal pre-assumptions interview was conducted at the beginning of the project by a colleague with

a number of questions about my perspective of the research question and what I expected to identify in the research. I recorded and retained the audio file, then listened to the interview after writing the conclusions and discussion. This interview demonstrated that I value the concept of membership while showing sympathetic feelings towards participants who do not belong to an organisation. The interview also demonstrated my considerable interest in understanding alternative points of view and a willingness to act reflexively. I expected to find some form of solution; however, recognised that the issue had been puzzling for some time and did not expect to find a straightforward answer to the research question.

## **2.6 Theory**

With little conclusive theory about membership levels in sport clubs, this thesis took an abductive approach to developing and evaluating theory, within the pragmatist view of the nature of theory. The existing theory about clubs sits mostly within social psychology and sociology and relates to a sense of membership or “belonging”. There are consumer behaviour models of decision-making in business and sport management literature, but very little literature features sport-specific models of retention and recruitment.

The early phases of this thesis were inductive, shaping preliminary principles, on which actions or interventions were subsequently developed. By its very nature, the process of intervention and evaluation has a deductive component—evaluating the “theory” developed from the issue identification phase. However, that evaluation also contributes to theory building. The process tends to be iterative—moving backwards and forwards between theory and data (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2008). In this respect, the process in action research is abductive, with a predominantly inductive tendency. The investigation phase can identify why a phenomenon occurs. The action and evaluation contribute to knowledge about how a situation can be improved.

The evaluation phases drew on the pragmatist view of the instrumental nature of theory. Theory is not evaluated as a truth that is either true or false (Stringer, 2014). It is evaluated on its usefulness in explaining, predicting or influencing change. Knowledge is only meaningful when complemented by action. Knowledge can only be acquired through a combination of action and reflection (Biesta, 2010).

With interpretive action research, Willis and Edwards (2014) emphasised the importance of avoiding theory that limits options or possibilities. It is important to seek local knowledge and avoid generalisation. This latter point was important in the data analysis and interpretation stages of the thesis.

## 2.7 Data collection

Consistent with the pragmatist philosophy, multiple data collection and analysis methods were used. The unit of analysis in a research design can be individuals, groups, organisations or communities (Gray, 2014; Yin, 2014). This research explored the perspectives of players and personnel managing clubs.

### 2.7.1 Multiple method design

This project used multiple methods of data collection, which is distinct from mixed methods. Many authors use the two terms interchangeably. Thus, much of the literature about mixed methods is relevant to a multiple methods study. Morse (2003); (Morse, 2010) differentiates between the two terms. A multiple method study is “the conduct of two or more research methods, each conducted rigorously, and complete in itself, in one project. The results are then triangulated to form a comprehensive whole” (Morse, 2003, p. 190). Each study could be reported as a standalone project, with the possibility of a synthesising report (Morse, 2010, p. 340). Figure 4 is a simple representation of triangulation in multiple methods research. Essentially, two sets of data are collected and analysed concurrently and then interpreted together.

With mixed methods, there is a core project and other studies are not fully comprehensible without the core project (Morse, 2010).

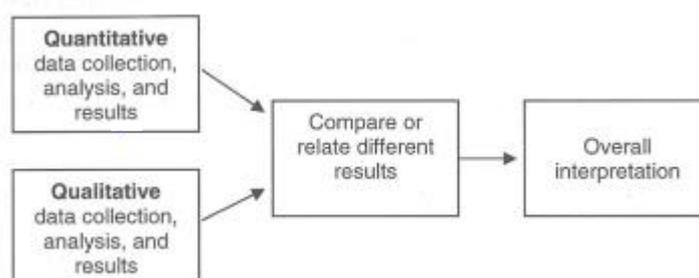


Figure 4. Triangulation of results  
(Plano Clark et al., 2010)

The studies in this thesis form a more complex pattern than that depicted in Figure 4. Three studies relate to the larger system or community surrounding the local clubs. These studies can be characterised as the context and issue identification phases of action research. The three studies are a document analysis providing context of golf and lawn bowls in Aotearoa New Zealand, statistical analysis of membership data and qualitative analysis of player behaviour and administrator attitudes (Figure 5). The context analysis

was substantial because of the complexity and long-standing nature of the issue, as demonstrated in the review of literature and secondary research.

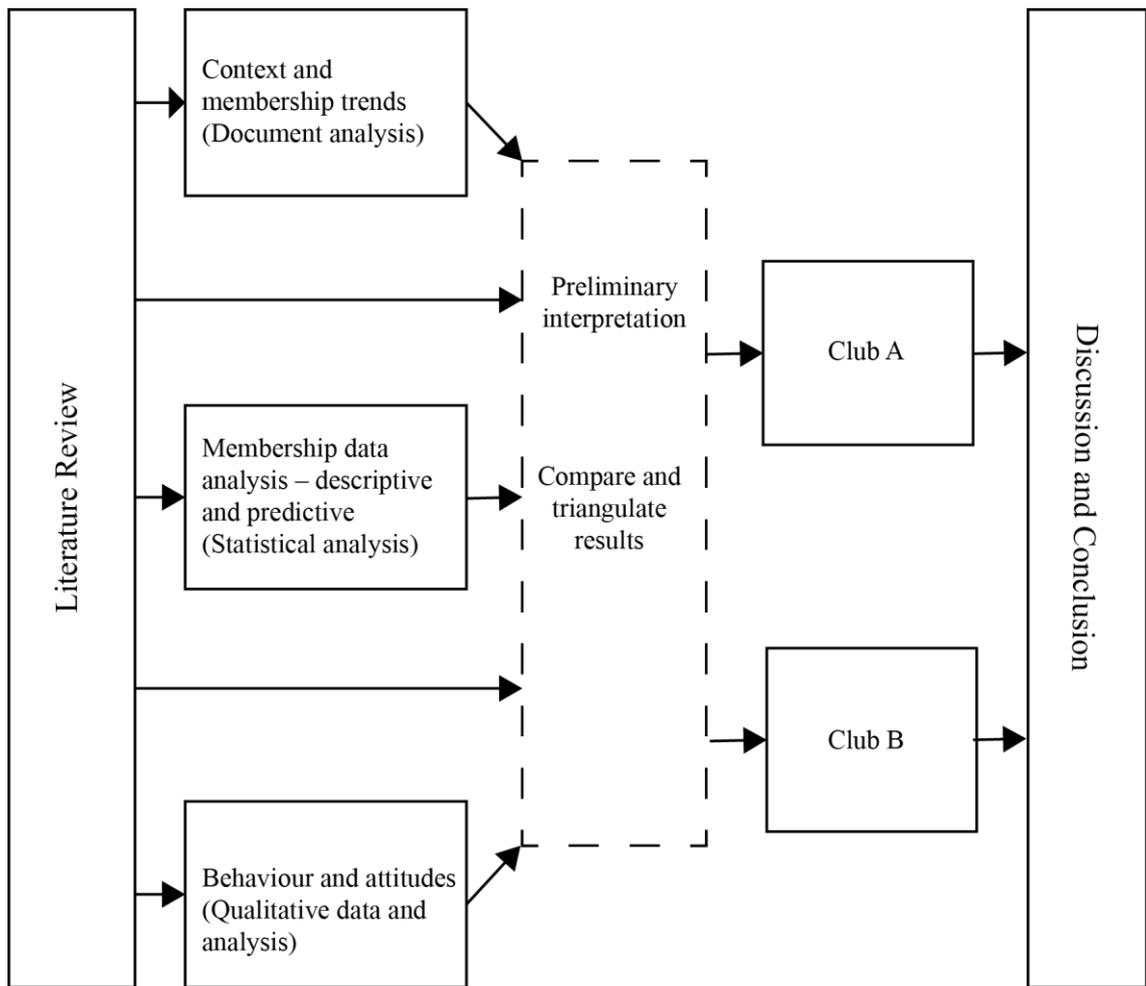


Figure 5. Relationship of studies in this thesis

As noted, the three initial studies identified the issues and context within which the two clubs were operating. The results of each study were initially analysed separately, but preliminary interpretation of these studies was discussed with personnel in each of the two clubs. These discussions set in motion the action research process in each club. The process in each club occurred as two separate case studies, after which the two cases were compared to form the discussion and conclusions.

The original intention of the statistical project was to assist clubs to form a retention strategy for members. Following presentation and discussion of the results, Club A personnel did not believe it was possible to apply the results specifically enough to their club to enable an intervention. The results of the logistic regression analysis (Chapter 5) were therefore not used in a specific retention strategy, but were retained as part of the issue identification phase.

### 2.7.2 Selection of cases (clubs)

The process for the selection of clubs is best described as judgement sampling, whereby cases are chosen based on researcher judgement. Judgement is made about whether a case would contribute understanding to the research question (Stake, 1995). This selection strategy is appropriate for applied research that aims for practical outcomes (Emmel, 2013). The club selection was based on advice from representatives of national organisations, as well as the willingness of clubs to participate. The aim was to identify clubs that might provide interesting analyses and that might be interested in membership initiatives. Initially, a contact at each national organisation (golf and lawn bowls) identified three to four clubs in their sport. In golf, the managers at all selected clubs agreed to discuss the project and to be interviewed. Managers at one golf club expressed interest in continuing with action or intervention. In lawn bowls, the process was more complex. The national organisation invited one bowling club to participate in the project. The club committee could not agree on whether to participate, so the invitation was withdrawn. Contact was established with two other bowling clubs, one of which did not believe that involvement in this project would be any more successful than previous underwhelming membership initiatives. With the other club, the contact was extremely friendly but not productive. The bowling club that ultimately participated in the research project was approached after an internet search of local clubs and discussion with the national organisation.

Action research often takes the form of a case study because it is based in a specific context (Gray, 2014). Case study research is an examination of a contemporary phenomenon through in-depth analysis of a person, group, community or society (Gray, 2014; Punch, 2014; Yin, 2014). The method is ideal for answering questions about “how” or “why” (Gray, 2014) rather than simply providing a description of a situation and so it aligns well with action research. In Yin’s (2014) seminal work, four applications of case study research were identified: an explanation of relationships too complex for a survey, a description of the context in which an action or intervention has occurred, an evaluation of an intervention and an exploration of a situation in which the outcomes are not clear. All of these applications applied in this thesis.

This thesis can be considered a *collective* (or *multiple*, or *comparative*) case study, given that two cases feature prominently. Yin (2014) advised that two or more case studies are better than one:

Even if you can do a “two-case” case study, your chances of doing a good case study will be better than using a single-case design. Single-case designs are vulnerable if only because you will have put “all your eggs in one basket”. More important, the analytic benefits from having two (or more) cases may be substantial. (p. 64)

Having two cases allows for both replication and comparison, which enables stronger conclusions (Yin, 2014). The aim was to provide at least one golf and one lawn bowls case to enable a degree of cross-sport comparison. The clubs are identified by letters (Clubs A and B) throughout the thesis as this. It also depersonalises the clubs to some extent and encourages the reader to think of the context for each club rather than the specific identity.

The two clubs provided contrasting situations (Table 2). A traditional action research approach was used in Club A, understanding and correcting weaknesses in the club and achieving an increase in membership over two consecutive years. Club B had been in a similar situation a few years earlier and created a stronger club and increased membership. However, the growth was not sustained, even for one season. Club B implemented, without much success, an initiative that is popular overseas. The interventions in this club arose more from in-club decision-making than discussions between the researcher and club representatives.

The relationship between me and the club representatives differed for each case. For Club A, a traditional action research process unfolded with a functional interaction completely focused on the project. For Club B, the relationship featured more frequent, and often informal, contact. In Club B,

Table 2. Participating clubs

Club	Type of club	Summary of action research
A	Golf club	Used a traditional action research approach. Two cycles of action research as shown in Figure 3 over two seasons, with investigation, action and evaluation. All interventions arose from the investigation and evaluation. Addressed issues within the club and increased membership over two seasons. Further issues have been identified.
B	Lawn bowls club	Used a variation of action research: Cycles of investigation, action and evaluation. However, actions often came from outside the action research process, including one idea popular overseas. Club B had been in the same position as Club A prior to participation in this thesis, and addressed many issues facing the club. This achieved a short-lived increase in membership. Club commenced on a major project in collaboration with other organisations.

### 2.7.3 Data collection

Data for this thesis were generated from documents, secondary sources, interviews and focus groups.

Table 3. Data collection methods used in each study

Study	Methods used
Membership trends (Chapter 4)	Document analysis
Descriptive and predictive analysis of membership renewal (Chapter 5)	Statistical analysis of a secondary data source
Player attitudes and behaviour (Chapter 6)	In-depth interviews
Club studies	
Club A (Chapter 7)	Focus groups and document analysis
Club B (Chapter 8)	Document analysis and in-depth interviews

The combination of focus groups and interviews provided a balance between the two techniques, which have different strengths and weaknesses. Individual interviews are appropriate to generate a detailed understanding of consumer perspectives and behaviour, because of the potential for greater depth and clarity when people can express themselves fully and uninterrupted by other participants. Focus groups are beneficial for a wide-ranging exploratory discussion, with the potential to cover a greater range of perspectives with multiple people interacting (Stokes & Bergin, 2006).

To complement these two data-gathering techniques, document analysis provided a good base for triangulation at a later stage. In a multiple methods study, data from documents can confirm and/or add detail to emerging insights from other data (Ivankova, 2015). Each data collection phase of the research is described in more detail.

#### Document analysis

The document analysis in this thesis had two purposes: first, to demonstrate the trends and magnitude of the membership problem for golf and lawn bowls and second to identify issues as perceived by media sources within and outside golf and lawn bowls.

Document analysis is the systematic analysis of existing documents as a source of data (Bowen, 2009). The documents can be government publications and statistics, records of meetings, newspapers and magazines, website pages and internet, letters and memos or diaries (Denscombe, 2014). Apart from the last two items, all these types of documents were examined in this thesis, the majority of which are available to the public. Both qualitative and numeric data were obtained from the documents.

Documents such as minutes of meetings, articles from newspapers and magazines, and information from websites may have significant limitations in terms of accuracy, with the possibility of bias in reporting or a lack of specific facts. The commentary in these

sources may provide opinion rather than facts about issues. As warned by Denscombe (2014), such commentary cannot be regarded as objective. However, this information still has value, as long as the limitations are acknowledged. Through content analysis, issues can be identified, along with perspectives of people about the two sports.

The availability of a large number of documents on this topic was both an advantage and a disadvantage. While documents can be easy to access, it can be time-consuming when a large number of documents are available. The importance of selecting the most relevant cannot be underestimated (Ivankova, 2015). The public library holds many volumes of golf and lawn bowls magazines spanning several decades. In addition, information is regularly published by Sport and Recreation New Zealand (2009) and Sport New Zealand (2015b) and other individual reports are on the Sport New Zealand website, annual reports for Golf New Zealand for each of the past 12 years, and annual reports for Bowls New Zealand for each of the past five years, strategic plans for each of the two sports, newsletters from national and regional organisations, national statistical bureaux in Australia and Great Britain, newspapers and sport magazines in Aotearoa New Zealand, club membership kits online, and previous small scale studies on the national body websites. This study summarises key information in a cohesive form.

### **Secondary data analysis**

Secondary data analysis is closely related to document analysis and involves the analysis of data that have been collected for some purpose other than the current study. For this thesis, a sample of four years of data from a golf membership database enabled extensive analysis. This data possessed characteristics of credibility, impartiality and being factual, which Denscombe (2014) identified as essential for good secondary analysis.

### **Individual semi-structured interviews**

Individual semi-structured interviews occur when an interviewer has a topic guide and asks the questions in an order and manner that fits with a natural flow of conversation. The advantage of a one-on-one interview is that the information is not influenced by other people (Denscombe, 2014). This enables the researcher to follow a decision-making or thought process of one person. It can generate more in-depth data about specific topics. Individual interviews are considered particularly appropriate for opinions, feelings, emotions and experiences. Another advantage is that an interviewer can pursue topics of interest to the participant rather than a preconceived set of questions. The interviewer can probe for more information on a particular topic and explore topics that may not have been on the original topic guide. The disadvantages are that the interviews can be time-

consuming to undertake, transcribe and analyse. Interviewer effects can introduce bias into the process.

### **Focus groups**

Focus groups typically consist of six to nine people brought together to discuss a specific topic, usually for one to two hours. Denscombe (2014) identified three essential characteristics of focus groups: a focus or specific topic for the discussion, interaction within the group to generate information, and the role of the moderator in facilitating this group interaction. The moderator guides the discussion by posing questions and ensuring that everyone's voice is heard. The group interaction is both an advantage and a disadvantage of focus groups. It can generate serendipity and a breadth of idea generation covering a wide range of issues. However, it can also provide group pressure that can lead participants to alter responses or maintain silence. In this thesis, focus groups were used for both exploratory and storyline purposes (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Exploratory groups are designed to increase researcher and participant understanding of an issue. The storyline approach identifies concerns of importance to participants in a specific situation, as told in their story of an event or situation.

#### **2.7.4 Action research in a thesis**

A number of aspects of the postgraduate thesis process are contrary to the emergent and collaborative principles of action research. Action research is designed to be an emergent methodology, which is driven by data rather than theory, and which is sensitive to a situation and the participating organisations. The thesis process requires precise proposals and a level of future planning that is somewhat contrary to this principle of emergence. Nevertheless, the emergent nature of action research is evident in this thesis. Some of the planned process did not eventuate, and the research went in directions unknown at the proposal stage.

Inherently, a postgraduate thesis is driven by one person. The student takes full responsibility for the management of the project and writing of the document. The individual nature of a thesis has to be managed alongside the collaborative spirit of the action research process. The possibility of a project champion in an action research project lends itself to the student-driven nature of a thesis. There are precedents for sport-based action research theses with a project champion (Ferkins, 2007; Vail, 2007).

Containment of an action research project to fit within the scope of a thesis was an ongoing challenge. During the course of the thesis, several large issues relating to golf and lawn bowls as a whole were raised, for example, the lack of diversity among the

participants of both golf and lawn bowls. Each of these issues could be a thesis in itself. This thesis generated insights about the significance of issues for the sports as a whole and their impact on golf and lawn bowls clubs. However, it was not possible to investigate the issues fully within the scope of a manageable thesis. These issues affect many clubs and are noted as topics for future research. All in all, using an action research framework for a PhD thesis on a complex topic was challenging.

## **2.8 Ethics**

Ethical issues occur at all stages of the research process, from the early stages of setting up the research, through the data collection, handling of data, analysing data and reporting data. This thesis was guided by the processes of the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEK). Two separate applications were approved for the interviews and focus groups. Consistent with the emergent nature of action research, two formal requests were later made to amend the applications: one to increase the number of interviews and the other to broaden the scope of the focus groups.

Befitting an academic institution in Aotearoa New Zealand, the AUT process draws on the principles of the founding document of Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty of Waitangi, which is an agreement between the British Crown and the indigenous people of Aotearoa New Zealand. Three principles of the treaty are consistent with the spirit of action research: partnership, participation and protection. The principles of partnership and participation are inherent in action research and in this study are twofold: partnership with the participating organisations and with the participants.

Other key ethical issues are informed consent, confidentiality and avoiding harm (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Pivotal in the process of obtaining informed consent are formal information sheets and consent forms approved by AUTEK for the interview and focus groups (Appendix 1). AUTEK approval covers not only the documents but also the process for selecting, approaching and interviewing participants; the recording, transcription and analysis of data; and the maintenance of participant records during and after the research. A particular issue for this thesis was honouring promises of confidentiality. While no participants were named in the reporting of the research, in some cases, a participant described a specific set of circumstances. Therefore, even though not named, the participant could inadvertently be identified by anyone aware of the circumstances. In such cases, the reporting of the data was shown to and discussed with the participant and modified if necessary. Harm is unlikely to occur in interviews discussing sport. Nevertheless, consideration was given to the possibility of someone

feeling uncomfortable, especially at a focus group. Ability to withdraw from an interview or focus group was emphasised in the information sheet, as was the freedom not to answer specific questions.

## 2.9 Quality

As with any multiple or mixed methods study, principles of quality appropriate for each method needed to be considered. These principles are discussed in Chapters 4 to 9, along with the precise method for data collection and analysis for the respective studies. In addition to quality for each component method, it was important to consider the action research process as a whole. Quality for the overall process can be assessed against complex sets: a comprehensive set of seven items identified by Bradbury (2015) or a more general set of three criteria as identified by Coghlan and Brannick (2014). Bradbury (2015) identified seven criteria in answer to the question “How do we know when we are doing good action research?” (p .8). Four of the criteria (Table 4) are specific to action research. Three criteria are relevant to any research project. These criteria are used in the final discussion of this thesis.

Table 4. Quality criteria for action research

Criteria	Description
Partnership and participation	The study demonstrates participative values.
Contribution to action research theory and practice	The study builds on or contributes to a wider body of knowledge and contributes to action research literature.
Actionability	The study provides new ideas that guide action in response to a specific need.
Reflexivity	Authors take a personal, involved and self-critical stance and are clear about their position in relation to the research.
Significance	The research has some meaning and relevance beyond the immediate context in support of some form of improvement.
Articulation of objectives	The action research explicitly addresses its objectives.
Appropriate methods and process	Methods and process are clearly articulated.

Adapted from Bradbury (2015, p. 8).

In contrast to Bradbury’s (2015 ) seven criteria, Coghlan and Brannick (2014) took a simpler approach to evaluating action research, noting that a good project “contains three main elements: a good story, rigorous reflection on that story and an extrapolation of usable knowledge or theory from the reflection on the story” (p. 16). Reflection and extrapolation are encompassed by Bradbury’s criteria. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) suggested three practical questions for reflection: “What happened?”, “How to make sense of what happened?” and “So what?” (p. 16). The “good story” was not defined by

Coghlan and Brannick. The criteria used for this thesis is the level of engagement of the audiences to which the story has been told, as described in Chapter 9.

## **2.10 Reflection**

The reflective processes of the researcher are fundamental in action research (Bradbury, 2015; Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) and therefore need to be identified from the outset. From a pragmatist standpoint, knowledge can only be acquired through a combination of action and reflection (Biesta, 2010), with numerous processes and models documented by authors such as Moseley et al. (2005). The two processes most used in this thesis were advocated by action research authors. Coghlan and Brannick (2014) successfully wove a three-phase reflective into their own action research. This process was used, along with that of Stringer (2014), an interpretative action researcher.

The three forms of reflection linked to action research by Coghlan and Brannick (2014) are based on Mezirow's (1998) research. They are reflection about content, process and premise. Content focuses on what is happening. Process is the strategies and procedures (the ways things are done). Premise refers to underlying assumptions that may govern attitudes and behaviour and may not be immediately evident. Therefore, an active process is needed to uncover assumptions.

Stringer (2014) used an interpretative approach for reflection specifically for action research. Stringer suggested three frameworks for "making sense" of the analysis: interpretative questions, organisational review and concept mapping. These approaches were all used in this thesis. Interpretative questions uncover a description of a situation with questions that begin with "why", "what", "how", "who", "where" or "when". This type of ongoing reflection informed the design of the qualitative interviews and focus groups and also the analysis of those data. The organisational review obtained the perspective from within a sport club. The review was particularly concerned with problems, issues and concerns and how the stakeholders interpret the problems. Concept mapping created a visual representation of the major influences that needed to be taken into account, bearing in mind that with a pragmatist approach an explanatory framework does not need to be a proven explanation but one that makes sense to stakeholders.

Each approach was used at different stages of the thesis. The interpretative questions and organisational review were mostly used in the design and data collection, with the concept mapping more evident in the analysis, interpretation and results.

With Coghlan and Brannick (2014) placing emphasis on underlying assumptions, aspects of Paul's model of critical thinking were used as a checklist for discussion:

comparing and contrasting ideals with actual practice, noting similarities and differences in situations, examining and evaluating assumptions, evaluating evidence and alleged facts, recognising contradictions, and exploring implications and consequences (Moseley et al., 2005).

## **2.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter has discussed the philosophy, methodology and methods relevant to this thesis. Further detail about the specific methods are given in the following chapters, each of which is self-contained study complete in itself:

Chapter 4—Context and membership trends (Document analysis)

Chapter 5—Statistical analyses of membership data (Descriptive and predictive)

Chapter 6—Behaviour and attitudes (Qualitative)

Chapter 7—Club A—Action research study

Chapter 8—Club B—Action research approach.

## **CHAPTER 3: LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review presented in this chapter considers the nature of club membership from a range of perspectives. Peer-accepted knowledge about clubs and membership is reviewed. Marketing from an organisational perspective is applied to sport clubs, followed by consideration of consumer behaviour. Finally, customer retention literature links the organisational and the consumer behaviour perspective. Because limited literature specifically relates to membership of sport clubs, golf and lawn bowls, theory relating to service and not-for-profit organisations is also discussed.

### **3.1 Clubs and society**

This section identifies club membership trends, issues relating to the size of sport clubs and characteristics of not-for-profit sport clubs. These characteristics are important as they influence the extent to which general marketing and consumer behaviour theory can be applied to clubs. The historical development of clubs has led to a culture and perception of exclusivity, as well as demographic bias, in membership. Despite this, sport clubs are considered to influence the development of social networks positively.

#### **3.1.1 Membership trends**

Membership trends in golf and lawn bowls in Aotearoa New Zealand are presented, along with comparative studies that show a pattern of decline for clubs in general and sport in particular. This decline has also been found in the not-for-profit sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tennant et al., 2008; Topping, 2017, March 14), in many types of clubs in a wide-ranging study in the United States of America (Putnam, 1995), a multi-sport study in Australia (Eime et al., 2009) and membership data for golf and lawn bowls in Australia (Bowls Australia, 2016a; Golf Australia, 2017).

Adult membership of golf and lawn bowls in Aotearoa New Zealand has steadily declined over the past decade (Table 5). The average annual membership decline for lawn bowls is 2.6% and 2.1% for golf. The net effect of this decline has been a reduction in membership of approximately one-quarter of the membership for lawn bowls and one-fifth for golf over the past 10 years. By contrast, the number of people registered in lawn bowls participation programmes has almost doubled over the same period. While not formal members of the organisation, these people have informal “membership” of a participation programme. The informality of the “membership” may be reflected in the lack of consistency for this type of participation, with the rate of change varying from a decline of 13% (2015/6) to growth of 48% (2014/5). In 2016, Golf New Zealand also

began registering casual golfers and found that the number of such golfers is increasing and is only slightly lower than the number of club members.

The declining membership in lawn bowls seems to be more long-standing than it is in golf. The peak for golf club membership in Aotearoa New Zealand was in 2007 (Table 5) and for lawn bowls it is reported as two decades earlier, during the 1990s (Barlow, 2005). Total membership stood at 68,210 in 1996, the year in which the men's and women's associations merged (Carter, 2013).

Even in golf, the 1990s heralded the beginning of fluctuating membership. Declines in membership were experienced most years for the first decade of the twenty-first century, offset by a few years of growth, bringing adult membership to its highest in 2006–2007 at 114,238 members (Table 5).

Table 5. Adult membership of lawn bowls and golf clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand

Year	Lawn bowls				Golf			
	Registered non-member players		Members		Registered casual golfers		Members	
	<i>N</i>	% change	<i>n</i>	% change	<i>n</i>	% change	<i>n</i>	% change
1913			10,912					
1924			13,943	27.8%			10,000	
1925			15,055	8.0%				
1939							28,446	184.5%
1950							30,000	5.5%
1960							45,100	50.3%
1965							60,101	33.3%
1970							94,600	57.4%
1994							107,171	
1995							105,112	-1.9%
1996			68,210					
2001–2002							117,861	
2002–2003							114,934	-2.5%
2003–2004							114,795	-0.1%
2004–2005							114,184	-0.5%
2005–2006							116,813	2.3%
2006–2007	39,784		51,702				114,238	-2.2%
2007–2008	43,972	10.5%	50,384	-2.5%			120,546	5.5%
2009–2010	50,834	15.6%	48,920	-2.9%			110,232	-8.6%
2010–2011	54,024	6.3%	45,826	-6.3%			110,623	0.4%
2011–2012	54,496	0.9%	44,009	-4.0%			105,266	-4.8%
2012–2013	48,702	-10.6%	42,593	-3.2%			102,798	-2.3%
2013–2014	51,660	6.1%	41,328	-3.0%			99,844	-2.9%
2014–2015	76,474	48.0%	38,243	-7.5%			97,120	-2.7%
2015–2016	66,694	-12.8%	38,550	0.8%			94,166	-3.0%
2016–2017	79,140	18.7%	37,882	-1.7%	85,286		93,016	-1.2%
2017–2018	83,621	5.7%	39,375	3.9%	88,336	3.6%	91,555	-1.6%
Since 2006								
Average change				-2.6%				-2.1%
% change		110.2%		-23.8%				-19.8%

Sources:

Bowls 1913 &amp; 1996: Carter (2013)

Bowls 1924 &amp; 1925: New Zealand Census and Statistics Office (1925, 1926)

Bowls 2006–2018: Bowls New Zealand (2012, 2013a, 2015a, 2017, 2018)

Golf 1924–1970: Kelly (1971)

Golf 1980–1995: New Zealand Golf Association (1995, 1996)

Golf 2001–2018: New Zealand Golf (2011, 2016, 2017)

Note: These figures do not include junior members in golf or secondary memberships (i.e., second or additional memberships held).

Differences between golf clubs have been reported by Cordery and Baskerville (2012).

Half the golf clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand showed a decline in membership in 2011

compared with two years earlier. A quarter of the clubs had growing membership and a quarter had stable membership.

While decline in both sports is long-standing, it started to occur later than it did for other not-for-profit organisations. The overall decline in membership throughout the not-for-profit sector in Aotearoa New Zealand was identified as beginning in the 1980s by Tennant et al. (2008), who linked this decline to changes in employment legislation and a shortage of volunteers. They concluded that “organisations have always had life cycles but changes in the late twentieth century proved especially challenging to the (not-for-profit) sector” (Tennant et al., 2008, p. 30). They also commented that declining organisations may “have failed to maintain their relevance” (Tennant et al., 2008, p. 30).

Universal decline in club membership in the United States was reported in the highly cited but controversial works “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital” (Putnam, 1995) and *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (Putnam, 2000). Bowling in the title of the works refers to ten-pin bowling leagues of the United States, not lawn bowls, the focus of this research. Putnam maintained that throughout all aspects of American society, membership of most community clubs in a range of activities has declined. He identified a range of social trends as the cause, with considerable emphasis on generational differences (i.e., the attitudes and behaviour of recent generations indicate less loyalty towards clubs). These works are based on a large sample of reliable government data. However, Putnam’s assumption of cause and effect between social trends and declines in membership has been criticised (e.g. Boggs, 2001; Galston & Hochschild, 2001).

Adult membership decline was demonstrated in a longitudinal analysis of sport clubs in Victoria, a state in Australia (Eime et al., 2009). The club-based sport structure in Australia is similar to that in Aotearoa New Zealand. Three out of four unidentified Victorian sports experienced a decline in adult membership between 1998 and 2003. The decline ranged from 5.3% of the membership to 16.5%, with the average annual decline varying between 1.1% and 3.5%. The membership numbers in these sports ranged from approximately 30,000 to 52,000 in the last year of analysis. For one sport, there was a steady decline each year. For the other two sports, slight fluctuations occurred, with one or two years of increase during the period of analysis.

In Australia, golf and lawn bowls memberships have seen decline similar to those in Aotearoa New Zealand. The average annual decline over the past five years for golf is 1.2% (Golf Australia, 2017) and for lawn bowls 3.5% (Bowls Australia, 2016b). The net effect of these declines is a reduction in membership of approximately a quarter over the

past five years. By contrast, the number of people registered in lawn bowls participation programmes has increased on average by 16% each year and more than doubled over the same period.

Based on evidence from Aotearoa New Zealand and around the world, one can conclude that club membership is generally in decline. However, as shown by Cordery and Baskerville (2012), while annual decline is widespread, it is not inevitable at the individual club-level.

### **3.1.2 Club size and membership**

There is conflicting discussion about the impact of size on the success of a club. A larger club is often assumed to be more successful than a small one. Whereas for-profit organisations define size by turnover, profit or number of employees, a club typically does so by the number of members (Wicker et al., 2014). However, Thiel and Mayer (2009) and Wicker et al. (2014) noted that a larger sport club is not necessarily better than a smaller one. They added that the ultimate purpose of a club, as defined in its constitution, is not to increase or have a large membership. While financial surplus may not be the purpose of a club, Dickson and Koenigsfeld (2018) warned that a club running at a deficit will be unsustainable. Membership numbers therefore need to be sufficient to ensure that the objectives of the club can be met.

From an economics standpoint, no conclusive literature indicates a theoretical ideal size for a club across sports. Wicker et al. (2014) concluded that the heterogeneous nature of sports makes it difficult to identify an optimum club size, with some sports being more cost intensive than others. This difference is clearly evident when considering golf and lawn bowls. The cost in running a facility for golf is considerably greater than it is for lawn bowls; hence, a golf club usually needs a larger membership to sustain its facility.

A large club has advantages and disadvantages in relationship to membership. It receives greater income from membership fees (Thiel & Mayer, 2009; Wicker et al., 2014) and usually has the advantage of economies of scale. Nevertheless, club theory (the economic study of clubs) emphasises that this economy only occurs up to a point, after which no further benefit is realised (Buchanan, 1965). In spite of the higher revenue from membership fees, the club may also have higher costs in delivery of the sport and so may not necessarily be financially more viable. A case study of clay target shooting in Italy identified that larger clubs have greater ability to attract new members and have a wider range of facilities (Musso et al., 2016). Nevertheless, as a club becomes older and larger and possibly more commercial, it may lose the special characteristics that are the strength

of sport clubs (Horch, 1998). Some problems associated with a large club are not evident with a smaller one, such as retention of volunteers. In addition, the distance from the “grassroots to the top of the organisation hierarchy” (Horch, 1998, p. 20) is greater in a large club.

Small clubs tend to have issues with informality and sustainability that affect membership. A smaller club is usually less formal in its operation (Clark, 2000). This informality can be both a strength and a weakness. Small golf clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand (under 100 members) have difficulty with training volunteers, dealing with funders and recruiting paid staff (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012). However, a small club makes greater use of its volunteers (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012) and so may have increased social integration (Ulseth, 2004). In spite of the sustainability difficulties, Cordery and Baskerville (2012) found small golf clubs to be the strongest financially.

Medium-sized clubs seem to have an advantage in managing membership. Only half the medium-sized golf clubs (100–300 members) in Aotearoa New Zealand have experienced a decline in membership. This contrasts with the declining membership in 60% of small clubs and 64% of large clubs (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012). Medium-sized clubs also had the highest level of member attraction in Queensland (Golf Queensland, 2009) and New South Wales (Golf NSW, 2009). None of the small clubs in Aotearoa New Zealand have had growing membership (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012), which supports the assertion of Musso et al. (2016) that larger clubs are better at attracting new members.

### **3.1.3 Characteristics of not-for-profit sport clubs**

Not-for-profit sport clubs have special characteristics that affect the application of business principles to the organisations and also the capacity for management and innovation. Sport clubs, historically, have brought together people with a common purpose, provided a way of ensuring play by common rules for the game, created an organisation of competition, and secured a location for participation and sociability (Vamplew, 2013). They are “largely run by member volunteers who organise and deliver opportunities for recreational and competitive sport participation” (Doherty et al., 2014, p. 124). The word “voluntary” is used in this section as the term found in literature to describe not-for-profit clubs run predominantly by volunteers.

The special characteristics of voluntary sport clubs are the discretionary nature of membership, a focus on members’ interests and needs, independence from third parties (i.e., self-governing), services performed freely by members and democratic decision-

making (Heinemann, 1984; Osterlund, 2013). These special characteristics are both a strength and a weakness and need to be considered when attempting to implement business theory in the organisation (Heinemann, 1984; Horch, 1994; Thiel & Mayer, 2009; Vamplew, 2013).

Two potential contradictions between theory and practice relate to the characteristics of independence and democratic decision-making. The first contradiction arises from autonomy in decision-making, described in Germany as independence from third parties and in Aotearoa New Zealand as self-governance. Within the Aotearoa New Zealand sport structure, clubs may need to conform to national requirements to access competitions, programmes or funding. A whole-of-sport strategy links national and community organisations such as clubs so that they do not operate in isolation (O'Boyle & Bradbury, 2017). It also exerts considerable influence over the direction of sport and recreation (Tennant et al., 2008) and so can undermine the self-governing nature of clubs. A second contradiction in relation to democratic decision-making arises from the governance of clubs, described by Thiel and Mayer (2009) as “quasi-bottom-up decisions” (p. 91). A club’s board is elected by the members to represent their interests, act as an executive body and make major decisions. Yet a general meeting can reverse, alter or block these decisions. Technically, every member has a voice in decision-making through their ability to raise matters and vote at an annual general meeting (AGM) and through the election of the executive body. This member-based power can potentially restrict the autonomy of managerial staff, who report to the board and ultimately to the membership. In practice, it may be technical rather than actual power for members of an organisation if decisions of a strong executive body or managerial staff are unquestioned.

People with a business background may not take sufficient note of the special characteristics (and potential contradictions) when making recommendations to a voluntary sport club (Horch, 1998; Thiel & Mayer, 2009). Vos et al. (2012) warned of the potential inappropriateness of the profit approach in not-for-profit clubs because of the added social value of volunteer work. In this respect, the weakness of a sport club is also its strength. According to Horch (1998), “Social life cannot be quantified and cannot be reduced to monetary values. Market mechanisms fail in realising non-monetary values” (p. 20).

If a purely theoretical social systems perspective is taken (without consideration of market pressures), a voluntary sport organisation is not required to be efficient as this is rarely an objective in their constitution. A theoretical critique of club structures from a social systems perspective evaluates the possible result of every member being involved

in all goal setting. A potentially gloomy perspective emerges with the description of managing a voluntary sport club as “nothing other than a democratic handling of disorder” (Thiel & Mayer, 2009, p. 95).

A club operating in a disorganised way could be described as lacking “capacity”. Capacity in a sport club was defined by Doherty et al. (2014) as “the ability of an organisation to draw on various assets and resources to achieve its mandate and objectives” (p. 125S). The importance of capacity building for sport clubs has received focus in recent years (Doherty et al., 2014; Hoskyn et al., 2017; Macrae, 2017; Millar & Doherty, 2016). Hoskyn et al. (2017) identified a process by which collaborative networks (including regional and national organisations) can support clubs and so reduce their organisational deficiencies.

Linked to capacity is the concept of innovation, which is important but often lacking in a sports club. However, a Canadian study of innovation in sport clubs indicated that an organisation unprepared for innovation can be motivated to obtain that ability. Hoeber et al. (2015) found the greatest level of innovation in two diverse organisations: (a) curling, which is an established traditional sport with older members and declining participation; and (b) Ultimate Frisbee, which is a new sport with younger participants. Hoeber et al. (2015) suggested that the innovation in curling clubs resulted from a fight for survival at the grassroots level, whereas the innovation in Ultimate Frisbee appeared to have been linked to a mind-set of supporting innovation, along with an absence of entrenched views.

When investigating the operation of clubs, it is important to take into account the context of the club as well as the nature of the specific sport. Cross-case comparative analysis has been advocated (Weed et al., 2005), which fits well with the use of multi-case action research as a methodology for an investigation of club issues.

#### **3.1.4 Exclusiveness of clubs**

The exclusiveness of sport clubs over many decades has led to membership challenges. Membership inherently creates two groups: people who belong and people who do not belong (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). People belong to a club when they pay a fee in return for the benefit of membership services. However, additional boundaries can be created by exclusionary practices, including emotional exclusion.

Emotional exclusion is an unwelcoming approach that can be directed towards groups of players or potential players. By contrast, emotional inclusion focuses on a connection between a player and the sport community. It is the feeling of belonging to a

community, with the right to belong (Aronson & Mills, 1959; Hedlund, 2014). Formal and emotional membership may not always occur together. A person may feel strongly connected to the community but not have formal membership (and so possibly be receptive to club membership). Alternatively, a person may be a member in a legal sense but loosely connected (and so potentially at risk of discontinuing membership).

The emotional nature of membership creates in-groups (i.e., those with which a person can identify) and out-groups (i.e., those with which a person does not identify). Argyle (2006) and Burrmann et al. (2020) found that sporting groups (compared with other leisure groups) displayed lower acceptance towards out-groups than towards in-groups. Exclusivity in a club makes it harder for someone from an out-group to join.

Historically, membership exclusivity has been the sign of a good club that people aspire to join. Exclusivity takes the form of barriers to entry, strict standards of dress and policy that restricts membership to certain groups in society. In addition, there are often unwritten rules of expected behaviour (Clark, 2000; Darwin, 1944), which are passed from one member to another verbally, thus making participation in the club uncomfortable for people without a network of existing members. This may also extend to hidden entry requirements for a club, such as family tradition, bearing and etiquette (Bourdieu, 1978).

Attitudes and practices have continued to make it difficult for sectors of the community to access club sport (Bourdieu, 1978; Clark, 2000; Darwin, 1944). For example, practices excluding lower social classes from joining a club are well-documented in the work of Bourdieu (1978). He noted that in France in the 1970s, golf and tennis were among sports indirectly closed to the working classes. No formal mechanisms prevented the working class from joining golf or tennis clubs, but it was either difficult for them to gain entry or they did not feel welcome.

Western practices of exclusivity contrast with the explicit focus that Māori have on collectivity, bonding and an ethic of care. This contrast led to the emergence of Māori sport organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand, such as the Māori Golf Association in 1931 (Tennant et al., 2008). There is opportunity for sport clubs to embrace Māori principles of *manaakitanga* (hospitality and care for people) and *whanaungatanga* (relationship through shared experience) to create greater diversity and a sense of inclusiveness (Thompson et al., 2017).

### 3.1.5 History of sport clubs

Exclusionary practice is only one influence of historic behaviour in sport clubs. Many issues influencing not-for-profit organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand are “deeply grounded in the past” (Tennant et al., 2008, p. 33). An international study of non-profit organisations identified the past as a key influence on current behaviour, with the sector described as “an integral part of a social system whose role and scale is a by-product of a complex set of historical forces” (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Anhier, 2000, as cited in Tennant et al., 2008, p. 1). British tradition influenced the set-up, organisation and legislation of the not-for-profit sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tennant et al., 2008).

In the British tradition, members had responsibilities to a club and were expected to consider how they might contribute to a club, not just what they might gain from it (Darwin, 1944). Darwin, a former president of the prestigious St Andrews Golf Club and an authority on amateur golf in Britain, discussed the concept of a person being “clubbable” or “fit for membership of a club” (p. 7). However, Darwin (1944) was concerned that this definition was insufficient and commented in a judgemental tone:

A man may be perfectly fit to be a member of a club, in the sense that his character and his habits are above reproach, and yet he may be altogether without certain essential qualities. The “clubbable” man does not merely get something out of a club but contributes something to it.  
(p. 8)

Similar expectations and sentiments can still be found in the expectations of some clubs of their members (Clark, 2000).

Early clubs were characterised by male dominance. Female participation in voluntary associations prior to 1800 was rare. When women began to join clubs, they formed separate organisations or were segregated into a women’s section of a club (Clark, 2000). Segregation by gender continued in sport organisations until well into the twentieth century. Segregation in sporting bodies has been evident in Aotearoa New Zealand (Tennant et al., 2008). Both golf and lawn bowls had separate national associations and clubs for men and women for decades.

The closure of clubs is another issue that is not a new phenomenon. Vamplew (2013) identified reasons for the closure of clubs in the eighteenth century such as financial problems and amalgamation with other clubs, which are similar to the reasons for closure of clubs over the past few years in Aotearoa New Zealand. Formation of new clubs during a boom can lead to competition between clubs in a local area. Even during the boom times of the late eighteenth century, clubs were losing members. This can also be seen in a history of bowling clubs in the Wellington region of Aotearoa New Zealand,

which identified club closures at various stages of the twentieth century, sometimes during a growth period for the sport nationally (Barlow, 2005). In some cases, the club no longer met a community need.

### **3.1.6 Gendered institutions**

Gender segregation is an important barrier to female participation. Golf, in particular, has been described as a “gendered institution” (McGinnis et al., 2008, p. 20), and similar practices were also evident in lawn bowls (Boyle & McKay, 1995; Carter, 2013). A gendered institution excludes one gender (usually women) from processes and full participation in the life of a club through rituals and practices that enhance the position of the other gender (usually men). These processes and practices may be overt, or they may be hidden and not readily observable.

Overt exclusion of women was still evident at numerous high-profile golf clubs during the past decade. Women were not admitted to the Augusta National Golf Club in the United States until 2012, to the St Andrews Golf Club in Scotland until 2014, and to the Royal Troon Golf Club, also in Scotland, and Royal St. George’s Golf Club in Kent, until 2016 (Topping, 2017, March 14). Muirfield in Scotland admitted women in 2017, the same year that the Tokyo Golf Club in Japan approved full membership for women. In both these cases, the decision followed a threat of withdrawal of prestigious tournaments if exclusion of women continued (Hurst, 2017, March 20).

Hidden processes were identified in a single club lawn bowls case 1995 study in Australia. The study reported not only gender segregation but also “exploitation” of women in terms of the domestic contribution made to the club, while men controlled the power structures (Boyle & McKay, 1995, p. 556). Instances of the provision of bowling time in return for catering are reported in Aotearoa New Zealand’s bowling history (Carter, 2013).

The need for gender segregation in golf has been questioned since there is “nothing inherent in the sport, except for rituals, that should advantage men or require segregated play” (McGinnis et al., 2008, p. 20). Handicapping, staggered tees, variably sized equipment and social interaction all suggest that golf should be an ideal sport to embody gender equity (McGinnis et al., 2008). Yet many female participants perceive golf as a masculine activity, which women are privileged to be allowed to play (McGinnis & Gentry, 2006).

Three categories of women golfers have been differentiated by their response to the dominance of men: accommodating participants, unapologetic participants and

unaware participants (McGinnis et al., 2008). Accommodating women prefer the status quo and accept the structures and processes within their golf clubs. In some cases, they do not want to rock the boat. Other women, however, not only accept but enjoy gender segregation because their sense of community arises from social time with other women. Unapologetic participants acknowledge the rituals of masculine dominance in a golf club and are unapologetic about challenging these practices. The unaware golfers seem surprised at the male dominance in golf. Some participants see the discriminatory rituals of golf as a problem for all participants and thus an issue of diversity rather than gender.

A female community is important for women in both golf and lawn bowls. Heuser (2005) identified that involvement in a female community was equally important to both serious and social women bowlers. Continued participation in golf by women, described by Wood and Danylchuk (2011) as “persistence in golf” (p. 366), could be facilitated when women connected with a group of players which formed a culture. Through the group, women supported skill development, while creating their own set of ritualised practices. For many females, a women’s league was considered the best way to play golf. The women’s culture in Wood and Danylchuk’s (2011) study downplayed competition (not wishing to be seen as serious golfers), created a unique set of rituals of their own (comparable to those of men), based on the norms of behaviour they wished to observe. One of these norms was to give encouragement rather than advice on how to play golf.

The differing opinions of women golfers makes impossible a single approach to remedying the problems of a gendered organisation. Potential for conflict arises between the accommodating women who enjoy gender differentiation and the unapologetic golfers. McGinnis et al. (2008) suggested “focusing on the pleasure of golf that is not tied to creating a privileged in-group” (p. 33). This broadens the focus of inclusiveness and moves it away from being solely a gender-related issue. In a separate comprehensive study of both golf professionals and women golfers, McGinnis and Gentry (2006) acknowledged that while gender neutrality should be a long-term aim, in the short-term “gender-segmented strategies” (p. 239) may be needed. Studies of women’s golf have tended to focus on the attitudes of women golfers. McGinnis and Gentry (2006) identified the need to understand a broader range of lived experiences of male golfers.

### **3.1.7 Social networks and social capital**

In spite of issues with exclusionary practice, the contribution of sport clubs to the development and maintenance of social networks is positive and significant. This positive effect is less contentious than the contribution of sport clubs to social capital. Coalter

(2007) derived a definition of social capital based on those of Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam, describing it as “social networks based on social and group norms which enable trust and cooperation with each other and through which individuals or groups can obtain certain types of advantage” (p. 57). Coalter (2007) concluded that the contribution of sport clubs in the development of social capital is not clear. Consequently, this section focuses on social networks, with reference to two concepts from social capital literature (bonding and bridging capital) that explain these networks.

Sports clubs have been rated as a good place for meeting friends (Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Ulseth, 2004; VicHealth, 2010). Ulseth’s (2004) study is important as it compared sports clubs with fitness centres, which offer similar activities but with a different organisational philosophy. Sport clubs play a role in the creation of social networks, whereas fitness centres only facilitate the maintenance of existing friendships. The development of new friendships in sport clubs was much more common than in fitness centres for both men and women, with 80% of people exercising at sport club making new friends in the process compared with only 14% in fitness centres. In addition, friendships in sport clubs extended beyond the club, in a way that did not occur at fitness centres. The reasons for this difference are unclear. Ulseth (2004) suggested that meeting places can be found in club rooms to a greater extent than in fitness centres and that this factor influences the development of networks.

Bonding capital refers to networks based on social ties between people who are similar to each other. By contrast, bridging capital refers to social ties between different types of people arising from organisations with more diverse memberships (Putnam, 2000). Bonding capital is less likely to produce inclusive behaviour (Coalter, 2007). One example is the role of golf clubs in facilitating business networking (Bourdieu, 1978), described by Field (2003) as a conscious “investment strategy” (p. 19), a benefit not available to all members. However bonding capital may be a necessary precursor to bridging capital (Darcy et al., 2014), creating a base from which to reach out and bridge with local, regional and national communities. This is effectively an unfurling technique of beginning within an organisation and then spreading progressively outwards.

Limited research has been undertaken on bridging capital within sport clubs. Studies to date have been small scale, exploratory and context bound (Coalter, 2007). Given the similarities within demographic profile of members of many clubs, it may be hard to find contexts in which to study this concept.

Heterogeneity needs to encompass attitudes as well as demographic profile. With regard to attitudes, heterogeneity can be seen in “the extent to which actual and potential

members differ in their personal mission preferences” (Van Puyvelde et al., 2015, p. 142). Tension can occur in a club wishing to increase its membership, if some members prefer to maintain a less complex organisation and informal relationships. An organisation may aim to increase membership, but members may take actions to suit their own interests contrary to the club’s collective aim (Van Puyvelde et al., 2015).

## **3.2 Marketing theory**

Based on their exclusivity and a lack of diversity, it is evident that many golf and lawn bowls clubs are not guided by a marketing orientation. Musso et al. (2016) concluded that an important issue in the management of membership seems to be a commitment to make the effort and find resources to implement strategy required by an individual club. A marketing orientation can assist a sport club in taking a longer-term view and identifying strategy needed for their specific situation. Many issues previously discussed demonstrate that weak relationships may be evident in clubs. Relationship marketing is usually evident in a marketing-oriented organisation. In this section, four aspects of marketing theory are applied to sports clubs: marketing orientation, relationship marketing, strategic marketing and segmentation.

### **3.2.1 Marketing orientation**

Through a marketing orientation, an organisation aims to achieve its goals (such as profitability) through a long-term focus on identifying and meeting customer needs, with all functions of the organisation integrated towards that cause (Peterson, 1989; Shank & Lyberger, 2015). In a sport club, the members or the users of the facilities have similarities with the customers of a for-profit organisation.

This orientation began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s and has been demonstrated to be an effective philosophy for organisations to adopt (Avlonitis & Gounaris, 1997; Peterson, 1989), including not-for-profit organisations (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002). Alternative philosophies were prevalent in earlier eras, such as product orientation (1930s), production orientation (1950s), sales orientation (1960s) and socio-marketing (1990s). However, adoption of a marketing orientation was not consistent across all organisations. Small businesses and services were slower to adopt a marketing orientation than retailers or traditional manufacturing companies (Peterson, 1989). Even when a marketing philosophy was adopted, it was often misunderstood. The majority of not-for-profit organisations in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States demonstrated a focus on sales and promotion rather than the full range of activities

encompassed by marketing (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). Table 6 summarises the alternative philosophies and how they can be applied to a sport club.

Table 6. Business orientations as applied to a sport club

Orientation	Definition	Application to sport clubs
Product	Focus on producing the best possible product. (If the company builds a better mousetrap, people will buy it).	Club focuses on its facilities, tournaments and programmes, and hopes that these will attract members.
Production	Focus on producing quality goods or service as efficiently as possible in order to produce at the lowest possible cost. (Standardisation is encouraged to reduce costs).	Club offers few membership or playing options as it is easier to have all members paying and receiving the same benefits or playing at specific times.
Sales	Focus on persuading customers to buy what is available for sale. Inform and persuade the market about the benefits of the product. (Try to sell as much as possible).	Club undertakes membership drives to increase membership. This may include discounting. Membership activities are focused around the time of payment of membership fees.
Marketing	Achievement of goals (such as profitability) through a long-term focus on identifying and meeting customer needs. Focus and integrate all functions in the organisation to meet these needs.	Club has long-term goals, which are achieved by meeting the needs of members. Recruitment practices are based on meeting identified needs of potential new members.
Societal marketing	Marketing orientation, while also considering the good of the society. Satisfy all the important stakeholders, which includes the wider community.	Club demonstrates the marketing concept and also contributes to the community, which could be the sport community or the local community.

Adapted from Peterson (1989).

Embracing a marketing orientation still allows for product promotion or sales activity, if compatible with meeting the needs of the members (“customers”). A poorly maintained facility can significantly inhibit enjoyment of the game. Product differentiation has a place in addressing customer needs. The nature of the course often differentiates one golf club from another. Some golf courses are noted for the challenge of being hilly. Others may have easier terrain or have aesthetic features such as a fountain. Some courses may have world ranking, as does one of Aotearoa New Zealand’s best courses. Bowling clubs may not show such significant differentiation in facilities. Nevertheless, an all-weather turf or comfortable club rooms may offer a distinguishable advantage over other clubs. The nature of the facilities can have a strong influence on the level of the club fee, such as in Germany where difference in membership fee was explained quantitatively by the number of holes, course difficulty and proximity to a city (Huth, 2019). In addition, clubs focussing on new members needed both a customer-focussed professional club manager and a well-organised pro-shop. A description of facilities maintenance can also help to explain the use of membership fees in the club. The facilities result in considerable

maintenance costs for most sport clubs, especially golf clubs (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012). However, it is important that product emphasis is not the complete focus of the activity of the club. At the heart of a marketing-oriented club is consideration of the way in which the facilities meet the needs of the members.

The special characteristics of a sport club make the adoption of a marketing philosophy difficult, even though such an orientation would seem a natural fit with the member focus needed in a sport club. The challenge is the integration of all aspects of the organisation towards the same goal. Because of the governance structure of the club, the customers, the marketers, the owners and the decision-makers may, in fact, be the same group of people. A key concept of voluntary sport clubs is that sport clubs and their products or services are mainly used by the people who also produce or create them (Harris et al., 2009), especially because of the high level of volunteerism in sport. Houston (1986) emphasised that a marketer in an organisation can have conflicting multiple roles. In a sport club, members of the board are also players. The actions required to improve a club may not suit the individual playing behaviour of the organisational leaders. Multiplicity of roles arising from the special characteristics of voluntary organisations can create difficulties in introducing a marketing orientation to a club at which it has been absent.

A signal of the non-adherence to a marketing orientation is the maintenance of a fixed offering with an unwillingness to change. Adherence to the traditions of the past generally evident in not-for-profit organisations can be the reason these groups are unable or unwilling to implement a marketing orientation (Peterson, 1989). Gummesson (1991) noted that it is far more difficult to move any company to the marketing orientation than literature suggests. It cannot simply be directed by management or a marketing department. This difficulty is even greater for a not-for-profit organisation. Marketing orientation requires every person in the organisation to understand their role in contributing to customer relations and customer satisfaction, in addition to considering the impact they may have on meeting the needs of other members

A marketing orientation needs an external focus, which can be described as market-driven activities (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002, 2005; Gonzalez et al., 2002). Market-driven activities are designed to satisfy the needs of the members of a market. In the case of sport clubs, this would be members and potential members. Examples of these activities are provision of coaching, competitions, catering, social activities and activities for new players. The key to the success of these activities is that the needs of the market have been determined prior to offering the activity.

### 3.2.2 Relationship marketing

The importance of relationship marketing is highlighted by Gummesson (2017) who advocates the importance of synthesising relationship marketing and addressing complexity rather than fragmented aspects of marketing. Through relationship marketing a holistic approach linking theory to practice can advance our understanding of complex issues. An organisation focusing on relationship marketing rather than transaction marketing (Grönroos, 1991) is more likely to demonstrate a marketing orientation, especially for a charitable service organisation (Bennett, 2005). Transaction marketing is focused on one transaction at a time rather than long-term relationships. In contrast, relationship marketing enhances “a stable, mutually profitable and long-term relationship” (Ravald & Grönroos, 1996, p. 19). These two types of marketing form a continuum rather than a dichotomy. A player using pay-for-play at a different facility each week sits firmly at the transaction end of the continuum. A player using pay-for-play at the same facility is starting to move along the continuum towards a relationship. Varying levels of relationship can be found in typical membership packages. Full membership does not necessarily guarantee a strong relationship. The emotional connection between a player and a club discussed in Section 3.1.4 gives a better indication of the strength of the relationship.

Every person who interacts with a “customer” is a “part-time marketer” (Gummesson, 1991, p. 60) and thus involved in relationship marketing. For services, Gummesson (1991) identified four points-of-marketing in the delivery of a service as interactions (a) with the prime contact people, (b) between “customers”, (c) with the physical environment and (d) with the provider’s systems and routines. Each of these points-of-marketing has an important role in the relationship with “customers”.

In the context of a sport club, the first two of the above points-of-marketing involve contact with other members: contact with prime people and contact between “customers”. For a club, the interaction between members or players may be the most prevalent interaction. The members have a role in marketing the organisation and can influence whether or not a club experience is positive. The organisation has little or no direct control over this interaction, other than to encourage a positive atmosphere. An additional issue for a sport club is that the prime contact people may be volunteers or a mix of volunteers and paid staff. Thus, part of the responsibility for marketing the sport club rests with volunteers who are also users of the club (in other situations, regarded as customers). This phenomenon of dual roles is consistent with the trend noted by

Gummesson (2017) of the changing role of the customer and the dual role that customers now play as suppliers as well as customers.

Not-for-profit organisations need to move from an organisation-centred approach to a customer-centred relationship approach in order to deal with the increasing challenges facing them and the pressure to become more professional in their approach (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). The special characteristics of such organisations may work contrary to this approach if guided by a constitution that usually focuses on the purpose of the organisation and thus encourages an organisation focus. This indicates a need for greater focus on relationships within a not-for-profit organisation between the organisation and its members, bearing in mind that the people implementing the relationship marketing may be customers or consumers as well as marketers.

### **3.2.3 Strategic marketing**

Strategic marketing (also described as strategic planning) is the practice that encompasses the functions of planning, implementing and evaluating or controlling activity (Shank & Lyberger, 2015). This process is underpinned by a marketing orientation at the heart of the organisation and is regarded as an essential capability for organisations, including sport clubs (Doherty et al., 2014). Few not-for-profit organisations and, in particular golf clubs, show strength in planning. Strategic marketing is only acknowledged by a few not-for-profit organisations in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Dolnicar & Lazarevski, 2009). The better performing Australasian golf clubs place more emphasis on strategic planning (Cordery & Baskerville, 2012; Garland et al., 2011). Nevertheless, even high-performing clubs place little importance on the *analysis* aspect of strategic planning. Fifty-seven per cent of high-performing golf clubs placed little importance on strategic analysis, compared with 81% of all golf clubs (Garland et al., 2011). The high-performing clubs undertook only member analysis and internal analysis. Few clubs undertook competitive and community-wide analysis. This was borne out by Cordery and Baskerville (2012), who found that only 56% of golf clubs had a business plan. Little is known about the planning capability of bowls clubs; however, there is no indication that it is any better than that of other sport organisations.

Reasons for this lack of emphasis in a club is the focus on day-to-day operation, the lack of skilled and enthusiastic people and a lack of financial or other resources (Doherty et al., 2014). A club needs sufficient people who are enthusiastic, appropriately skilled and focused on the same goal. The time frame for developing and implementing a strategy may also be disconcerting for not-for-profit organisations. O'Boyle (2017)

suggested a time frame of no less than 12 months for a strategic planning process. Club boards are typically elected for one year and so the process may not fall within the tenure of a consistent group of people, unless a special group is formed to undertake the task.

Strategic marketing practice is similar to the process of action research, with planning, implementation and evaluation or control (Kotler et al., 2013; O'Boyle, 2017; Shank & Lyberger, 2015). Planning has two phases: situation analysis and SWOT analysis (where are we now?) and a vision, which includes a mission and objectives (where do we want to be?). The implementation is based on an action plan to meet the objectives (how will we get there?). At the final stage, often called control, evaluation is undertaken during the implementation of activity and at the conclusion. It potentially includes corrective action, if needed (are we getting there?). This evaluation can lead into a second phase of the strategic marketing process (Kotler et al., 2013; O'Boyle, 2017).

The standard strategic marketing model does not place any emphasis on the unique aspects of a not-for-profit organisation in general or a sport club in particular. Nothing prevents the acknowledgement of unique aspects of these organisations when using such a model. Nevertheless, if a traditional marketing checklist is used, the sport development aspects may not be addressed. Sotiriadou (2013) maintained that generic management principles are insufficient for sport development and that sport-specific practices and theories need to be articulated specifically in marketing processes when applied to sport.

An empirically derived attraction, retention/transition, nurturing (ARTN) model has been developed from a study of annual reports of sport organisations (Sotiriadou et al., 2008). It has been tested in situations such as cycling (Sotiriadou et al., 2014). The model demonstrates mechanisms for attracting and retaining players and also pathways for transition from mass to elite participation and nurturing athletes (Sotiriadou, 2013; Sotiriadou et al., 2008). This model was designed as a sport-specific strategy. Three processes in the model are (a) attracting new participants, (b) retaining existing participants or assisting them to achieve higher standards, and (c) nurturing athletes or teams to achieve excellence. The success of ARTN depends on a stakeholder analysis of processes. The attraction and retention aspects of this model are relevant to this exploration of sport club membership decline, even though the model is focused more on participation.

Sotiriadou (2013) used the ARTN and the stakeholder analysis of processes in her sport development planning model. The sport development model is the traditional strategic marketing practice of planning, implementation and evaluation, with the

addition of an extra stage that utilises the ARTN processes and stakeholder analysis of processes to answer the question “What are our sport development processes?” These processes follow the situation analysis and SWOT and precede the development of mission and objectives and subsequent stages. This sport development planning model is sport-specific only in this additional stage. However, this stage is crucial in ensuring sufficient sport input into the later stages.

The sport-specific nature of clubs was also emphasised by Skille (2008) when he described the implementation of something new to a sport organisation as needing “translation” (p. 196). A new concept needs to be adapted when applied in a local setting. This could apply to the concept of marketing orientation as well as to ideas and policies from other organisations. Because of the specific characteristics of a local organisation, adaptations for use of a theory or idea in a local organisation should be based on strategic marketing approach and the needs of the members and potential members. In the Aotearoa New Zealand context, ideas and theories can come from national or regional sport-specific organisations, from another sport, from another country or from outside sport.

### **3.2.4 Segmentation**

Strategic marketing includes segmentation (Kotler et al., 2013; Mullin et al., 2014; Shank & Lyberger, 2015), which is highly relevant to the current research context of sport club membership. Sport clubs, especially golf clubs, are moving from the concept of a single membership package to a differentiated approach with a range of packages to suit different needs. Segmentation can assist with this development. The process of segmentation divides a market into segments or groups of consumers so that the people in each segment have similar needs and are as distinct as possible from other segments. Segments can then be targeted with a specific package tailored to their needs (Kotler et al., 2013). This offering ideally provides the target group with superior value (better than other options). The variables used to segment the market are known as bases and are typically demographic, geographic, psychographic (attitudes or personality) and behaviour (Kotler et al., 2013; Mullin et al., 2014; Shank & Lyberger, 2015). Behavioural variables identify a consumer’s relationship with the product and can include benefits sought from the product, usage rate, loyalty and readiness to use (Kotler et al., 2013).

The use of benefits to generate segments, rather than demographic variables or product features, has been advocated for over 30 years (Dhalla & Mahatoo, 1976; Wind, 1978). In many markets (e.g., banking) there has been a shift from using demographic variables to benefits sought and other behavioural variables, and this shift has resulted in

more useful segmentation (Kahreh et al., 2014). Innovative variables can also be used, such as organisational citizenship behaviour, which focuses on the helpfulness of the customer during interaction (Shannahan et al., 2016).

### **3.2.5 Segmentation in sport**

Sport has typically used relatively crude forms of segmentation, such as the historic emphasis on differentiation by gender and generation. Generational segmentation may differentiate between groups such as baby boomers (born in the 10–15 years following 1945) and millennials (people born in the last two decades of the twentieth century). The assumption that differing needs arise from gender and generation requires testing before segmentation based solely on these variables is used in any specific circumstance. While segments of adult members may have similar demographic characteristics, these characteristics are unlikely to be driving differing needs. Another crude form of segmentation is the division of participation into club member and pay-for-play. It is ineffective partly because the needs of each segment are not clearly defined, and the two groups may not be mutually exclusive. The needs within each group appear to be wide-ranging. A clear understanding of the benefits sought from a club will aid development of more useful segmentation approaches and membership packages.

Three more effective forms of segmentation may offer guidance in strategic marketing for a club, if it is unable to undertake its own study: a four-segment classification of sport styles, an Australian segmentation of club members and non-members (Australian Sport Commission, 2013) and an Australian segmentation of lawn bowlers (La Trobe University, 2013).

The first of these studies produced a behavioural classification: informal light participants, semi-formal light participants, semi-formal heavy participants and formal heavy participants (Borgers et al., 2018). Light segments are regarded as a new pattern of sport whereby participants are less dependent on a heavily structured sport organisation with member obligations and rigid rules. The organisations targeting heavy participants were also described by Borgers et al. (2018) as “greedy” as they thrive on “loyalty from members (and) the rigid application of rules” (p. 84). Within the general light and heavy participation classifications there are variations. Informal light is individual and semi-formal light involves an informal group with a structured approach. Semi-formal heavy participation occurs within health or fitness centres or some programmes in sport clubs. Formal heavy participation is the traditional highly organised competition. An interesting

point about this classification is that it acknowledges that sport clubs have started to accommodate less formal participation.

The second study featured a two-part segmentation based on attitudes of club members and non-members in an industry report commissioned by the Australian Sport Commission (2013). The thoroughness of this report, as well as the large sample sizes and the outcomes, made an important contribution to understanding the use of segmentation in the context of membership. Segments of club members were identified (Table 7). An individual club would need to identify how to apply the detailed descriptions specifically to their club members, as the differentiating characteristics of club members are not immediately observable. The important consideration for clubs in operationalising the Australian Sport Commission typology is to remember that a group of people are apathetic to club membership and are easily put off, if a rigid club structure creates a barrier. Some groups are more focused on the sport and others on the social aspects of the club.

Table 7. Key characteristics of club member segments

Segments	Key characteristics	What engages the segment
Loyalists	Consider club membership an imperative.	Products, services and promotions that challenge their competitive spirit.
Socially engaged	Highly engaged with clubs and sport.	Social aspects are important, but competition should not be underestimated.
Sport driven	Club as a place to access facilities.	Need to help them fit club membership into their lives. Sport rather than social aspects is important.
Apathetic clubbers	Somewhat apathetic view of sport and clubs. Initially enjoyed membership but enjoyment is waning.	Need to feel less pressured to be good at sport. Focus on ease of entry—can join regardless of skill level.

Adapted from Australian Sport Commission (2013).

The second part of the study was a separate sample of sport participants who were not club members. The Australian Sport Commission identified three segments with the potential to be receptive to club membership (Table 8).

Table 8. Key characteristics of non-club member segments

Segment	Key characteristics	What might engage the segment
Side-lined sportsters	Past club members, keen but lapsed often because of personal circumstances.	All of these segments need more flexibility from clubs, with products outside the traditional club structure.
Club wary	Reservations based on past experiences. Do not always feel they will fit in to clubs.	
Ponderers	Past club members and gave up membership for practical reasons. Positive attitudes towards clubs.	

Adapted from Australian Sport Commission (2013).

Three other segments are not receptive to club membership: sport atheists, sport indifferent and self-focused. Sport atheists undertake exercise infrequently, usually alone, and are very negative about sport clubs; sport indifferent participants are not highly engaged with sport; and self-focused participants are not competitive and prefer to exercise alone.

The third qualitative study, originally specific to lawn bowls in Australia, developed five categories based on the extent to which bowlers invest in the social aspect of the club: the bowler, the socialiser, the consumer, the clubber and the identifier (La Trobe University, 2013). These groups are not dissimilar to the Australian Sport Commission study—the bowler is focused on the sporting experience and competition, the socialiser is focused on the social aspects of the sport, the consumer is interested in casual bowls and what they can gain from their membership, and clubbers and identifiers

are long-term members. Clubbers have belonged to the bowls club for an extended period, such as five to 10 years. Playing bowls has been an important part of their life because they have developed a strong social network around the club, which is now the main reason for continued membership. Identifiers have usually been members for a long period (such as 20 years) and identify themselves as members of the club. They are usually involved in the organisation or management of the club. This study has been extended to other sports, with the bowler and the consumer grouped together as a segment called the player (VicHealth, 2010).

Commonalities in the output of these studies are the typical range of segments such as serious players, semi-serious players, social players and loosely attached players. If a club is unable to undertake a study of its own, the segments from one of these studies or this typical range of segments could serve as a starting point.

### **3.3 Player/member behaviour**

A marketing orientation places considerable emphasis on understanding customer needs. Models of consumer behaviour can provide a framework to help a club organisation understand its members. This section overviews general models of consumer behaviour and then discusses four sport-specific models.

#### **3.3.1 General models of consumer behaviour**

Models of consumer behaviour tend to fall into one of three typologies: cognitive, reinforcement or habit (East et al., 2013). The cognitive models assume rationality such that consumers can be influenced in their decision-making, if provided with adequate information. Reinforcement models are based on environmental factors that either reward or discourage behaviour. Both the cognitive and reinforcement models relate to behaviour change or development of new behaviour. The third model assumes maintenance of behaviour through habit. Habit is learned behaviour, such as an automatic response to a stimulus.

One sport-specific model is based on a cognitive model of the buying decision-making process that is included in almost every basic marketing textbook. However, this problem-solving model is rarely found in refereed literature. Similar to John Dewey's problem-solving model of 1905 (Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979), the most commonly included steps in the model equate to problem or need recognition, search for information or alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour (Kotler et al., 2013; Neal et al., 2006; Olshavsky & Granbois, 1979).

East et al. (2013) identified that decision-making models are unlikely to work because of emphasis on rationality and lack of emotional input. These models also assume that a consumer has time to search for alternatives and places sufficient importance on the decision to undertake such a search. A decision-making model is most likely to be used on the first occasion a decision is needed in a specific area or when a habit is broken. The implication of habit is that the retention of customers can be built partly on inertia, with a customer continuing past behaviour until a disruption causes a review of the habit.

### **3.3.2 Sport-specific models of consumer behaviour**

Four sport-specific models that identify sport behaviour or psychology are considered in this section. The first is the decision-making process adapted to a sport context (Shank & Lyberger, 2015). The second is the psychological continuum model (PCM) (Funk & James, 2001), which has been validated in the context of golf using a sample of club members and a sample of non-club members (Funk et al., 2011). Thirdly, a qualitative study in lawn bowls identified stages of involvement (Heuser, 2005). Fourthly, the model of the relationship between involvement, psychological commitment and behavioural loyalty (Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004) is discussed. This model is significant because it can be applied to a recreation agency rather than a sport.

First, the model of participant consumption and behaviour (Figure 6) is the decision-making process adapted to a sport context and includes a number of environmental factors (Shank & Lyberger, 2015). Consumers may move backwards and forwards between the steps (Neal et al., 2006). The potential participant identifies a need (for example, would like to play sport), looks for information about options, evaluates these options (including deciding where to play), participates and then evaluates the experience. The need may be broad, such as a desire to increase fitness or the need for friendship. Alternatively, the need may be more specific, such as a desire to play golf. In either case, the need, along with a number of other factors, influences how and where the sport is played. An adaption of Shank and Lyberger's model (Figure 6) includes outlet selection. Having decided to play a sport, a person gathers information about the alternative ways or places to do this and evaluates the options. This could involve evaluating different clubs or evaluating clubs by comparing them with some other way of participating.

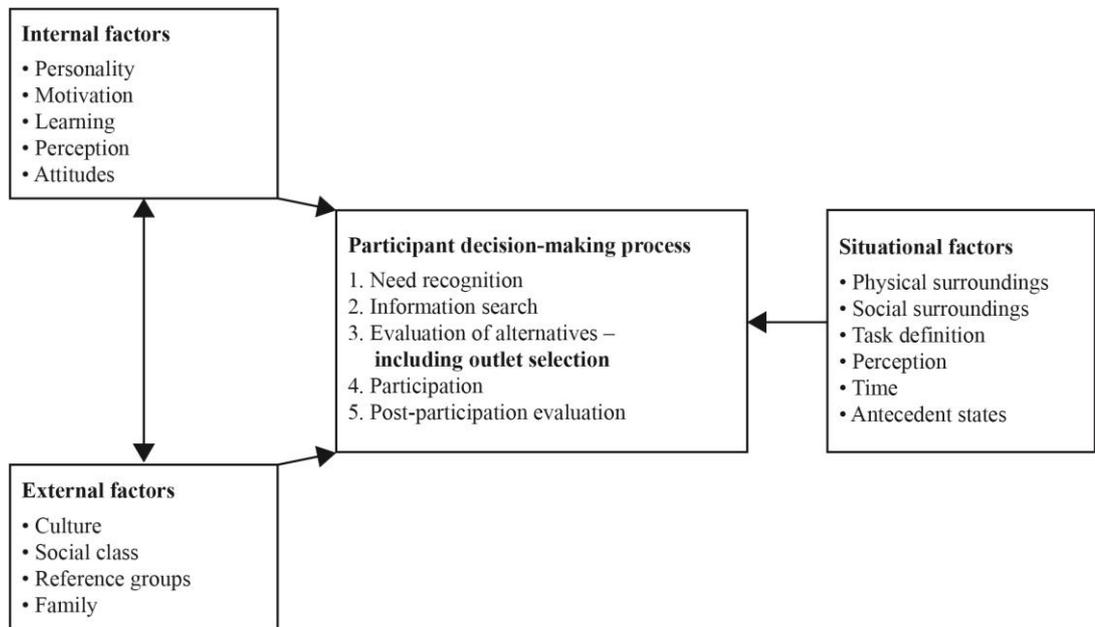


Figure 6. Model of participant consumption and behaviour

Adapted from Shank and Lyberger (2015, p. 138).

The decision-making process is influenced by a number of internal, external and situational factors. The value of this model is that it draws together a number of the factors discussed earlier in this section. It also remedies the concern of East et al. (2013) that the basic decision-making model does not consider the possibility of significant influence from other people such as friends, a spouse or family. It is unwise to assume that the decision is being made by a person on his or her own.

Second is the PCM, which attempts to understand the progressive nature of connection between a person and a sport (Funk & James, 2001). Four stages of the framework applied to golf are awareness (I know about golf), attraction (I like golf), attachment (I play golf) and allegiance (I am golf), with players becoming progressively more involved in the sport at each stage of the model. Club membership is more likely at the later levels of engagement. Funk et al. (2011) validated this model quantitatively in the context of golf. They demonstrated an increasing level of engagement in terms of attitudes and behaviour as golf participants moved along the continuum. In the validation study, two samples, club members and non-club members, were initially analysed separately.

The samples of club members and non-club members showed little difference between club members and non-members in terms of the process of developing an engagement with golf. This means that there can be highly engaged non-club members with strong allegiance to the sport in their attitudes and behaviour who are not club

members. There can also be club members showing relatively low engagement with the sport.

The third model, which arose from a qualitative study of the career of women in lawn bowls, has five stages of involvement: introduction to bowls, getting hooked on bowls, playing bowls, becoming organizationally involved in bowls and retiring from bowls (Heuser, 2005). Heuser (2005) emphasised that the movement between the stages was non-linear and that women moved backwards and forwards between the stages. Women were typically introduced to bowls by an existing player (family member, friend, work colleague) or prompted to start the sport through an event such as retirement. For many players, bowls was a continuation of a lifetime of sport. Relationships often engaged players into the second stage as the sport captured time, energy and attention. This preceded the desire to become more involved and to play weekly, for example, at either social roll ups or competitive championships. During this stage, the player might fluctuate between serious and social play. The fourth stage was not embraced by all players, only those who wished to give something back to the game through service on a committee or by generally helping at a weekly session. Retirement from bowls was usually brought on by medical conditions. For some it was a gradual process while for others it occurred more quickly. Some retired bowlers continued to support the game in an administrative way.

The fourth model identifies enjoyment and involvement as key indicators of increasing commitment to a sport (Casper et al., 2007; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). Iwasaki and Havitz (2004) developed a model of the relationship between involvement, psychological commitment and behavioural loyalty to a recreation agency, defined fairly broadly as an organisation offering recreation facilities that has customers. This work identified involvement as a pre-condition of loyalty. However, not all highly involved committed participants are loyal to a recreation agency. In addition, loyalty is also associated with an unwillingness to change (Bodet, 2012; Iwasaki & Havitz, 2004). If that is the case, it helps to explain why change in sport clubs is slow to develop. Even though members may be loyal and wish the best for the club, they may also be unwilling to change their playing behaviour or accept change that will make the club more attractive to new members. In this way there is a positive and negative aspect to loyalty. Loyalty may encourage existing members to remain while at the same time inhibit growth in the club.

### **3.4 Customer or member retention**

A key issue at the heart of the decline in sport club membership is customer retention, which is well covered in service marketing literature. This section focuses on retention rates across service industries, reasons for defection in service industries and reported reasons for discontinuing membership in golf and lawn bowls.

#### **3.4.1 Customer retention rates and reasons for defection**

Customer retention can be measured by the percentage of customers who continue to use the services of an organisation. Customer defection rates are the percentage of customers who discontinue using the services of an organisation. Studies of such rates have identified tenure as important in customer retention or defection (East & Hammond, 1996; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990). The longer customers have been with an organisation, the more likely they are to continue. Reichheld and Sasser (1990) found that a company typically loses 15% of its customers in the first year and 50% over five years. East and Hammond (1996) found a similar result, with a 15% loss in the first year and the defection rate halving in the second year and diminishing each year. These findings came from generic studies, with no differentiation between types of services.

The reasons for defection differ between located and unlocated services (East et al., 2012). Located services operate from a specific location, such as a supermarket or hairdresser, while unlocated services include operations such as credit cards that can be used anywhere. Reasons for defection can include service failures and conditions, as well as pricing and competition. The two causes receiving the most focus in literature are service failures and conditions, which can be described as controllable and uncontrollable factors (East et al., 2012; Keaveney, 1995; Reinartz & Kumar, 2003). An organisation has responsibility for service failures, which can potentially be controlled so that customer retention can be improved by alleviating or removing the impact of these failures. By contrast, conditions for the most part cannot be managed by the organisation and relate to unavoidable customer loss from issues such as a change in the circumstances of the customer. The organisation could do little, if anything, to retain these customers.

In a study by East et al. (2012) only 12% of defections in located services arose from manageable service failure and 47% from uncontrollable conditions. Service failures caused between 0% and 14% of defections across different industries. The influence of conditions was more wide-ranging, causing 14% to 54% of defections. The located services in the study were a restaurant, pub, hairdresser, dentist and supermarket. None of these services are not-for-profit or in any way similar to a sport club. Therefore,

it is difficult to speculate about the likely differential between controllable and manageable (or uncontrollable) factors for a New Zealand sport club, which will probably differ for each club. These findings indicate the importance of identifying the extent to which defection is due to manageable factors for a specific industry or organisation. East et al. also noted that if defection is predominantly due to uncontrollable factors, management's ability to improve retention may be more limited than expected. However a German study by Koenigstorfer and Wemmer (2019) identified service quality and trust as the most important factors in retaining members, highlighting that these factors are under management control. They also identified the importance of board members networking and developing relationships of trust.

However, there have been marked differences between the results of different studies. The results of East et al. (2012) for all services (both located and unlocated) showed 18% of defections were from service failures, compared with 31% from conditions. This differs markedly from the earlier work of Keaveney (1995), who identified 50% of defections from service failures and only 16% from conditions. Many factors explain these differing results, including methodology and the significant time lapse between the two studies. The importance of the studies is the acknowledgement that defection from a service can occur through controllable and uncontrollable factors and the impact of each type of factor influences the level of organisational control over the level of defection.

There is very little published academic work on retention of members by sport clubs run by volunteers. The existing studies with the greatest similarity relate to membership of commercial health and fitness clubs (Alexandris et al., 2001). In keeping with studies previously discussed, Alexandris et al. (2001) identified the importance of context in assessment of loyalty to a service provider. There are important differences between a sport club and a fitness centre, with the members of the latter having no ownership or formal input into how the centre is run. Nevertheless, the findings do indicate characteristics that may be important. Perception of service quality could be used to predict loyalty (purchase intentions and word of mouth communication) by users of three franchised fitness centres. Important aspects were found to be the tangible element (relating to the facilities) and the assurance dimension (relating to knowledge and politeness of employees, along with the trust and confidence inspired by employees). In a later study, Alexandris et al. (2004) reinforced the importance of facilities but identified outcome quality as more important than interaction with employees. Outcome quality is whether or not activity at the fitness centre produced the expected health benefits.

Existing sport literature indicates that clubs tend to place more emphasis on attraction of customers. The Sport and Recreation Alliance (2011, 2013) demonstrated through a comprehensive survey in the United Kingdom that more clubs see recruitment of members as a key issue compared with retention. This emphasis is evident in Aotearoa New Zealand as well (Sport New Zealand, 2015a; Tennant et al., 2008). An important consideration for any organisation is to identify whether its issue is predominantly recruitment or retention of members. An investigation of gym clubs in the Netherlands found that declining membership was due to people not joining rather than people leaving (Deckers & Gratton, 1995). In contrast, Golf Australia (2017), one of the few organisations to publish such figures, found the rate of attrition of 8.7% to be higher than the attraction rate of 7.7%.

Concern about customer loss is not new. Hirschman (1970) discussed the ability of a range of organisations (including businesses and voluntary organisations) to respond to dissatisfied customers or members. These customers or members could demonstrate options of “exit and voice” (p. 3). Exit results in a member leaving the organisation. Voice involves the member attempting to repair the relationship by talking to someone or complaining. The third concept in Hirschman’s framework is loyalty, which can interact with exit and voice. Loyalty is demonstrated when dissatisfied members consider it an obligation to remain with an organisation. In voluntary organisations, voice may have a more important role than for a business selling services. However, Hirschman (1970) commented about the possibility that “exit is ... considered as treason and voice as mutiny” (p. 121) and so are possibly viewed as destructive responses. In reviewing the framework, Dowding et al. (2000) identified voice as an active and constructive approach, whereas exit is an active and destructive approach. They included a fourth concept, “neglect” (p. 481), which is passively destructive, demonstrated by apparently ignoring the problem but putting less effort into the relationship with the organisation while holding negative opinions. They further concluded that the provision of opportunities for voice can increase a member’s identification with a group and promote loyalty. Past voice activities may form an investment in an organisation that raises “the cost of exit through the psychological variable of loyalty” (p. 492).

### **3.4.2 Membership discontinuation in golf**

Given the differences across industry, it is important to study discontinuing membership in sport-specific studies. There are several studies of note for golf: two Australian retention studies (Golf NSW, 2009; Golf Queensland, 2009), research into private golf

clubs in the United States (Clem et al., 2013) and a Swedish study with a nationally representative sample of golfers (Svenka Golfforbundet, 2010; Swedish Golf Federation, 2010). Each of these studies had a slightly different focus and identified different factors linked to discontinuing membership.

When asked for the top four reasons that members leave a golf club (Golf NSW, 2009; Golf Queensland, 2009), golf managers in Queensland and New South Wales in Australia identified the following: change in residential location (24% of managers in New South Wales and 27% in Queensland), time constraints (19% and 26% respectively), increasing time and family commitments (25% in both states) and, to a lesser extent, not receiving value for money (5% and 13%). In addition, age and health reasons were reported by 24% in New South Wales. Loss of a member through change in residential location is clearly an uncontrollable factor, about which the club has no influence. Poor value for money is potentially a factor that club management could influence. Time constraints and family commitments do not fall neatly into either category. While they appear to be uncontrollable, they are also indications of other aspects of life taking a higher priority to golf. In the study of Golf New South Wales, a question was raised about whether players were given sufficient opportunity at the club to play at a time that suits them. However, the reasons for discontinuation of membership in these studies were only the perception of club officers. Only 24% of clubs in New South Wales and 16% in Queensland actually surveyed discontinued members to verify these reasons. With so few clubs actually enquiring of members, the accuracy of these perceptions is unknown.

The involvement of members and perceived value in two private golf clubs in the United States affected member satisfaction and intention to renew membership (Clem et al., 2013). Members with high involvement perceived that their club offered more value. On a golf course, value was found to be related to three things: design of the course, course maintenance and the playing experience. Member satisfaction could decline following a poor experience on a course, such as a long waiting time between holes and poor course maintenance. Perception of service quality also affected satisfaction levels and decisions about whether to renew membership.

The nationally representative study of Swedish golfers, with sound statistical analysis, reported the three main reasons for discontinued golf membership in Sweden as personal reasons, club-related issues (a problem with their club) and golf-related reasons (Svenka Golfforbundet, 2010; Swedish Golf Federation, 2010). More specifically, the personal reasons were a change in the circumstances of members, the club issues were snobbish attitudes and lack of support for new members, and the main golf-related issues

were difficulties integrating into the game. Failure to improve one's game was also cited as a reason for giving up membership and could be linked to an often-quoted insight about handicap (Simpson, 2012; Svenka Golfforbundet, 2010; Swedish Golf Federation, 2010). This insight is that high handicap is a predictor of defection in golf (Simpson, 2012). The Swedish study found that 38% of players with a handicap of 36 or greater were at risk of ceasing to be a club member. This group comprised 11% who would consider quitting golf completely and 27% who would continue as a pay and play golfer. In addition, 12% expected to remain a member but change their membership type (Svenka Golfforbundet, 2010). Only 50% of the high handicappers expected to continue their membership, compared with 79% or more of other handicap groups. This pattern indicates that a high handicap (as defined in Sweden) can potentially be a retention issue.

This comprehensive study (Svenka Golfforbundet, 2010; Swedish Golf Federation, 2010) included other less frequently quoted details about at-risk golfers. Golfers who self-identify as being at risk of giving up membership are likely to be middle income and have low frequency of playing golf, low loyalty in relation to their own golf club and low consumption of golf products. There are several important considerations about this study. First, the study reported what players forecasted they would do in the future. Actual behaviour may have differed. Second, all members in the study had a handicap because of the method of handicap calculation in Sweden. All new players begin with the maximum handicap and as they play, their handicap can reduce based on their performance. It is important to consider the differing methods of handicap calculation before considering whether the issue could apply in other countries.

### **3.4.3 Membership discontinuation in lawn bowls**

A comprehensive Australian study of lawn bowls (La Trobe University, 2013) cited uncontrollable reasons as the most prevalent reason for discontinuing bowls: passing away, illness, moving away and the impact of work on availability to compete regularly. There were also three controllable reasons, which are similar to the reasons for golf discontinuation in Sweden: poor club management, which took fun out of the sport; poor integration of younger players by older members; and poor relationships, especially the way accomplished players treated newer players (La Trobe University, 2013). The selection of players for events was cited as a problem related to management and integration. This includes older players not making way for younger ones and people being pushed into competitive divisions. It again needs to be noted that these reasons were

drawn from the perceptions of bowlers about why people stopped playing rather than a survey of discontinued bowlers.

### **3.5 Chapter summary**

The highly contextual nature of membership recruitment and retention indicates the need for a study specifically on golf and lawn bowls. The context-specific nature of this phenomenon may even reduce to club-level. An important consideration for a sport club is to investigate the extent to which membership loss is occurring through factors that are manageable (within a club's control or ability to influence).

Critical to the development of a club is an understanding of sport behaviour (an individual's relationship with a sport or sport agency) and relationship marketing (maintenance of a long-term relationship between an organisation and its users or members). This is most easily achieved if a club is operating with a marketing orientation, taking into account that the application of any marketing practice to a voluntary, not-for-profit organisation must consider the special characteristics inherent in that type of organisation. Because of the volunteer dependence of clubs, members can simultaneously be a marketer, a user and part of the product (i.e., heavily involved in producing the environment in which they also participate in the sport). Such is the social network in clubs that the experience may be created by friends rather than a less personal service provider. This special characteristic of a sport club may require the adaption of marketing principles to this type of organisation.

## CHAPTER 4: CONTEXT

The context in which clubs operate is an important consideration in pragmatist research, especially for an embedded issue where an apparently local problem may be heavily influenced by larger systems (Waddell et al., 2015). This chapter describes the history, organisation and membership of golf and lawn bowls clubs in New Zealand; participation in these two sports; the macro environment surrounding this participation and analysis of media and online information that can influence players and prospective players. Participation identifies the pool of people who could be club members. It also indicates the magnitude of non-member participation (Figure 7).

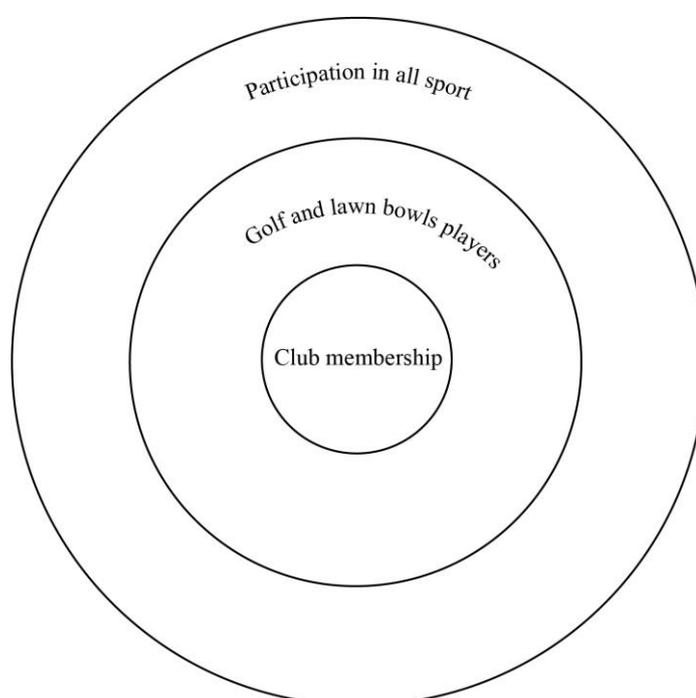


Figure 7. Club membership and participation in sport

This chapter is based solely on document analysis, a technique that can produce the context for an actual research situation, through a “systematic process for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). Documents are “social facts in that they are produced, shared and used in socially organised ways. They are not, however, transparent representations of organisational routines, decision-making processes or professional diagnoses” (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 58). Data in the documents must be examined and interpreted in order to derive understanding of the context. Document analysis is often regarded as a qualitative method (e.g. Bowen, 2009). However, numeric data can also be included.

For each section of this chapter, the relevance of the data and the source is explained. Three considerations when using documents are a) a strong rationale for the use of each source, b) the relevance of the data to the research question and c) the appropriateness of each document to the researcher's philosophical stance (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). In addition, the quality of each source needs to be evaluated. Important factors are the purpose for which the data was originally collected and the availability of information about the data collection. These factors enable evaluation of relevance to the current research and the reliability of the data.

The key documents used for analysis were published annual reports for national sport organisations and reports from the relevant Crown entity Sport New Zealand. The annual reports of national associations are documents formally published to meet constitutional requirements of the organisations. They contain membership data gathered by audited processes. Sport New Zealand and its predecessors provide longitudinal data about the macro environment and sport participation from well-constructed surveys and census data.

Published histories of sport provide commentary about the development of bowls, golf and sport in general, but require careful interpretation. For example, Carter's (2013) history of bowling in New Zealand is largely based on records with little interpretation; whereas, the work of MacDonald (1993) on the history of women in sport is clearly focused on a theme of unequal gender representation.

Media sources (listed in Appendix 2) are discussed in Section 4.5. The sources in this study were golf and lawn bowls magazines, newspaper articles, national associations websites, television programmes screened during the preparation of this thesis, miscellaneous publications relating to bowls and golf and articles about membership in general. Based on the interpretative tradition of considering multiple perceptions, it is unimportant whether or not all opinions in these documents are well-supported, as long as potential bias is acknowledged. These reports demonstrate a range of attitudes that sport administrators and clubs face when managing membership issues. Media reports have been thematically analysed, similar to qualitative interviews.

At the outset, the purpose of this chapter was to inform issue identification. However, collection of sources continued throughout the project to ensure that updated information was considered. Longitudinal data fostered understanding of membership problems facing clubs despite some misaligned time frames from differing data sources.

## **4.1 Lawn bowls organisation and membership in New Zealand**

This section includes a brief history of lawn bowls in New Zealand and details its governance and membership patterns. The key sources are well-researched and well-referenced sport history and annual reports from Bowls New Zealand. The membership information within annual reports is considered reasonably accurate and reliable, having been derived from membership fees which are audited.

### **4.1.1 History**

Important themes characterising the history of bowls in New Zealand are the early development of the formal organisation of men's bowls, the late formation of organised women's bowls, the strength of the sport in the early twentieth century and the early adoption of a number of sport practices.

Bowls is one of the earliest sports to be organised formally in New Zealand. Records show the sport being played in New Zealand in the 1860s. The first men's national association of 12 bowls clubs was formed in 1886. The first *Bowls Annual* was published in 1905, comprehensively describing the state of the game at that time based on information provided by clubs (Alloo, 1907). Provincial associations were formed, which merged into the Dominion of New Zealand Bowling Association in 1913 (Carter, 2013).

In the early years, the sport was popular and growing rapidly. By 1913, 17 regional centres encompassed 198 clubs and 10,912 members (Carter, 2013). As a well organised sport in a growing country, by 1924–25 the country's first official census of sport organisations reported that bowls had the fourth highest membership (13,943 males in 269 clubs), behind rugby, horse racing and tennis, but ahead of cricket and golf (New Zealand Census and Statistics Office, 1925). A year later, with an eight percent increase in membership, the sport reported 15,055 male members in 285 clubs. Bowls was described as one of the best organised sports in New Zealand, at a time when some sports were described in the census as disorganised.

In contrast, women's bowls had a much slower start. While the first women's bowling club was established in 1906 (MacDonald, 1993), the first national women's association was not formed until 1930. Women's regional organisations were formed in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch in the 1940s, with the New Zealand Women's Bowling Association being formed in 1948 and the first national women's championship being held in 1951 (Bowls New Zealand, 2012). In spite of this slower start, the women's

national bowling organisation was described in 1993 as one of largest and longest established women's organisations in New Zealand's history (MacDonald, 1993).

Throughout its history, bowls has been innovative compared with other sports. The formal men's organisation pre-dates most other sports in New Zealand (Ryan & Watson, 2018). Despite the late start to the women's organised game, the men's and women's associations were among the first to merge, doing so in 1996 (Carter, 2013). Bowls New Zealand was one of the first national sport organisations to undertake a facilities review (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b) and was also one of the first to record casual participation in its annual reports. Prior to 2015, Bowls New Zealand introduced casual membership to its constitution, defining a casual member as:

a person who participates in any bowling event or competition held by or at a Club(s), Centre(s) or Bowls New Zealand in accordance with Rule 10.2(c) and becomes a Member for the period of that event or competition and/or while present at the bowling venue (Bowls New Zealand, 2015b, p. 1).

In annual reports, casual members are recorded as non-member participants, without the same status as a full-time member. These participants could be regarded as part-time members for the period of participation in a competition or event. This clause in the constitution means that membership is no longer a dichotomy of member and non-member. Bowls remains one of the few sports in New Zealand to take this approach and formally recognise this 'in-between' category of player.

Trends in the gender profile of bowlers are rarely documented. Since the merger of the men's and women's associations, gender representation has not been formally reported by the national association. When the men's and women's associations merged in 1996, 60% of members (42,413) were men and 40% (25,797) were women (Carter, 2013). While the women's sport developed later and with a smaller base than the men's, it grew rapidly. When formed in 1948, the women's association had 2,766 members; a figure significantly lower than the men's association in its early years (Carter, 2013). With formal organisation, the women's sport grew rapidly achieving 20,000 members by 1964 (MacDonald, 1993).

#### **4.1.2 Organisation and initiatives**

Bowls New Zealand has three regions (i.e., northern, central and southern), organised into a total of 27 centres. The national and the regional organisations each have paid staff responsible for participation and club development. The centres organise local

competitions with clubs in their area and some employ staff. Clubs are members of centres and thus are also members of Bowls New Zealand.

Bowls New Zealand's 2013 three-page strategic plan focused on two outcomes: a) increasing participation and b) retaining champion status at elite level. The first outcome is described as "we will increase participation by understanding the needs of our communities and by designing game formats that reflect these needs, are enjoyable to play and can easily be delivered" (Bowls New Zealand, 2013c, p. 2). Three components support each outcome: 1) identifying and supporting capable partners; 2) building brand value in order to attract sponsor and funding revenue; and 3) recognising that leadership and new capabilities are needed, with a focus on use of new technology especially with regard to use of data and media. The plan has "participants as its focus and is shaped by our values" (Bowls New Zealand, 2013c, p. 2) which are summarised as enjoy, grow, share, honour and succeed. The plan explains the traditional and future importance of clubs. The goal was to develop 25% of bowling clubs to the status of partner clubs. As at 2018, 121 clubs (24%) clubs were listed as partner clubs (Bowls New Zealand, 2018). However, in the future other new partnerships will be needed and are reflected in the objective of developing 200 community partnerships.

It is noteworthy that Bowls New Zealand has identified its intention to be selective about working with clubs by stating that "our strategic direction is to assist clubs that wish to change and grow, but we will only work with the willing. Those who continue to yearn for the past will struggle to survive in today's environment" (Bowls New Zealand, 2014, p. 4). Bowls New Zealand has developed a Partner Club programme, whereby identified clubs agree to work in partnership to improve the strength of the clubs. Partner clubs receive support from a Bowls New Zealand Community Development Officer, produce strategic and operational plans and offer Bowls New Zealand brands/products, including surveys and database development. ClubPlan is a package of modules aiding improvement to club operations and sustainability. Clubs can work through an assessment process to become gold, silver or bronze partners

(Bowls New Zealand, 2018). In addition, national awards recognise outstanding clubs and individual administrators.

Bowls New Zealand provides 'products' or activities and supports club implementation of these activities. The annual reports emphasise marketing principles, such as customer focus, segments and brands. Bowls products target a range of segments from the serious to the social bowler. The products include Mates in Bowls/Business House Bowls, Roll Ups, Bowls3Five and Squad6, more traditional competitions and

recognition of disability within mainstream competitions. Mates in Bowls and Business House Bowls are tournaments run throughout the summer months on weekday evenings. Teams from workplaces compete over a six-week period. Games usually last about an hour and all equipment is provided. Roll Ups is a relaxed form of competitive bowling usually played in the afternoon. Bowls3Five is a new product that was introduced in 2018 and is a fast format of the game, with three levels of competition: social format for twilight competitions, a nationwide interclub competition and the inaugural Bowls3Five television league. Squad6 is a secondary school programme of up to 90 minutes duration. These options are in addition to the traditional national and centre competitions. Dress codes range in formality, with Mates in Bowls/Business House Bowls being everyday clothing, Roll Ups encompassing a coloured club uniform, and white clothing only required for traditional competitions. Diversity is prioritised with considerable emphasis on bowling for the disabled and for the blind.

A facilities review addressed the impact of declining memberships. A large number of bowling venues were reviewed, resulting in a recommendation for rationalisation in such a way that would allow clubs to share venues in partnership but each retaining its own identity. Community partnerships were also a recommendation of the review (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b). Implementation of the review has proved challenging.

Two Bowls New Zealand initiatives were recognised with external awards. Mates in Bowls won the innovation award at the Inaugural New Zealand Sport and Recreation Sector Awards in 2009 (Carter, 2013). Bowls New Zealand won the Sport New Zealand award for Women on Boards, for strong representation of women on the national board, including the roles of president and chair. Bowls New Zealand has also been active in using the Sport New Zealand Organisational Development Tool (Bowls New Zealand, 2014).

#### **4.1.3 Membership patterns and trends**

Bowls has possibly the largest network of clubs of any sport in the country (Bowls New Zealand, 2018). In 2017/18, 500 bowling clubs were affiliated to Bowls New Zealand. This number had reduced from 583 in 2010, a reduction of 14%. In 2010, 250 clubs were judged to be in small communities (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b). The remaining clubs were in metropolitan areas with two or more clubs within a town or suburb. The average club size in 2013 was approximately 75 members nationally and 98 members in Auckland clubs. Both these figures are lower than the national Australian average of 112 members.

(Bowls New Zealand, 2013b). The facilities review gave examples of club sizes in Auckland and North Shore ranging from 24–150 members (Bowls New Zealand, 2013b).

Discussion of club membership tends to focus on national membership figures. However, a specific club needs to look more closely at regional and local data. Data at local and regional level illuminate noteworthy trends related to the focal bowls club in this study. With the approach of Bowls New Zealand towards casual members, data relating to recorded non-member participation through organised programmes is also reported. Nationally, the percentage change over the five years has shown a 32% increase in participation, arising from a 5% decline in membership and 62% increase in non-member participation. Each region of New Zealand shows quite different patterns. In the Northern region, where Club B is situated, an 8.5% decline in membership was offset by a doubling of non-member participation. In the Central region, both membership and non-member participation increased. In the South Island, both member and non-member groups declined (Table 9).

Table 9. Change in regional bowls club membership over five years

Region	Member % change	Non-member % change	Total % change
<b>Northern</b>	<b>-8.5</b>	<b>110.9</b>	<b>57.4</b>
Central	7.8	98.2	50.3
Southern	-9.6	-0.5	-4.1
Total	-4.7	61.9	32.3

In the Northern region, with the shift towards non-member participation, by 2017/18 only a quarter of the club players were members. At 26%, the Northern region had the lowest percentage of club member participants (Table 10).

Table 10. Regional bowls club membership over five years

Region	2012/2013					2017/2018				
	Member ( <i>n</i> )	Non-member ( <i>n</i> )	Total	Member % of total	Non-member % of total	Member ( <i>n</i> )	Non-member ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )	Member % of total	Non-member % of total
<b>Northern</b>	<b>16,725</b>	<b>20,604</b>	<b>37,329</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>55.2</b>	<b>15,296</b>	<b>43,458</b>	<b>58,754</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>74.0</b>
Central	10,580	9,392	19,972	53.0	47.0	11,405	18,611	30,016	32.3	67.7
Southern	14,023	21,664	35,687	39.3	60.7	12,674	21,552	34,226	35.1	64.9
Total	41,328	51,660	92,988	44.4	55.6	39,375	83,621	122,996	32.0	68.0

Adapted from Bowls New Zealand (2013a, 2018).

However, the percentage change over the most recent two-year period showed a different pattern. In 2017–2018, Bowls New Zealand heralded a nationwide increase in membership for the first time in a number of years (Bowls New Zealand, 2018). Nevertheless, this increase is attributable to growth in only one region, namely the Central region (Table 11). The Central region saw a 15% increase in membership, accompanied by a 10% decline in non-member participation. In the Southern region, both membership and non-member participation declined, while in the Northern region membership was maintained with non-member participation growing by 26%. The most recent two-year pattern needs to be reviewed in the context of the longer-term trend to be meaningful. When the most recent years differ from the five-year trend, a region cannot yet know whether this is a change in fortunes or a random fluctuation.

Table 11. Regional bowls membership over the past two years

Region	2016/2017			2017/2018			Change between two years		
	Member ( <i>n</i> )	Non-member ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )	Member ( <i>n</i> )	Non-member ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )	Member % change	Non-member % change	Total % change
<b>Northern</b>	<b>15,173</b>	<b>34,495</b>	<b>49,668</b>	<b>15,296</b>	<b>43,458</b>	<b>58,754</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>18.3</b>
Central	9,896	20,750	30,646	11,405	18,611	30,016	15.2	-10.3	-2.1
Southern	12,913	23,899	36,812	12,674	21,552	34,226	-1.9	-9.8	-7.0
Total	37,982	79,144	117,126	39,375	83,621	122,996	3.7	5.7	5.0

Adapted from Bowls New Zealand (2017, 2018).

Even within the centres of the Northern region, different patterns are evident. The local centre (which includes Club B) is one of seven centres in the Northern region, with 32% of players being members. The centres on either side geographically are quite different. The more northern centre has a higher percentage of members (43%). To the south in Auckland, only 17% of players are members. Further south in Counties Manukau, 71% of participants are members. However, Counties Manukau has very low total participation considering its population, whereas Auckland has the highest participation in the Northern region.

In summary, membership of bowling clubs has declined over the five-year period, whilst non-member participation through Bowls New Zealand programmes has increased. This pattern has been evident nationally, in the Northern region and in the North Harbour Centre of that region. The membership numbers demonstrate differences between each local area and also the importance of the time frame when analysing membership trends, especially when the pattern for the past two years differs from the longer time frame.

## **4.2 Golf organisation and membership in New Zealand**

This section provides a brief history of golf in New Zealand, the organisation of the sport and membership patterns. The key sources are credible historical narratives and annual reports from New Zealand Golf. Membership data from these reports was generated from a purpose-built system used by every New Zealand affiliated golf club. The feedback loop between the system and the golf clubs helps to ensure accuracy of the membership information. Membership data from early years is dependent on handwritten returns by club secretaries and is less reliable.

### **4.2.1 History**

Key themes in the history of golf in New Zealand are the early organisation of women's play, a high level of segregation in the men's and women's games, a proliferation of organisations influencing the sport, and the recent attempt to unify the industry. The playing of golf was recorded in New Zealand as early as the 1860s. In 1899 the Golf Council was formed which later became the New Zealand Golf Association in 1910, the forerunner of the current national governing body, Golf New Zealand (Kelly, 1971).

The history of women's golf differs from bowls insofar it was organised earlier, although it was dependent on other organisations. Until 1905, women's championship meetings were held under the auspices of the men's association. In 1905, women's clubs

affiliated with the British Ladies' Golf Union and a separate New Zealand branch of this union was formed in 1910. In spite of this early organisation, the relationship between men's and women's golf is described by MacDonald (1993) as "an unbalanced parallel" (p. 407). Men's golf clubs were not keen to include women on an equal basis. Women were generally admitted to the men's clubs but had to negotiate access to courses and facilities. However, Kelly (1971) identifies that the relationship between the men's and women's game differed greatly from club to club from "nearly full integration to distant tolerance" (p. 96), and acknowledges many situations that demonstrated "first and foremost, clubs and courses (were) for men" (p. 96). Both Kelly (1971) and MacDonald (1993) describe an environment of almost complete segregation between the men's and women's game. Gender differentiation in membership categories is still evident. The other key differentiation in membership categories is between 18-hole and 9-hole golf. The 9-hole game for handicap purposes was introduced for women in 1997 but was not available for men until 2006 when the national associations amalgamated.

The proportions of female and male golfers in New Zealand over the past century is particularly interesting. Whereas women's bowls strengthened in comparison to the men, the ratio of women golf members diminished. By 1930, the New Zealand Ladies' Golf Union in New Zealand had 125 clubs, with just under 7,500 members. In 1939, membership came close to parity with 55.9% men and 44.1% women (Table 12). The shift towards a greater percentage of male members began in the 1960s and 1970s, several decades before the merging of the men's and women's national organisations in 2005. By 2003, the ratio was 71.5% men and 28.5% women.

Table 12: Adult membership of golf 1924–2003: Gender profile

Year	Memberships ( <i>n</i> )		Membership (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1924	6,000	4,000	60.0	40.0
1930	NA	7,500		
1939	15,900	12,546	55.9	44.1
1950	17,500	12,500	58.3	41.7
1960	26,100	19,000	57.9	42.1
1965	36,101	24,000	60.1	39.9
1970	59,600	35,000	63.0	37.0
1985	67,713			
1988	68,521			
1989	64,871			
1990	64,238			
1991	64,238			
1992		34,464		

1994	73,240	33,931	68.3	31.7
1995	71,834	33,278	66.6	33.4
2002	84,132	33,729	71.4	28.6
2003	92,144	32,790	71.5	28.5

Sources:

1924–1970: Kelly (1971)

1992 females: Northover (1993)

1985–1995: New Zealand Golf Association (1995, 1996)

2002 and 2003: New Zealand Golf (2004).

Golf in New Zealand has been governed by a number of prominent associations. In addition to the national association and associated structure, the Professional Golf Association (PGA) of New Zealand was founded by 12 golf professionals in 1913, the Aotearoa Māori Golf Association was set-up in 1932, the New Golf Course Superintendents Association in 1940, and the Golf Managers Association was registered as an incorporated society in 2004. As of 2018, the PGA of New Zealand represented 410 members who provide professional services (coaching) to around 100 (approximately a quarter) of New Zealand’s clubs. The Golf Managers Association provides support for the managers and administrators of golf clubs. In addition, there are associations for referees, a range of ethnic groups, and organisations involved in golf equipment and golf tourism.

The New Zealand Golf Industry Council was established in 2016 to bring together all stakeholders and encourage collaboration between organisations to provide the New Zealand Golf Strategy, a unified approach to the golf industry in New Zealand (New Zealand Golf, 2017). The term ‘industry’ is used and includes commercial aspects of the sport. In addition to golf clubs, players can learn the game at commercial driving ranges, the largest being The Golf Warehouse that also supplies golf equipment. Forty organisations were members of the council in 2017. New Zealand Golf has agreements with nine of these organisations including the PGA of New Zealand. Following years of discussion about potential amalgamation, the PGA of New Zealand and Golf New Zealand began to work from the same offices in 2016 (New Zealand Golf, 2017).

In addition, local body councils are stakeholders as the owners of land leased by many golf clubs. Auckland Council has been particularly proactive in reviewing golf facilities (Auckland Council, 2016). The interest of the council is to ensure the best use of public assets which may result in reduced allocation of land for golf.

#### **4.2.2 Organisation and initiatives**

Golf is governed in a three-tier hierarchical structure featuring New Zealand Golf, 15 district associations and 395 affiliated golf clubs. New Zealand Golf and the district associations have paid staff responsible for participation and club development.

New Zealand Golf's Strategic Plan has three outcomes: a) "strong golf clubs and healthy golf communities", b) "competitive success at all levels" and c) an industry recognised for its economic contribution and career prospects (New Zealand Golf, 2014, p. 13). The two priorities are to grow and support the game of golf with a total of eight objectives: four objectives for each priority. Four of the eight objectives relate to clubs. The four club-related objectives are: a) increased participation, b) increased new club membership and existing member retention, c) increased profile and positive perception of golf and d) improvement in club capability and financial health. In addition, the plan includes comments about the value of golf and the vision and mission of Golf New Zealand.

The strategic plan takes responsibility for the past shortcomings of New Zealand Golf and difficulties faced by the sport. Key data are presented relating to participation and the structure of golf in New Zealand along with a list of core issues facing the game (New Zealand Golf, 2014). This section of the plan includes comments about the "many golf organisations operating in an uncoordinated manner" (p. 4) and the lack of strategic focus from within New Zealand Golf up to 2014. The plan references three reports including the National Facilities Study (O'Connor Sinclair, 2013), and comments that "New Zealand Golf is not currently structured to be a market-led and customer-focused organisation dedicated to partnership with its clubs and the overall health of the sport. It cannot currently reach all clubs with quality service delivery" (p. 5).

New Zealand Golf's annual reports were structured around the two priorities and outcomes (New Zealand Golf, 2017). Twenty-one programmes were tabulated in the 2017 report, with statistics to indicate success. Programmes to grow the game include promotion of a positive perception of golf with national campaigns, "LOVE Golf" and "She Loves Golf". These campaigns were designed to be used in conjunction with club events. Casual golfer registration and Get on the Green promotions encourage engagement with non-members. Registration of casual players through the New Zealand Golf website since 2016 has been critical in understanding more about non-member players.

Different formats of the game are supported with new products such as Speedgolf, FootGolf and SNAG (Starting New at Golf) for schools. Nevertheless, the 18-hole and 9-

hole formats remain the main emphasis. Several initiatives are evident such as Find-A-Buddy on the New Zealand Golf website through which a potential player can find someone with whom to play. The Partner Club programme supports clubs with projects and capability development. Surveys and a national database provide considerable information about members and participants. Case studies of good practice and innovation in New Zealand golf clubs are provided online.

Facility reviews received considerable attention in recent years. In line with the strategy of Sport New Zealand, New Zealand Golf undertook a review to inform strategic direction (O'Connor Sinclair, 2013). Auckland Council, the local government body covering the whole of Auckland, drew heavily on this work in its Golf Investment Plan (Auckland Council, 2016). Both these documents note the absence of facilities to introduce new people to golf. Of the 14 courses on Auckland Council land, none are introductory courses that support new players to learn the fundamentals of the game. Eleven are development courses designed to expand and improve the skills of golfers. The remaining three are more advanced courses (Auckland Council, 2016; O'Connor Sinclair, 2013).

#### **4.2.3 Membership patterns and trends**

The number of golf clubs in New Zealand has remained stable since 2012, fluctuating between 389 and 390 clubs (New Zealand Golf, 2017). The golf club discussed in this thesis is located in one of New Zealand's larger golf regions, and is adjacent to another large region. Together these regions account for 22% of the national membership (9% North Harbour and 13% Auckland). This percentage has been consistent over the past 14 years. North Harbour covers Auckland's North Shore up to Helensville and West Auckland. Auckland covers the area south of Auckland harbour to the end of the Southern Motorway at Bombay. With the population of these two areas accounting for 33% of the New Zealand population (Statistics New Zealand, 2013a), golf membership is under-represented in the greater Auckland area.

The average club size in 2013 comprised approximately 266 members nationally and 638 members in the combined Auckland/North Harbour area (O'Connor Sinclair, 2013). In the combined Auckland/North Harbour area, the average memberships ranged from 638 for urban clubs and 331 for rural clubs.

An annual decline in membership has been consistent over the past 14 years, both nationally and in each region. The North Harbour decline mirrors the national trend while the decline in Auckland is smaller (Table 13).

Table 13. Adult membership of golf: National, North Harbour and Auckland

Year	National		North Harbour		Auckland	
	Adult members (n)	% change	Adult members (n)	% change	Adult members (n)	% change
2004	116,692		10,452		14,638	
2005	114,184	-2.1	10,597	1.4	15,260	4.2
2006	115,699	1.3	10,726	1.2	15,580	2.1
2007	114,083	-1.4	10,275	-4.2	15,566	-0.1
2008	120,546	5.7	11,008	7.1	14,611	-6.1
2009	110,202	-8.6	10,304	-6.4	13,740	-6.0
2010	110,623	0.4	10,388	0.8	13,629	-0.8
2011	105,266	-4.8	10,064	-3.1	12,964	-4.9
2012	102,798	-2.3	9,551	-5.1	12,783	-1.4
2013	99,844	-2.9	9,371	-1.9	12,633	-1.2
2014	97,120	-2.7	9,071	-3.2	12,305	-2.6
2015	94,166	-3.0	8,716	-3.9	12,331	0.2
2016	93,016	-1.2	8,455	-3.0	12,632	2.4
2017	91,555	-1.6	8,170	-3.4	12,151	-3.8
Total changes	25,137	-21.5	2,282	-21.8	2,487	-17.0

Adapted from New Zealand Golf (2004, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2017).

Over the past 14 years, the proportion of female golfers in New Zealand and the two regions has decreased steadily (Table 14). For both North Harbour and Auckland, the proportion of females in 2017 was slightly lower than the national figure.

Table 14. Adult golf membership 2004–2017: Gender profile in Auckland region compared with national figures

Year	National		North Harbour		Auckland	
	Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)	Males (%)	Females (%)
2004	71.4	28.6	76.4	23.6	73.3	26.8
2005	71.5	28.5	74.9	25.1	74.0	26.0
2006	70.5	29.5	74.7	25.3	73.6	26.3
2007	72.5	27.5	73.5	26.5	74.2	25.8
2008	72.4	27.6	70.1	29.9	71.3	28.6
2009	73.5	26.5	75.0	25.0	73.7	26.3
2010	74.1	25.9	76.1	23.9	74.3	25.7
2011	74.6	25.4	76.2	23.8	73.9	26.1
2012	74.9	25.1	76.5	23.5	74.5	25.5
2013	75.1	24.9	77.6	22.4	74.6	25.4
2014	75.2	24.8	77.7	22.3	75.2	24.8
2015	75.6	24.4	77.8	22.2	77.0	23.0
2016	75.6	24.4	77.8	22.2	77.7	22.3
2017	76.2	23.8	78.0	22.0	78.3	21.7

Adapted from New Zealand Golf (2004, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a, 2016, 2017).

In 2017, most golfers in New Zealand (86%) were annual members with 91% of male and 72% of female members (New Zealand Golf (2005, 2010, 2017)). The emphasis on this traditional form of the game is demonstrated by the term “annual members” referring to 18-hole players who join annually. Whilst only 10% of all golfers are 9-hole members, almost a quarter of women take out this form of membership, compared with just 5% of men. This membership type has grown since 2005.

Gender profile can differ considerably between clubs within a region. For example, in two North Harbour clubs, over 90% of members are men, contrasting with another club for which 67% of the membership is male. Overall, the immediate North Shore area is more similar to the national profile than the rest of the North Harbour region (New Zealand Golf (2018)).

Casual participation data has been collected by New Zealand Golf for the past two years. Overall, the number of adult members is slightly higher than the number of casual participants (Table 15). However, this differs across regions. In Auckland, casual players make up a higher proportion (70%). In North Harbour, just over half are registered casual participants.

Table 15. Adult golf membership compared with registered casual participation

Region	Adult members ( <i>n</i> )	Registered casual ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )	Members as % of total	Casual as % of total
<b>North Harbour</b>	<b>8,170</b>	<b>9,020</b>	<b>17,190</b>	<b>47.5</b>	<b>52.5</b>
<b>Auckland</b>	<b>12,151</b>	<b>28,444</b>	<b>40,595</b>	<b>29.9</b>	<b>70.1</b>
Northland	4,901	2,941	7,842	62.5	37.5
Waikato	8,138	6,480	14,618	55.7	44.3
Bay of Plenty	8,381	5,106	13,487	62.1	37.9
Hawkes Bay	3,628	2,789	6,417	56.5	43.5
Manawatu	5,023	2,449	7,472	67.2	32.8
Poverty Bay	667	344	1,011	66.0	34.0
Taranaki	3,131	1,150	4,281	73.1	26.9
Wellington	10,374	9,359	19,733	52.6	47.4
Aorangi	3,379	530	3,909	86.4	13.6
Canterbury	9,690	6,394	16,084	60.2	39.8
Otago	7,851	3,773	11,624	67.5	32.5
Southland	2,420	1,006	3,426	70.6	29.4
Tasman	3,722	3,480	7,202	51.7	48.3
Totals	91,626	83,265	174,891	52.4	47.6

### 4.3 Position and profile of participation in outdoor bowls and golf

This section explains total participation in golf and outdoor bowls (the name given to lawn bowls in the national participation statistics). Total participation includes players

outside the formal structures of bowls and golf, as well as registered casual players and members. New Zealand is well served with national statistics about sport participation. National government statistics included sport information from as early as 1924. Regular national participation surveys have been conducted since the 1990s utilising large and well-constructed samples. Since 1997, a participant has been defined as someone who reports a single engagement in the previous year. Non-member participation can be estimated from the participation surveys in conjunction with annual report membership data. Government studies also provide insights into bowling and golf behaviour.

An important insight from these surveys is the increasing range of sports and activities available to New Zealanders. The first national survey in 1924 included 18 formally organised sports. The latest survey covers 133 activities (which includes activities such as gardening, walking and exercising at home that would have been undertaken in the 1920s but not measured). Sixty-two of these activities were shown to respondents on a card. The other activities were spontaneously mentioned without any prompting. Golf and outdoor bowls were both included on the showcard. In addition, respondents spontaneously added frisbee golf and mini golf. As well as bowls, pétanque and 10-pin bowling were mentioned. The variations to standard sports are extensive (Sport New Zealand, 2015b).

#### **4.3.1 Position of outdoor bowls and golf**

Participation in both outdoor bowls and golf declined in the 18 years between 1997 and 2013 (Table 16); currently 10% of the adult population play golf at least once a year and 3% play outdoor bowls. Golf remains one of the top 10 activities in terms of participant numbers. While outdoor bowls participation has declined, it is still the 24th ranked sport out of the 133 activities in terms of participant numbers (Sport New Zealand, 2015b). Amongst older people, outdoor bowls is the third highest activity behind walking and gardening and is the most played sport in this age group.

The 91,000 adult participants of outdoor bowls are consistent with the membership and non-member participation reported by Bowls New Zealand. However, with 318,000 players, participation in golf as recorded in the national survey is considerably higher than the combined number of members and casual participants registered with New Zealand Golf. This indicates a considerable number of participants who are not recognised in the formal structure of the national golf association.

The position of golf in the top 10 activities is inconsistent across Auckland. It is only within the top 10 activities on the North Shore and in the higher socioeconomic suburbs of South Auckland.

Table 16. Level of participation in outdoor bowls and golf in 2013/14

Participation statistic	Outdoor Bowls	Golf
Adult participation as % of population		
1997/8	Not available	17.5%
2007/8	7.0%	13.1%
2013/14	2.7%	9.8%
Adult population (aged 16 years and over) who participated once in 2013/14	91,000 adults	318,000 adults
Participation position amongst 133 leisure activities and sports in New Zealand	24th highest (32nd in 2007/8)	10th highest (8th in 2007/8)
Participation position in Auckland	Not available	11th 8th amongst men Not in top 20 for women
Participation position by age group in Auckland Local Board		
75+ years	3 <sup>rd</sup>	7th
65–74 years	7 <sup>th</sup>	8th
50–64 years	Not in top 10	Not in top 10
35–49 years	Not in top 10	9th
25–34 years	Not in top 10	Not in top 10
Participation position by Auckland Local Board area		
North		10th
West	Not in top 10 in any Local Board area	Not in top 10
Central		Not in top 10
South – Southern initiative area (high social need)		Not in top 10
South – Non-Southern initiative area (higher socioeconomic level)		7th

Adapted from Sport New Zealand (2015e, 2015g).

### 4.3.2 Profile of players

Profiles of players of golf and outdoor bowls can be compared with the national adult population (Table 17). The gender profile of both sports is heavily skewed towards men and New Zealand Europeans. The prevalence of the older age group in outdoor bowls is clear with 66% of players over the age of 55. Deprivation is a measure of socioeconomic level, with low deprivation describing people who are well-off and high deprivation describing people who are people unable to cover basic living needs. Golf is played by people in all three deprivation groups. However, the incidence of participation is lower amongst people of high deprivation and increases with socioeconomic level. Outdoor

bowls participation is more similar to the profile of the New Zealand population. Nevertheless, the incidence of participation in this sport also increases with socioeconomic level.

Table 17. Profile of participants in outdoor bowls and golf

Characteristic	Outdoor bowls (%)	Golf (%)	New Zealand population (%)
Gender			
Male	67	75	48
Female	33	25	52
Key age groups			
70 years and over	31	11	12
55–69 years	37	27	21
40–54 years	19	26	28
25–39 years	11	23	24
16–24 years	4	13	16
Ethnicity			
NZ European	80	77	65
Māori	4	3	5
Asian	0.4	5	10
Pacific	3.5	1	4
Deprivation			
Low	39	44	32
Medium	32	37	34
High	30	19	34

Sources: Sport New Zealand (2015e, 2015g).

### 4.3.3 History of participation

The most recent participation study identifies when players started to play the sport (Table 18) and compares golf and bowls with other sports. The data profiles people starting to play lawn bowls at an older age, with a large percentage (56%) of people taking up the game within the last five years. Golf, in comparison, has a long-standing group (46%) who have played for more than 16 years. Golf has a low percentage of first-time participation within the past year (10%) or even the past five years (36%). This profile is similar to tennis, but is almost the opposite of aerobics, an activity which seems to attract participants readily but has few long-standing participants.

Table 18. Starting to play outdoor bowls and golf compared with other sports

Participation history	Outdoor bowls (%)	Golf (%)	Tennis (%)	Badminton (%)	Canoeing (%)	Aerobics (%)
<b>Length of participation</b>						
Started in past 12 months	21	10	7.5	19	12	29
Restarted after not doing for 12 months or more	12	13	18	23	20	13
Been doing for 12 months or more	67	77	74	58	68	58
<b>Time frame from starting to play</b>						
Within last five years	56	36	39	67	54	72
6–10 years ago	13	11	12	12	17	12
11–15 years ago	8	8	7	6	8	5
16–25 years ago	11	21	11	6	10	9
25 years ago or more	13	25	31	10	11	3
<b>Age at which started playing</b>						
Over 35 years	83	44	23	33	44	42
18–34 years	16	34	45	33	28	45

Adapted from Sport New Zealand (2015c, 2015d, 2015e, 2015f, 2015g, 2015h).

The majority (70%) of golf players, both members and non-members, were introduced to the game through a member of their family or social network (New Zealand Golf, 2015b).

#### 4.3.4 Style and nature of participation

The most recent participation survey also asked questions about the way in which the sports are played (Table 19). The high frequency of playing bowls is consistent with the retirement profile of bowlers, with 67% playing once a week or more. The strength of the short-term casual participation packages offered by Bowls New Zealand can be seen in the high participation in short-term organised competitions (32%) and the number of people paying to take part in an event (20%). In comparison, almost a quarter of golf players undertake the sport less than once a month. Less than half (40%) play once a week or more while more than half pay each time they play (i.e., pay per visit).

Both sports are played for enjoyment and social reasons more so than sport performance. New Zealand Golf's Participant Survey also noted personal challenge as a reason for playing whilst also confirming the social reasons (New Zealand Golf, 2015b).

Both golf and outdoor bowls players undertake on average six other activities including other facilities-based sport.

Table 19. Style and nature of participation in outdoor bowls and golf

Nature of participation	Outdoor bowls	Golf
Frequency of play	52%	34%
1–2 days a week	15%	6%
More frequently	33%	59%
Less frequently	(including 17% less than once a month)	(including 23% less than once a month)
Location of play	Outdoor sports facility	Outdoor sports facility
In regular club competitions	48%	29%
Short-term organised competitions	32%	7%
Payment		
Paid per visit	37%	52%
Paid via membership of a sport club	45% (approx. 41,000)	40% (approx. 125,900)
Event payment	20%	8%
Member of sport clubs for purpose of playing the sport	58%	47%
Received coaching	20%	29%
Used instructional resources	7%	28%
Reasons for taking part		
Enjoyment	87%	90%
Social reasons	82%	68%
Sport performance	32%	32%
Number of other activities played	On average 5.8 activities	On average 6.2 activities
Other activities	Predominantly walking, fishing, swimming, jogging. The only other facilities-based sport in the top 10 sports is golf.	Predominantly walking, fishing, swimming, jogging. The only other facilities-based sport in the top 10 sports is tennis.

Adapted from Sport New Zealand (2015e, 2015g).

Membership information is broadly consistent with data from national associations. The number of bowlers participating by paid membership is similar to the membership figures in 2014 (Table 19). New Zealand Golf identifies that approximately 52% of players pay per visit (New Zealand Golf, 2015b). However, the projected membership numbers in the participation survey are higher than in the national association annual report (Table 19).

#### 4.4 Macro environment in New Zealand

This section provides an overview of the macro environment as described by Sport New Zealand, key points relating to clubs from Sport New Zealand’s policy, a broad overview of the history of the macro environment in New Zealand, and a profile of national and regional populations. This section demonstrates the challenges facing sport clubs in New Zealand and the expectations of the Crown entity in relation to sport clubs. The

information extracted from policy documents and sport history represent a carefully considered view of the macro environment. The population statistics are from reliable census data.

Table 20. Evolution of the current sporting environment

Era	Key trends
1840s–1860s	Sport was mostly informal events, generally localised.
1870s–World War I	Clubs were formed with “some lasting little more than a season or two” (p. 275). Regional and then national associations began to support more organised competition as “communities of interest typically grew outward from local to regional ... to national ... and the process could be shaky as previously independent bodies came together in a mood of mutual suspicion as much as cooperation” (p. 275).
Post-World War I–1945	Participation and spectating increased, aided by developments in transport and communication.
Post-World War II–1972	Security of leisure with full employment, modest prosperity and contained working and shopping hours resulted in “a golden era for New Zealand sport” (p. 289) and “an explosion of activity” for sport clubs (p. 285). This era was “distinguished by high levels of joining and a strongly demarcated sexual division of leisure” (p. 271). Sport clubs in particular were “part of the fabric of daily life – a time and place of special interest to the wave of children and young people growing up in the mid-40s to the 1960s” (p. 285).
From 1972–2007	Irregular working hours, unemployment, extended shopping hours, deregulation of the labour market, changing roles for men and women, and a greater range of sporting and leisure activities brought challenges for sport clubs and the hierarchy of sporting associations became harder to sustain.

Adapted from MacDonald (2009).

The complexity of the overall environment for sport in New Zealand, including golf and lawn bowls, is highlighted by social and technological change, population change, uncertain sustainability for organisations and a changing environment in Auckland (Sport New Zealand, 2012). The social and technological change is described by Sport New Zealand (2012) as “growth in casual or informal sport (which) may cause a gradual decline in club membership and volunteer numbers, making the traditional club less viable. Similarly, new sports and digital entertainment may lead to declining participation in traditional sports” (p. 5). A narrow income base affects the sustainability of organisations. In Auckland, a major change to local government occurred in 2010 when separate local bodies were brought together under one coordinated structure. Differing sport policies came together in a unified approach for Auckland, with short-term uncertainty for organisations dependent of council support. The Sport New Zealand Strategic Plan (2012) also placed emphasis on the significant changes to the demographic profile in Auckland.

In this changing environment, overall membership of sport clubs (as measured in the four weeks prior to the participation survey) declined between 2007 and 2013/14, from 19% to 17% of the adult population over 16 years (Sport New Zealand, 2015b). In contrast, gym membership increased by three percentage points over the same timeframe.

#### **4.4.1 Sport New Zealand policy and issues**

The predominant concern is a national decline in the past two decades in adult participation in sport and activity overall (Sport New Zealand, 2017a). A key strategy for Sport New Zealand through its community strategy is to increase adult participation and increase the quality of sport and recreation opportunities in New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2015a). The position of clubs differs between the 2012 and 2015 policy documents. In 2012, support for clubs was highlighted and by 2015 the emphasis was on community partners. This shift in emphasis places other organisations alongside clubs as providers of sport opportunities.

The Strategic Plan 2012–15 included statements such as “we’ll also help sports bodies become more commercially-capable” (Sport New Zealand, 2012, p. 2). In terms of sports clubs, Sport New Zealand was committed through its community sport strategy to club development and exploring “opportunities to strengthen the club infrastructure in New Zealand” (Sport New Zealand, 2012, p. 12). However, sport outside the traditional club structure was also important as Sport New Zealand was also committed to ensuring that “sport remains an attractive option for all New Zealanders (and) will support the sector to develop new ways of connecting with existing and new participants, through events, commercialisation or appealing to diverse cultures and communities” (Sport New Zealand, 2012, p. 12).

The latest approach to community strategy emphasises “new organisational forms, partnerships and capabilities are required to create innovative approaches to delivering sport” (Sport New Zealand, 2015a, p. 7). Clubs are only encompassed in comments about partnerships, with few specific references. The plan comments about the need for adaptability, the wide range of activities now available and the diversity of the New Zealand population. A key point is made about ethnic diversity especially in Auckland, noting that 37% of people living in Auckland were not born in New Zealand (Sport New Zealand, 2015a).

Sport New Zealand now has specific strategies for low participation groups such as Māori (Sport New Zealand, 2017b) and women (Sport New Zealand, 2018b). Lower participation by females and gender inequity have been issues for sport in New Zealand

as a whole (Thompson, 1985), with women described as “also-rans” having a lower profile than their male counterparts (MacDonald, 1993, p. 405).

Research resources available for clubs include participant voice surveys and Insights Tool. National associations can include their sport in participant voice surveys which measure member satisfaction of their sport club. Results are available to the public unidentified, with each national association only receiving identified results for their sport. Both golf and bowls participated in the participant voice survey. The Insights Tool of Statistics New Zealand enables sport clubs to develop profiles of their neighbourhood and any suburb in their catchment area. The ability to select a suburb in an online map gives an easy tool from which to gain a profile of demographic characteristics from the latest census data.

#### 4.4.2 Population statistics

New Zealand is fortunate in the ease of access to census population profiles. It is important for a club to understand the demographic profile of the specific area in which it is located. The profile of Auckland and the national profile differ markedly (Table 21). The areas surrounding the two case clubs also differ. Club A is in a suburb with a high New Zealand European population and higher than average Asian population. Club B is in a suburb which is also strongly New Zealand European and slightly older than average.

Table 21. Ethnicity and age population statistics for Auckland suburbs

Demographic	New Zealand (%)	Auckland region (%)	Suburb for Club A (%)	Suburb for Club B (%)
Ethnicity				
NZ European	74	59	76	88
Māori	15	11	5	6
Pacific	7	7	2	2
Asian	12	23	20	8
Other	5	4	5	4
Age				
Median age in years	38	35	39	42
% over 65 years	14	12	15	18

Adapted from Statistics New Zealand (2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

Narrowing the profile to the immediate neighbourhood of the club facilities can show a different profile to that of the Local Board. Club A is located in an area which has a very strong New Zealand European profile. From the Insights Tool it is easy to see that the Asian population in the area is minimal. Club B is in a more diverse area than its local board with a higher Asian population (Sport New Zealand, 2018a).

Table 22. Ethnicity statistics for suburbs surrounding focal clubs

Ethnicity	Immediate neighbourhood Club A	Immediate neighbourhood Club B
European	87	76
Māori	7	4
Pacific	3	1
Asian	5	21
Other	3	3

Adapted from Sport New Zealand (2018a).

The population of New Zealand is expected to age and become more multicultural over the next three decades. The percentage of people aged 65 years and over is expected to be between 21% and 26% by 2043. Nationally, the New Zealand European population is expected to make up 65% of the population in 2038, whilst all other ethnicities are expected to increase, for example, Māori to 18%, Asian to 22%, Pacific to 10%. In Auckland, the New Zealand European population will drop to below 50% (Statistics New Zealand, 2016).

#### 4.5 Media and online resources

Media and other sources provide additional context for this thesis about sport club membership. Perceptions presented through the media influence sport clubs as they interact with the community to encourage membership and also influence the perceptions of potential members. Unlike the other sources used in this section, media articles are not always objective or factual. Some articles include a quick judgement about the facts, without clear explanation and/or little critical analysis.

Perceptions of membership have been presented in the press and popular literature with descriptions such as “membership is dead”, “the membership model is broken” and “the end of membership as we know it” (Appendix 2). This idea is reinforced by club histories containing comments such as “in line with other clubs” our membership is dropping (e.g., Barlow, 2005). The implications are that declining membership is pervasive and inevitable.

Magazines representing the national associations for golf and lawn bowls have been published since the early 20th century. These magazines tend to focus on the interests of the serious and experienced sports person rather than the social, casual or new player. Membership numbers have been published annually for both golf and lawn bowls in these publications providing longitudinal information extending back several decades. Membership issues were rarely discussed prior to the 1980s. Articles about declining

membership in golf and the need for clubs to take a more modern approach have been published with increasing frequency (Appendix 2).

Media articles, predominantly in the *New Zealand Herald*, an Auckland-based daily newspaper, have focused on the merging or relocation of golf clubs, low rental paid by many golf clubs for the lease of public land, a disagreement over the potential sale of land used by a public golf course and the closure of bowling clubs. Many of these articles include comments about declining membership and/or participation in golf and lawn bowls. A selection of radio interviews and podcasts reinforce the social forces acting against clubs. Television drama tends to portray a stereotypic exclusive golf club or aged bowls club (Appendix 2).

A multitude of online resources from Sport New Zealand, club support organisations and national organisations provide suggestions for planning, membership management, recruitment and retention of new members. These range from being highly administrative to templates and ideas for marketing. However, without a basic understanding of the marketing orientation discussed in Section 3.2.1, the use of these resources is likely to be a ‘tick in the box’ exercise. Bowls New Zealand links these resources to their ClubPlan and in doing so are attempting to develop capability in the philosophy of marketing within clubs.

#### **4.6 Chapter summary**

As emphasised by Atkinson and Coffey (2004), data has to be interpreted to derive understanding of a context. As demonstrated in this chapter, there is no shortage of data relating to the sport context in New Zealand from national participation surveys, sport policy documents and national sport associations. Data about membership and participation is readily available. The purpose of this chapter is to provide context against which findings from subsequent chapters can be compared in order to explain or support discussion.

A key principle demonstrated from this chapter is that a specific club or local organisation needs to analyse thoroughly the membership, participation patterns and local context, because these can differ from national or even regional benchmarks. Growth is possible and has been experienced in some geographic areas. Re-definition of membership, as undertaken by Bowls New Zealand, has technically achieved growth in membership although the organisation still regards short-term members as casual participants.

The impact of non-member participation is an issue for both sports and is being addressed differently by golf and lawn bowls. However, both national associations have recognised and taken steps to be inclusive of non-member participants.

Some issues faced by golf and lawn bowls concern sport across New Zealand such as gender equity, the increasingly diverse population of New Zealand, provision of facilities and the increasing range of activities. The current situations for both golf and lawn bowls are shaped by history, as much as by the complex environment in which these sports now operate. This environment includes declining activity levels in New Zealand in general, declining memberships of sports clubs overall and a perception that the majority of the population has increasing pressure on their time.

Articles from general media such as newspapers do not necessarily provide objectivity. However, they demonstrate the negative forces that sport clubs encounter when dealing with membership issues. Opinions in these sources may not be well-supported. Nevertheless, these opinions demonstrate perceptions that exist in the community about sport clubs.

## **CHAPTER 5: STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF MEMBERSHIP DATA – DESCRIPTIVE AND PREDICTIVE**

This chapter explores the ability to predict the non-renewal of annual golf club membership in New Zealand. The study addresses the retention sub-question of this thesis: how can a club retain existing adult members? The rationale for the study is that identification of variables predicting discontinuation of membership can enable clubs to identify at-risk members and subsequently develop and implement strategies to ensure retention.

Downward and Rasciute (2010) show considerable use (nine studies) of logistic regression to identify predictors of sport participation. Four of these studies used logistic regression to predict membership of sport activity groups. The term sport activity group referred to participation in a group sport activity such as club-organised sport or sport organised by an infrastructural group such as a gym (Scheerder, Taks, et al., 2005; Scheerder, Vanreusel, et al., 2005; Taks & Scheerder, 2006). In most studies, the authors used logistic regression to identify demographic factors that were predictive of participation in the sport activity group in a single European country (Scheerder, Taks, et al., 2005; Scheerder, Vanreusel, et al., 2005; Taks & Scheerder, 2006; Wicker et al., 2009). In addition, Ulseth (2004) used logistic regression to compare the use of sports clubs and fitness centres and Cordery et al. (2013) used logistic regression in their study of financial vulnerability.

None of these studies specifically investigated club membership, only club participation, leaving an unexplored gap in our knowledge. The most relevant study using a similar analytic approach is that of McDonald et al. (2014), in which logistic regression identified season ticket holders at risk of not renewing their season ticket.

In a study of golf membership renewal from Sweden (Simpson, 2012; Svenka Golfbundet, 2010; Swedish Golf Federation, 2010), it was reported that a player with a handicap of 26 or greater is at risk of ceasing to be a club member. The relevance of this finding to New Zealand's golf community has yet to be determined.

### **5.1 Overview**

The majority of club-based sports have some form of membership database containing details about current (and former) members. For golf in New Zealand, the membership database covers a considerable period of time and contains playing behaviour as well as demographic data. The database holds records for membership, playing behaviour and a

member's handicap. This centralised handicapping system, based on the United States Golf Association's slope handicapping system, is used by every New Zealand affiliated golf club. A player's handicap reflects their proficiency at golf. The better the player, the lower their handicap. All registered golf club members are recorded in the system with details of their gender, type of membership, number of friends to whom they are linked, club, region and handicap. Each time a competitive player completes a round of golf they are supposed to submit a card relating to that round. Playing behaviour (e.g., frequency and scores) are therefore captured in the system. Handicaps are automatically calculated from these participation records.

Three aspects of this study differentiate it from the body of sport membership retention literature. First, an explicit membership retention variable was used as the dependent factor, whereas most previous studies used participation as the outcome of interest. Second, a wider range of predictor variables were incorporated in this analysis, adding an appropriate level of complexity to what had been overly simplistic analysis. Finally, the nature of this secondary dataset enabled a longitudinal approach which is appropriate for a study of membership retention. Many studies identified by Downward and Rasciute (2010) only used a single time period.

In addition, previous predictive studies in sport management have rarely, if ever, utilised a receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve. This technique has been used in other disciplines, especially medicine and health, and has the distinct benefit of providing a simple, visually interpretable representation of a focal relationship between variables. One example is a multidiscipline team in Auckland, New Zealand who used logistic regression in conjunction with an ROC curve to identify children at risk of maltreatment. From these results, an algorithm was developed to generate an automated list of at-risk children for preventive follow-up (Centre for Applied Research in Economics, 2012). If a similar approach could be developed in the golf community, specific members could be targeted with retention strategies.

The aim of this study was to identify whether any indicators or a combination of indicators within the New Zealand membership system could predict the likelihood of a member discontinuing membership. This would enable clubs to implement more effective member retention strategies. The study is delimited to the formal membership of golf clubs affiliated to a national organisation.

## **5.2 Method**

This section explains the dataset used in this study; the processes for checking, coding and analysing the data and a description of the sample.

### **5.2.1 Background of the dataset**

New Zealand Golf provided access to data from the membership database. Data for 2009–2012 was retrieved by the database manager. In Section 2.7.3, general issues related to secondary data analysis is discussed. In this chapter, specific issues related to the dataset for this study are discussed.

Secondary data can be collected for a purpose other than its current use (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Zikmund et al., 2016). The value of secondary research data is that it can provide good quality data quickly and cost-effectively and it enables longitudinal analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The custom-built, secondary dataset described in Section 5.1 demonstrates these characteristics.

Secondary data may have limitations in answering a research question (McDaniel & Gates, 2013). The membership database for New Zealand Golf contains specific variables required for the management of golf membership and handicaps. This placed a limitation on the variables available for the study of membership non-renewal, because other relevant variables may not be available. One example of an unavailable variable is the length of time that a player had been a member. The study of (McDonald et al., 2014) identified this as a key variable in other customer retention settings.

When using secondary data, the researcher needs to be concerned about the purpose for which the data was originally collected, and whether sufficient is known about the method of data collection (Denscombe, 2014). This includes ensuring that the data was accurately recorded. For this study, sufficient information about the source was available to form a judgement that the data is reliable and appropriate for the current project. The data was collected for the purpose of providing accurate records of memberships and handicaps for the management of a golf club. This purpose is not in conflict with the research question and is actually directly related to it. The process for collecting and recording the data in the system was documented. Members provide the information and have the opportunity to check their personal information. Information about the type of membership influences the membership fee paid and benefits available to the member. The only aspect of the data that may not be accurate is the playing history. This relies on a member submitting the results of each game played. The interpretation of the analysis from playing history considers the possibility of this type of inaccuracy. One

key benefit of this dataset was the provision of most data in raw form, with little aggregation. Variables such as age, number of scores, number of home scores and handicap were provided as ratio data and allowed for maximum flexibility in analysis.

One form of aggregation had been undertaken which proved problematic. For each player, their total scores for a 12-month period (January–December) had been aggregated for each of the four years. This made it difficult to analyse the extent of playing in the time frame immediately prior to ceasing membership, especially with each club determining its own annual subscription start date. Players could discontinue membership at any time of year. When looking at playing history in any one year, it was necessary to consider whether a player had discontinued their membership early in the calendar year or later.

Two approaches were used to counter this problem. First, the database manager created an additional variable for the people who had resigned—the number of games played in the three months prior to resignation. This was useful in terms of profiling the players but could not be used in the comparative predictive analysis because a similar variable was not available for continuing members. The second approach was to use the presence or absence of a player's handicap as an indication of participation in golf. However, this indicator is more than merely a record of playing as it shows whether the player had engaged with golf. The absence of a handicap indicates either that a player had either not played golf a sufficient number of times to gain a handicap and/or had not submitted a card.

### **5.2.2 Data checking**

Preliminary data analysis and data cleaning were undertaken in order to prepare the raw data for analysis. Data were checked for errors and missing data. Frequency distributions for key variables gave a 'feel' for the overall patterns in the data (Hair et al., 2014; Zikmund et al., 2016).

Frequency distributions for demographic and membership variables were checked against the New Zealand Golf Annual Report for 2012, which showed membership for the previous four years, and against Sport New Zealand's Participation Survey 2015. This check established that the sample matched the population from which it had been drawn. A large number of clubs, 308 of the 393 clubs in New Zealand, were represented in the sample. The gender split was similar to the membership data in the *New Zealand Golf Annual Report*. In terms of geographic spread, the sample also matched the population, with the proportion from each region consistent with the annual report, as was the

proportion of annual, secondary, summer and life memberships (New Zealand Golf, 2012). The age profile of the sample was compared with that from a Sport New Zealand survey. It showed a skew towards the over 50 age group, which was consistent with the findings of Sport New Zealand (2015g).

Given that the database system mandates the entry of key information about members, it is not surprising that there was very little missing data. The only variable with significant missing data was age, which was available for only half the cases. A comparison of cases in the dataset, with and without age, was undertaken using cross-tabulations of all variables. There was no statistically significant difference between the people who gave their date of birth and those who did not.

Consistency checks within records showed a high level of consistency. Only 115 cases were removed from the dataset because they had inconsistent membership data. Examples of inconsistent membership data included no data for 2009 but data for subsequent years, or secondary club membership with no primary club for one or more years.

### **5.2.3 Coding and recoding of data**

The data was coded and recoded. Coding involved converting descriptive variables into numeric format to identify patterns in the data. Recoding involved compressing the data into variables suitable for statistical analyses such as logistic regression.

The first use of coding was a conversion of semantic variables into numeric formats. These variables were gender, type of membership, region, club and if a 9-hole member. Secondly, codes crucial to the analysis process were then created to reflect patterns of membership: a) continuation of membership; b) final year of membership; and c) number of memberships held by a person in any one year. The continuation of membership identified people in one of three categories: a) players with continued membership throughout the period; b) people who discontinued membership permanently (that is ceased at some point for the remainder of the four-year period); and c) people with fluctuating membership (that is discontinued and then reinstated membership). The two groups of greatest interest for this study were members that discontinued permanently during the four-year period and members who continued throughout the four-year period.

Recoding was needed for the compression of data. The raw data enabled the calculation of mean scores; however, for frequency distributions, the number of response types created a very long list. Recoding of several variables into approximately 10 groups for each variable was undertaken in order to obtain manageable frequency distributions.

These variables were age (for those who gave their date of birth), number of games played, number of home games played and handicap. Descriptive statistics (mean, median, standard deviation) were calculated on the original variables, with the recoded variables being used for frequency distributions. In addition, compression of data was needed to create dummy variables for use in logistic regression (two-code variables with 0 and 1 indicating the presence or absence of a characteristic such as handicap, playing 9-hole golf).

#### **5.2.4 Data analysis**

Analysis of the data was undertaken with descriptive statistics, logistic regression and an ROC curve. Descriptive statistics provided basic information about the sample and a comparison between key groups. Logistic regression analysis of player demographic and behaviour data identified indicators that predicted the likelihood of a member discontinuing or continuing membership. The discontinuation or continuation of club membership was the dependent variable.

The descriptive statistics consisted of frequency distributions, cross-tabulations, measures of central tendency (mean and median), and measures of dispersion (range and standard deviation). In addition, tests of difference, chi-square and *t*-tests, identified whether differences between discontinuing and continuing members were statistically significant.

Logistic regression is used for predictive analysis involving a dichotomous dependent variable. This technique can include several independent variables to predict the probability that a person will belong to one of two categories (Hair et al., 2014). Logistic regression is an attempt to find a variable or combination of variables that lead to an event such as discontinuing club membership (Zikmund et al., 2016). The predictor variables can be either continuous or categorical. In this case, the two mutually exclusive categories forming the dependent variable were discontinued and continuing membership.

The forced entry method using SPSS was used for logistic regression. With this procedure, all predictor variables are tested as a block, rather than a stepwise method. Stepwise methods have been criticised because of the possible influence of random variation in the data (Pallant, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). The process for interpreting logistic regression results is described by Pallant (2016). Three types of output are analysed: 1) the strength of the model in predicting the outcome; 2) the statistical usefulness of the model; and 3) the importance and effect of each variable.

The initial output for assessing the strength of a model has three components. First, the chi-square in the omnibus tests of model coefficients shows whether the result is statistically significant. Second, the Hosmer and Lemeshow test is purported to be the most reliable test of model fit (Pallant, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). However, the third and most compelling component is the success in correctly predicting the outcome for cases. Logistic regression produces a classification table showing the accuracy of classification and notes incorrect (false) and correct (true) classifications.

The second output, covering the statistical usefulness of the model, shows the variation in the dependent variable explained by the model. Cox and Snell R-squared and Nagelkerke R-squared both report variation. These two measures show the maximum and minimum variation likely to be explained by a set of variables in the logistic regression model.

Having determined the predictive value of the model, it is then necessary to use the third type of output to identify which variables are important. In the output, variables are identified that have a significant impact in predicting the outcome; the magnitude of the impact; and also, the nature of the impact (whether it is positive or negative). Of particular importance is the odds ratio which shows the probability of a change in the outcome for every unit of change in the predictor variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For a continuous variable, Pampel (2000) suggests converting the odds ratio to a percentage (i.e., what percentage of change in the dependent variable can be expected for each unit of change in the independent variable).

Three issues to consider with logistic regression are sample size (Pallant, 2016), possibility of multi-collinearity or correlation between independent variables (Pallant, 2016) and missing data. The sample size of the initial dataset was large enough to support analysis of sub-groups. However, even with this large sample, the number of people who discontinued membership in any one year was considerably smaller than the number who continued. This made single-year analysis difficult. However, analysis of all discontinuing members in the four-year period was possible. Because handicap was strongly correlated with other measures of playing behaviour, only one of these variables could be used in the model. Handicap was used as the other measures did not produce a meaningful result. In SPSS, any cases with missing data for variables are discarded as part of logistic regression analysis. This was an issue for age which proved to be a key variable and was only available for half the sample. The sample was large enough to perform analysis using only those for whom age was available. This was justifiable

because previous analyses indicated differences on all variables between the players with age records and those without age records were not statistically significant.

### **5.2.5 Receiver operating characteristic curves**

An ROC curve conveys the predictive power of logistic regression analysis and the correct classification of cases. In statistical terms, sensitivity is described as a ‘true positive’ (i.e., the correct classification of the characteristic under investigation). In this study, a true positive is discontinuation of membership. However, the term ‘true positive’ is not used in this thesis as it would be confusing as discontinuation of membership is not positive in a practical sense. Specificity is the correct classification of the alternative option (Pallant, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In this thesis, sensitivity and specificity simply describe correct classification. Sensitivity is the correct classification for discontinuing members and specificity the correct classification for continuing members. An ROC curve is considered more informative than a classification table, not only because of the visual representation of sensitivity and specificity, but because it summarises the predictive power for all possible cut or cut-off points (Agresti, 2010).

The default cut point for initial analysis in logistic regression is usually 0.5. This places equal importance on sensitivity and specificity. The cut point can be used to place greater emphasis on either one of these. For example, if the cut point is lowered, more emphasis is placed on sensitivity (the correct classification or identification of discontinuing members). If the cut is increased, more emphasis is placed on specificity (the correct classification or identification of continuing members). This is demonstrated in the results in Section 5.3.2. The variation in cut point becomes important if the analysis is later extended to create an algorithm to identify members likely to discontinue membership.

### **5.2.6 Sample**

A random sample of 5,000 members from 2009 was provided by the database manager. Membership information for the same sample of members was then taken for the subsequent three years: 2010, 2011, and 2012. For each member, all memberships held by that person were captured in the data. After removal of junior members, corporate members, summer and life members and a few members with incomplete records, a sample of 4,627 adult annual members remained. A frequency distribution of the sample is provided in Table 23. Just over half (52%) the cases in the sample were continuing members. Forty percent discontinued permanently during the four-year period. The

remaining 8% were in some way unstable in that they stopped and started membership during the four years.

Table 23. Continuation of membership for 2009 sample

Continuation of membership	<i>n</i>	%
Continuing members – Held annual membership throughout the four-year period	2,394	52.1
Discontinued annual members – Resigned or did not renew membership	1,852	40.4
Discontinued in 2009	667	14.4
Discontinued in 2010	536	11.5
Discontinued in 2011	370	8.0
Discontinued in 2012	279	6.0
Unstable members – Membership stopped and started during the four-year period	345	7.5
Total	4,627	100.0

Table 23 shows that the largest number of discontinuations was in the first year of analysis with a smaller number in each successive year. This diminishing rate of loss over time aligns with the findings of Reichheld and Sasser (1990) and East and Hammond (1996) and existing theories about membership discontinuation.

In addition to the fluctuations in membership, each year approximately 6% of the continuing members changed their primary club. This study analysed players who discontinued membership of golf clubs. A player who moved their membership from one club to another is not shown as a discontinuing member. This membership change may not concern New Zealand Golf; however, it demonstrates that membership loss at club-level may differ from the national-level figures.

### 5.3 Results

Given the magnitude of the dataset, the data were analysed in three ways, each with a different purpose. The first analysis was descriptive and the second and third analyses were predictive. Collectively, the three analytical processes provide a more nuanced understanding of membership retention. The first analysis (Section 5.3.1) is based on all members who discontinued their membership permanently during the four-year period. These members were compared with the sample who had continued their membership during the same time frame. The purpose is to highlight the differences between discontinuing and continuing club members. The second analysis (Section 5.3.2) used logistic regression to investigate if variables in the membership database could predict membership discontinuation. The third analysis (Section 5.3.3) was a longitudinal

analysis and used only members who discontinued prior to the final year of the four-year period. The aim was to see whether there were indications of discontinuation in the preceding years.

### **5.3.1 Profile of discontinued members versus continued members**

Descriptive statistics can provide a profile that identifies key differences between groups of people, in this case discontinuing and continuing members. Pearson chi-square and *t*-tests identified whether these descriptive differences were statistically significant.

Four differences between the two groups were identified (Table 24). The most dramatic difference related to whether or not the members had a handicap. Over half the discontinuing members did not have a handicap at the beginning of the year. At the beginning of the final year of analysis, only 13% of continuing members had no handicap. The second obvious difference was that discontinuing members were less likely to be linked to friends in the membership system. Seventy-four percent of discontinued members had no links to friends compared with 42% of continuing members. The other two differences between the groups were less pronounced. The discontinued members were slightly more likely to play 9-hole golf and were less likely to be a member of more than one club. In terms of gender, no difference between the two groups was evident.

Pearson chi-square tests were used to identify the statistical significance of differences between discontinuing and continuing members. The chi-square results are: handicap  $\chi^2 = 1680.7$ , *df* 1, *p* < .01; number of friends  $\chi^2 = 458.140$ , *df* 1, *p* = < .01; number of memberships  $\chi^2 = 84.94$ , *df*, 1, *p* = < .01 ; 9-hole membership  $\chi^2 = 10.454$ , *df*, 1, *p* = < .01; gender  $\chi^2 = 2.995$ , *df* 1, *p* = .084.

Table 24. Comparison of continuing and discontinued members

Variable	Continuing members ( <i>n</i> = 2,394)	Discontinuing members (2009–2012) ( <i>n</i> = 1,852)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 4,246)	$\chi^2$ sig. <i>p</i>
	%	%	%	
Handicap at beginning of year				< .01*
Had handicap	<b>86.4</b>	24.0	59.2	
No handicap	13.6	<b>76.0</b>	40.8	
Number of friends				
None	41.6	<b>74.2</b>	55.8	< .01*
One or more	<b>58.9</b>	25.8	44.5	
Number of memberships				
One	<b>90.9</b>	<b>97.7</b>	93.9	< .01*
More than one	9.1	2.3	6.1	
9-hole				< .01*
No	<b>91.5</b>	<b>88.6</b>	90.2	
Yes	8.5	11.4	9.8	
Gender				
Male	73.8	76.1	74.8	.084
Female	26.2	23.9	25.2	

Note: \* Chi-square statistically significant at 0.01.

An obvious difference between discontinuing and continuing members is their age. The average age of the discontinued members was 40 years and the average age of the continuing members was 55 years. The age distribution (Table 25) shows that discontinuing members were more likely to be younger people under 30 years of age. Over the age of approximately 50 years, players were less likely to discontinue. Chi-square and *t*-tests show that these differences were statistically significant:  $\chi^2 = 300.740$ , *df* 8, *p* < .01; *t* = 16.984, *df* 1740.228, *p* < .01.

Table 25. Age distribution of continuing and discontinued members

Age group	Membership pattern		Total ( <i>n</i> = 1,960)
	Continuing membership ( <i>n</i> = 1,091)	Discontinued during 2009–2012 ( <i>n</i> = 869)	
18–20 years	7.4%	21.9%	13.8%
21–30 years	7.7%	25.2%	15.5%
31–40 years	5.2%	7.5%	6.2%
41–50 years	10.3%	11.3%	10.7%
51–60 years	22.3%	14.4%	18.8%
61–70 years	27.6%	9.6%	19.6%
71–80 years	15.5%	6.9%	11.7%
81 years and over	4.0%	3.3%	3.7%
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>M</i>	55.2	40.1	
<i>SD</i>	18.1	20.6	

Note: This sample size was reduced as age is an optional variable in the membership data system. A total of 1,960 players had their age recorded in the dataset for this study.

The mean scores show a key variable that is not related to discontinuation of membership—the size of the handicap (Table 26). Whilst there may be a difference between discontinuing and continuing players in terms of whether they have a handicap, where a discontinuing player has a handicap, on average, it is no different to continuing members. Both groups had an average handicap of 19. The results of *t*-tests for this variable were: handicap  $t = .572$ ,  $df\ 2511$ ,  $p = .567$ .

Two variables on which the two groups did differ was the number of linked friends in the membership system and the extent to which they had played golf away from their home club. Discontinuing members tended to have fewer friends (on average two compared with eight for their continuing counterparts). They played golf away from their home course to a greater extent than continuing members. They had played on average 68% of their games at their home, whilst continued members had played on average 75%. However, this variable is not an effective predictor in logistic regression possibly due to the level of missing data. The results of *t*-tests for these variables were: number of friends  $t = 9.195$ ,  $df\ 2848.701$ ,  $p < .01$ ; percentage of games played at home club  $t = 2.895$ ,  $df\ 604.636$ ,  $p < .01$ .

Table 26. Handicap, number of friends and location of games

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -test sig.
Handicap				
Continuing members	957	19.44	8.331	.567
Discontinued 2009–2012	204	19.19	8.501	
Number of friends				
Continuing members	2,383	8.64	31.990	< .01*
Discontinued 2009–2012	1,852	2.32	8.949	
Percentage of games played at home club				
Continuing members	959	76.3%	27.2	< .01*
Discontinued 2009–2012	229	71.0%	38.0	

Note: \* *t*-test statistically significant at 0.01.

### 5.3.2 Predictors of discontinuing membership

Several logistic regression analyses were undertaken. The variables in the analyses covered demographic variables (age and gender); membership information (number of memberships; 9-hole, number of friends in the membership system) and playing information (level of participation; level of handicap; change in handicap between membership years; presence and absence of handicap; extent of playing away from home club). Mindful of the need to ensure little multi-collinearity between variables, related variables (such as participation and size of handicap) were not included together. The early analyses showed that lack of handicap was more strongly predictive of discontinuing membership than lack of participation.

The final model included three variables (age, the number of friends linked to the player in the membership database, whether or not the player had a handicap). Younger players with no handicap and no linked friends were more at risk of discontinuing membership. The following presentation of statistics related to the logistic regression analysis was suggested by Pallant (2016). The full model containing these predictors was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(3, n = 1,952), df 1013.922, p < .001$  indicating that the model could distinguish between discontinued members and continuing members. The model as a whole explained between 40.5% (Cox and Snell R-squared) and 54.2% (Nagelkerke R-squared) of the variance in membership behaviour. The Hosmer and Lemeshow test indicated that the result was statistically significant ( $\chi^2 10.68, p > .05$ ).

The key variable in predicting discontinued membership is the lack of handicap, with age and number of friends having less predictive power. All variables made a statistically significant contribution to the model (Table 27). The odds ratio (Exp (B)) shows the likely change in the outcome when the value of the predictor increases by one unit (Pallant, 2016; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). For the categorical variable of whether

or not the player had a handicap, a player with no handicap was 16.4 times more likely to discontinue membership. For age, the odds ratio was .973. For every year that a player gets older, they are .973 times or 3% less likely to discontinue membership. Similarly, for every additional friend that a player has in the membership database, they are .971 or 3% less likely to discontinue their membership.

Table 27. Variables in the logistic regression equation

	B	SE	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Age	-.027	.003	77.970	1	.000	.973
Totalfriends	-.032	.007	21.813	1	.000	.969
Handicap (Yes/No)	2.797	.132	445.897	1	.000	16.399
Constant	.150	.183	.670	1	.413	1.161

Note: a. Variable entered: Age, Totalfriends, Handicap.

Sensitivity is the correct classification of discontinuing members and specificity is the correct classification of continuing members. With a cut point of 0.5 (equal emphasis on sensitivity and specificity), the model correctly classified 83.1% of total cases: 88.6% of continuing members and 76.3% of discontinuing members (Table 28). The predictive ability for continuing members is stronger than for discontinuing ones.

Table 28. Classification table

Observed	Pattern of membership	Predicted		% correct
		Pattern of membership		
		Continued membership	Discontinued 2009–2012	
Pattern of membership	Continued membership	959	124	88.6
	Discontinued 2009–2012	206	663	76.3
Overall %				83.0

Note: Cut value = .500.

The ROC curve is a visual presentation of sensitivity and specificity and it conveys predictive power at a glance. The further the ROC curve is from the diagonal line, the greater the predictive power of the model. For this regression analysis the area under the ROC curve is 87.8% (Figure 8), which demonstrates strong predictive power. Predictive power of between 80–89% is regarded as strong (Kleinbaum et al., 2010).

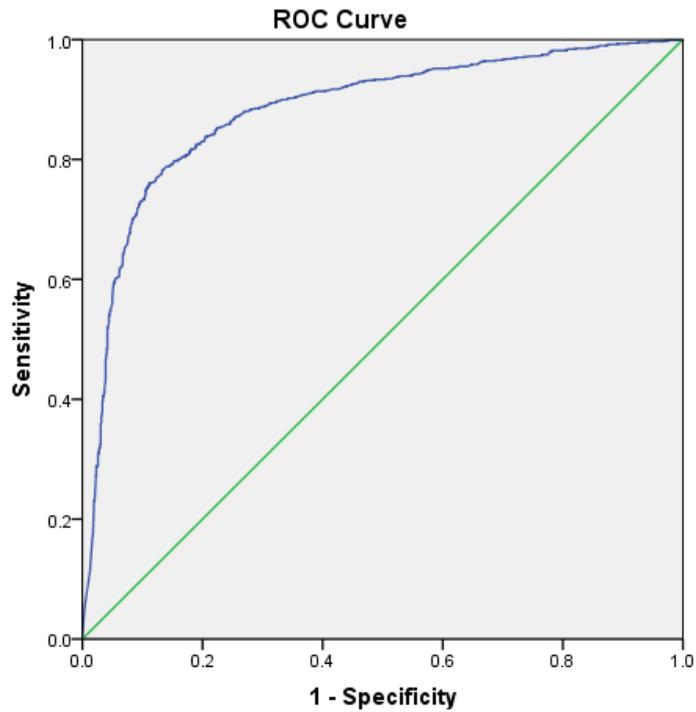


Figure 8. Receiver operating characteristic curve for golf membership discontinuation

The point of the ROC curve closest to 1.0 (top left-hand corner) is at sensitivity at 0.8 and 1 - specificity at 0.2. Table 29 shows the improvement in the correct classification of discontinued members when the cut value was reduced. However, the correct classification of continued members reduces to a level (68%) with which a club is unlikely to be comfortable.

Table 29. Classification table with cut value of 0.2

Observed		Predicted		
		Pattern of membership		% correct
		Continued m/ship	Discontinued 2009–2012	
Pattern of membership	Continued membership	731	352	67.5
	Discontinued 2009–2012	94	775	<b>89.2</b>
Overall %				77.2

Note: Cut value = 0.2.

Table 30 shows the improvement in correct classification of continuing members when the cut value was increased to 0.8.

Table 30. Classification table with cut value of 0.8

Observed		Predicted		
		Pattern of membership		% correct
		Continued m/ship	Discontinued 2009–2012	
Pattern of membership	Continued membership	1026	57	<b>94.7</b>
	Discontinued 2009–2012	369	500	57.5
Overall %				78.2

Note: Cut value =0.8.

If the absence of handicap is such a strong contributor to membership discontinuation, it is questionable whether the use of three variables is better than simply looking at whether or not a player has a handicap. Most of the indicators for assessing the fit of the model suggest that the combination of three variables is no better than the absence of a handicap. However, the three variable model explains more of the difference between discontinued and continuing members and there is also a slight improvement in the classification of continuing members (Table 31).

Table 31. Three variable model compared with individual variables

Variable	$\chi^2$	<i>P</i>	Cox and Snell	Nagelkerke	Hosmer and Lemeshow	Correct classification		
						Overall	Cont.	Disc.
Age	267.74	< .01	.13	.17	NS	68.6	79.0	55.5
No friends	224.10	< .01	.11	.15	NS	67.9	59.7	78.1
No handicap	889.94	< .01	.37	.49	Not given	82.8	87.7	76.5
All three variables	1031.9	< .01	.41	.54	>.05	83.1	88.6	76.3

### 5.3.3 Longitudinal analysis of members who discontinued in 2011

Longitudinal analysis was undertaken for the people who discontinued membership in 2011. For those players, playing behaviour data was available for the preceding two years. This analysis was undertaken using cross-tabulations and mean scores, as the number of people who discontinued in that year did not enable effective logistic regression analysis to be performed.

In the preceding two years, discontinuing members played less golf than the continuing members and showed greater instability in their playing patterns. Discontinued members played at an average annual rate of 14 times two years prior to discontinuing membership and this reduced to 11 times in the year prior to discontinuing membership (Table 32). Continuing members played on average twice as much as the

discontinuing members and showed greater consistency, playing on average 33 games in each of 2009 and 2010. The declining rate of play between 2009 and 2010 for discontinued members was a statistically significant difference at 0.01 level. On average, the number of games over the two-year period diminished by an average of 3.1 games ( $t = 3.5$ ,  $df = 337$ , significant at .01).

Table 32. Number of games played in 2009 and 2010

Number of games	Continuing members ( $n = 2,663$ )		Discontinuing members ( $n = 375$ )	
	2009	2010	2009	2010
0	13.3%	13.0%	28.8%	34.7%
1	3.1%	3.3%	6.7%	6.4%
2–10	15.2%	13.4%	27.5%	28.3%
11–20	10.8%	11.1%	13.3%	12.0%
21–30	11.3%	11.6%	7.7%	5.9%
31 games or more	46.3%	47.6%	16.0%	4.3%
Totals	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>M</i>	32.8	33.4	14.1	11.7
<i>SD</i>	30.7	30.4	20.0	19.1

Non-participation was higher for discontinuing members than continuing members. Thirty-five percent of discontinuing members did not play at all the year prior to their membership lapsing. Twenty-nine percent did not play two years prior. However, the difficulty with the early detection of non-participation is that it applies to a significant number of continuing members. Thirteen percent of continuing members also did not play in each of the two years of this study. Whilst this is a smaller percentage, the number of people who played no games and remained a member was higher than the number of people who later discontinued. Hence, it is a reduction in playing shown by the mean scores that is important.

The main months for discontinuing membership were March–April (Table 33), reflecting the tendency for clubs to undertake membership renewal at the end of the summer months. In the three months prior to discontinuation, 82% of discontinuing players did not play or record any rounds of golf. Even players who discontinued after the summer months had low participation in the sport. This could indicate early warning signs with diminishing participation in the years prior to membership discontinuation, and then negligible participation in the months immediately prior.

Table 33. Games played prior to discontinuing membership

Number of games	Month of discontinuing membership					Total ( <i>n</i> = 1,833)
	Jan–Feb ( <i>n</i> = 372)	Mar–Apr ( <i>n</i> = 590)	May–Jun ( <i>n</i> = 259)	July–Sept ( <i>n</i> = 224)	Oct–Dec ( <i>n</i> = 388)	
No games	77.7%	78.3%	89.6%	89.7%	83.2%	82.2%
One game	6.5%	7.8%	3.5%	4.5%	4.9%	5.9%
Two games	4.8%	3.4%	2.7%	1.3%	2.8%	3.2%
Three or more	11.0%	10.5%	4.2%	4.5%	9.0%	8.7%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: The sample size for this analysis was 1,833 rather than 1,852 due to missing data for the month of resignation.

## 5.4 Discussion

The aim of this study was to identify whether any indicators or a combination of indicators within a golf membership database could predict the likelihood of a member discontinuing membership so that membership retention strategies can be implemented by golf clubs. Descriptive and predictive analyses contributed to an increased understanding of golf membership. The results are consistent with McDonald et al.'s (2014) study of season ticket holders and the Svenka Golförbundet (2010) study based in Sweden. The results indicate issues for which qualitative research is needed to understand more about the underlying cause of the patterns shown by the statistical analyses.

The indicators of discontinuation of membership can be identified from basic statistics as well as from logistic regression. Some differences in the profile of discontinuing and continuing members were slight (e.g., number of memberships held, 9-hole membership, playing away from home club) and some are more dramatic (e.g., age, having a handicap, having friends in the system). The variables with dramatic descriptive differences were also the predictors of discontinuation in logistic regression.

Of equal importance, the analysis demonstrates variables that are not predictors of discontinuing membership in New Zealand, such as gender, level of handicap and declining handicap. The relationship between frequency of playing and membership continuation is complex, as shown by longitudinal analysis over three years.

The characteristics predictive of discontinuing membership are an absence of handicap, being younger and linked to few, if any, friends in the handicap system. The final logistic regression model differentiates between discontinuing and continuing members; however, the practical application of the profile to a specific group of people such as a club may be difficult. Clubs involved with this thesis did not find the results easy to utilise for specific retention strategies. Instead, the results contributed to a more

general understanding and prompted more specific investigation of the club's own membership data. This does not preclude further work with this model at a later date.

Continuing members can be identified with greater certainty than discontinuing members. This finding is consistent with the study of season ticket holders undertaken by McDonald et al. (2014), and creates difficulties for a club attempting to use the results to develop retention strategies aimed at specific members. A further difficulty for golf club managers is that discontinuation of membership can be a quick process for some players and a slow process for other players. Some players continue with no handicap for some years before discontinuing and a number of continuing members also demonstrate the trait as well. While this was the strongest variable in the predictive equation, numerically, no-handicappers who continue membership outnumbered those who discontinue membership in any one year.

It is not clear whether the reasons for the discontinuing membership relate to factors controllable by golf clubs. The younger age profile of discontinued members could indicate mobility and lifecycle issues of the under 30 age group. However, for other discontinued members, a weak engagement with golf is indicated by lack of handicap, absence of friends in the membership system and diminished participation. A lack of friends in the system can indicate either a lack of engagement or an insufficient network with whom to play a round of golf. The extent to which reduced engagement with the game is an issue is discussed in Chapter 6 with qualitative data and attitudinal information.

In both Sweden and New Zealand, handicap as a variable was reported as an important indicator of the likelihood of discontinued membership. However, differences between the two studies and countries make it difficult to compare the results. The Swedish study was based on reported intention of continuing or discontinuing membership. The study in this chapter is an investigation of actual membership continuation. The method of handicap calculation differs between the two countries. In Sweden, all players receive a high handicap when they join. Through playing and improving, handicap can reduce. In New Zealand, players need to submit a score for a sufficient number of games to achieve a handicap. The high handicappers in Sweden would be divided into two groups in New Zealand: those who do not play well (and so have a high handicap) and those with no handicap due to an insufficient number of submitted scores to obtain a handicap. This chapter adds a New Zealand perspective to the often-quoted Swedish study that high handicappers are at greatest risk of discontinuing membership.

In technical terms, the strengths of the study outweigh its limitations. A key limitation of the study is that analysis is restricted to variables in the membership dataset. Key variables may be missing, for example, the length of time a player had been a member. The research empirically shows the demographic characteristics and playing behaviour of discontinuing members from a large longitudinal dataset.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

The value of this study is the contribution that it makes to understanding the difference between discontinuing and continuing members. The basic descriptive statistics in many respects are as useful and can easily be analysed by club managers with data specific to their club. Customer retention literature shows the specific nature of retention issues to an industry. Therefore, it is important for a sporting body to identify customer retention patterns relevant to that body. A national database of membership can indicate issues within a sport. A similar analysis could be undertaken for a club or smaller organisation within a region. If the sample size of members precludes logistic regression analysis, cross-tabulations can provide comparison of discontinuing and continuing members, provided there is a membership database with sufficient variables. Whilst the logistic regression and ROC curve added predictive insights to the study, the simple cross-tabulations on their own contributed considerable understanding. Even a club with limited data and resources could undertake that analysis. As shown in Chapter 7, the case study club in this thesis chose to take a club-specific approach rather than attempt to operationalise the results of this national study. The national results provided useful guidance and an overview of issues to investigate within their club.

Golf is in a fortunate position in New Zealand, and in fact, in most countries. The handicap system means that data about players is collected seamlessly as a matter of process. In New Zealand, the golf members most likely to discontinue membership are players with no handicap, who are younger (under 30 years) and who are not linked to any friends in the handicap system. Qualitative investigation into the issues behind engagement with the game in Chapter 6 complement this quantitative study.

## **5.6 Summary of chapter**

The aim of this study was to investigate the use of membership data in predicting whether or not players renewed their annual subscription to member-owned golf clubs in New Zealand. In this study, descriptive statistics, logistic regression and an ROC curve

analysis of membership of New Zealand golf clubs over a four-year period were presented.

Qualitative research in Chapter 6 generates greater understanding about the engagement of members and complements this study. The club-specific analyses in Chapters 7 provides a useful comparison. This statistical study and the subsequent two chapters are discussed comparatively in Chapter 9—the discussion for the whole thesis. In line with the pragmatist approach, methods can be combined in creative ways to understand a research problem as thoroughly as possible (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Whilst specific retention interventions were not achieved directly from the study in this chapter, it forms an important part of this multi-method thesis.

## CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY

This qualitative study explores the behaviour and attitudes of lawn bowlers and golfers towards club membership. The thesis questions relating to retention and recruitment of adult members draw on an understanding of a) the process and influences for club membership decisions, and b) administrators' perceptions of the process. Exploratory research can investigate phenomenon such as club membership by exploring motivations and factors that lead to decisions (Ritchie & Ormston, 2014). This chapter therefore complements and helps to explain the statistical information in the two previous chapters.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with lawn bowlers, golfers and golf club employees. The interviews focused on membership from a club perspective. The study included only a limited number of non-member players and former players. However, these alternative perspectives were evident in past non-member and pre-membership experiences of existing members.

### 6.1 Method

In this chapter a *player* is a person who plays the sport while a *participant* is a person who took part in an interview. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken in three samples: 14 lawn bowls players, 28 golf players and five paid employees (managers and a coach) of golf clubs. Bowling clubs in Auckland typically do not employ managers or coaches. Most interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes, with the shortest being 12 minutes and the longest 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and imported into NVivo and then an Excel spreadsheet. Confidentiality, informed consent and research processes were handled as outlined in the ethics application approval (Appendix 1). The data collection, analysis methods and sampling process are discussed in this section.

#### 6.1.1 Data collection

The interviews were semi-structured, with the interviewer asking questions similar to the natural flow of conversation, guided by topics rather than specific questions. This type of interview can generate in-depth data about specific topics, with the interviewer probing (i.e., asking further questions) for greater clarity of information (Gray, 2014). Participants can also raise their own topics of interest in addition to the interviewer's prompts (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Bryman, 2016; Denscombe, 2014; Myers, 2013).

Such interviews generate personal accounts, understanding of the personal context within which activity takes place and exploration of issues (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lewis & McNaughton Nicholls, 2014). These characteristics make semi-structured interviews appropriate for investigating decision-making and thought processes (Bryman, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are usually undertaken with one participant at a time. However, for two interviews, two sets of friends expressed a preference to be interviewed together. The advantage of a one-on-one interview is the freedom from influence from other people. Without this influence it is easier to follow a participant's story and thought process (Denscombe, 2014). The benefit of interviewing one person at a time was evident when analysing the two-person interviews. Even with two people at the interview, the thought process of one individual was harder to identify from the transcript.

Semi-structured interviews overcome the disadvantages of completely structured and completely unstructured interviews (Myers, 2013). Structured interviews do not allow participants the freedom to pursue new areas of inquiry but have the advantage of consistency across interviews. However, unstructured interviews are problematic if the participant is not talkative. Semi-structured interviews have structure while still allowing for improvisation. Savin-Baden and Major (2013) suggest that the semi-structured interview keeps the conversation more focused than an unstructured interview. The structure allows for cross-case comparison, which was important in this study.

A disadvantage of interviews is the time needed to undertake, transcribe and analyse (Denscombe, 2014). Even one interview produces considerable data, with "many hundreds of 'bites' of information" (Ritchie et al., 2014, p. 117). Significant effort is required for the management, quality control and analysis of qualitative data. The individual flow in each interview creates a sequence of data that is often non-linear. For example, when describing playing history, participants suddenly expanded on incidents mentioned earlier in the interview. The challenges created by the quantity and sometimes unwieldy nature of the data can be mitigated to some extent by organised analysis.

Three strategies provided structure for analysis. First, immediately following each interview, I wrote a short paragraph summarising the key experiences in the interview. Second, for most interviews, a transcription service provided a transcript. Third, I read each transcript while listening to the recording. Key elements were coded for easy identification. The key elements were early stages of playing the sport, identifying where to play, changing clubs, ceasing to play either temporarily or permanently, non-member playing experience, membership issues and possible verbatim quotes. Transcripts with

these broad codes were stored in NVivo to aid retrieval of data and themes during analysis.

### 6.1.2 Interview topic guide

The topic guide for the interviews followed examples of Braun and Clarke (2013) and Bryman and Bell (2015). It was based on issues from literature, secondary research and suggestions from club liaison employees in the golf and bowls national organisations. The questions were predominantly open-ended to provide flexibility to participants when responding. Probing or follow-up questions were asked to add clarity. From time to time I summed up key points, which were checked with participants to ensure that their perspectives had been fully understood.

The interviews began with a general question about sport to see how golf or bowls fitted into the participants' sporting life. Participants then explained their experience in golf or lawn bowls from their first experience up to the time of the interview. Any alteration in their approach to the game was probed, in particular, changes between club and non-member playing.

Table 34. Interview topic guide items

Interview dimensions
a) Sport played in adult life
b) Identification of the way participants started to play golf/lawn bowls
c) Identification of where and how to play initially and after playing for a while, especially changes of club or non-member playing
d) Current playing of lawn bowls/golf (e.g., where, when, how often, how long, who with, payment/membership arrangements for playing?)
e) Factors relating to participation such as influences on decision-making and membership
f) Suggestions for lawn bowls/golf clubs—advice to an organisation who wanted to improve the environment for playing golf/lawn bowls.
g) Any other comments
h) Any comment about dress code in golf*
i) Attitude towards ownership of clubs*

Note: \* Following the first 12 interviews, questions h) and i) were added at the end of the interview if not spontaneously covered by the participant.

Additional questions about dress code and the ownership of clubs were added following the initial interviews to explore issues not raised spontaneously by participants. Few golf participants in the initial interviews mentioned dress code—a prevalent issue in media reports. Bowls and golf participants in the early interviews talked about their clubs in different ways with a less possessive tone from the golf players.

### 6.1.3 Analysis of interviews

Two stages of analyses, inductive and deductive, were undertaken. The first inductive stage comprised analysis based on the data. Second, at the deductive stage, data was compared with themes from literature. The data-driven analysis for player interviews had two components: a) to follow the thought process and actions of each participant and b) to identify issues relating to club membership. The analysis of golf club personnel interviews focused on issue identification.

Thought processes and sequential actions were displayed using the matrix and network approaches of Miles et al. (2014). Matrices present the experience of each participant in tables, from which commentary is based. The data was initially entered into a spreadsheet, focusing on the experience of beginning to play bowls or golf, joining a club, changing clubs, leaving the sport and non-member experiences. Each section of the spreadsheet is presented separately in this chapter. The ordering of cases in each matrix is a form of cross-case comparison. Cases are ordered hierarchically based on characteristics of playing and membership experience. This ordering of cases aided identification of patterns in the data.

However, through the separation of experience into sections, the holistic picture for each participant and their emotional involvement with the sport were lost. A network for each participant (a diagram of events over time) gave a more holistic view. These diagrams formed the basis of a vignette, a “focused description of a series of events ... It has a narrative, story-like structure that preserves the chronological flow” (Miles et al., 2014, p. 182). The vignettes are presented in Appendix 3.

Transparency of analysis is an advantage of presenting data in matrices. First, the reader can compare the commentary with the data. This comparison enables the reader to identify the relationship between the data and the interpretation or to undertake additional analysis. Second, a matrix presentation ensures all participants are included in the analysis especially unusual cases. This is particularly important in heterogeneous sampling. However Miles et al. (2014) warn that “the conclusions drawn can never be better than the quality of the data entered” (p. 115). Hence, the checking of the transcripts against the matrices was important to ensure accurate reflection of the participants’ experience.

Thematic analysis identified issues and attitudes to club membership for players and golf club personnel using the process described by Creswell (2014). I read each transcript and annotated a bracketed chunk of data with a code or theme. In keeping with an interpretative approach, a range of perspectives on each theme is presented.

At the deductive stage of analysis the results were compared with theoretical frameworks from Chapter 3, namely the consumer behaviour models of Shank and Lyberger (2015) and Funk et al. (2016), golfing behaviour described by McGinnis and Gentry (2006) and the bowls segmentation of La Trobe University (2013).

The transparency of the relationship between results and commentary is enhanced by using participant numbers to link the results to a specific participant. Each participant is identified by an interview number, for example P1, P2. However in doing so, a breach of confidentiality can occur if the identity of participants is inadvertently revealed (Webster et al., 2014). In this study participants described unique scenarios, potentially identifying them to fellow club members. Care was taken in reporting these cases by checking the reported descriptions with the participants and/or removing detail. In a few cases the participant identifier has not been provided with the data.

The club for each participant is not identified, either in the sample description or commentary. Club identification is not only a confidentiality issue for participants but also for clubs. Participants made comments about clubs based on their own perception, which may or may not be reflective of the experience of other members. Club identity is not important to this study. The membership issues in the interviews are the important factors rather than an ad hoc individual evaluation of a club. The range of clubs experienced by participants does form part of the sample description in order to demonstrate diversity of the sample.

#### **6.1.4 Quality**

Trustworthiness, authenticity and credibility are hallmarks of quality in qualitative research and are reflected in eight mechanisms: triangulation, member checking, detailed descriptions, researcher bias, handling of discrepant information, prolonged engagement in the field, debriefing and an audit process (Creswell, 2014). The use of these mechanisms in this thesis is shown in Table 35.

Table 35. Quality considerations

Strategy	Application to thesis
Triangulation involves examining evidence from different data sources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross-case comparison (comparing cases in the samples)</li> <li>• Comparison of results with literature, media sources and the quantitative study</li> <li>• Placing this study in the context of club case studies.</li> </ul>
Member checking during the interviewing and analysis stages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Repeating aspects of the participants' comments to ensure their perspectives were fully understood</li> <li>• Summing up of interviews with participants</li> <li>• Sharing a summary of analysis with participants if requested.</li> </ul>
Detailed descriptions	Detailed descriptions enable participants' comments to be understood in context.
Bias of the researcher	My perspective of membership was identified at the pre-assumptions interview (Chapter 2). Sufficient detail has been included in the matrices for interpretation to be checked.
Discrepant information	The matrix process ensured all participants were considered in analysis.
Prolonged experience in the field aids in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2014)	Interviewing was undertaken over a year, following which I maintained contact with the golf and lawn bowls community for the duration of this thesis.
Sufficient time allocation for depth in analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)	Analysis began during the data collection and continued for months, with further investigation of the data at several stages during the compilation of the thesis.
Peer debriefing	Peer debriefing with supervisors and at conferences. Three presentations at sport management conferences of data, followed by questions from conference attendees.
Audit	Creswell (2014) advocated an external auditor check the interpretation against the data. In this study I undertook the audit process and checked the transcripts against the matrices a year after the original analysis. This passage of time enabled a fresh perspective.

In addition, theory-based strategies underpinned interviewing technique and reporting (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Recordings of early interviews were reviewed against this theory. Miles et al. (2014) distinguish between data display and interpretation. To enhance authenticity, verbatim comments are used extensively in the reporting of results. Such comments illustrate an opinion or issue, deepen understanding of the issue or give participants a voice (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006). Verbatim comments can illustrate the level of emotion felt by participants. Verbatim quotes have been interwoven with my description of themes and issues, taking care to ensure a clear distinction between data (the participants' comments and information) and interpretation (arising from my analysis). Quotes are presented in italics with quotation marks (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006).

### **6.1.5 Sampling**

This section discusses the sampling methods and sample size.

#### **Sampling methods**

Purposive sampling methods were used, through which participants were chosen for their club experiences to enable detailed exploration of the research question (Ritchie et al., 2014). The main form of purposive sampling in this study was heterogeneous sampling, most commonly called maximum variation sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ritchie et al., 2014). This type of sampling includes cases that vary as widely as possible (Ritchie et al., 2014). Towards the end of the interview process, variation was increased through snowball sampling—identifying from participants other people with a perspective not covered in previous interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Variation can be based on differences in relation to a phenomenon (such as club membership) or demography (Sandelowski, 1995). The sample in this study differed both in their club membership experiences and demographically (Tables 36 and 41). This diversity enables cross-case identification of themes (Ritchie et al., 2014) and identification of differing perspectives.

Club liaison personnel at Bowls New Zealand and New Zealand Golf arranged introductions to club administrators, some of whom were interviewed and/or arranged access to players. Potential participants were contacted via email by club administrators. In the snowball sampling, the original participant made the initial contact. Interested people contacted me if they were willing to participate.

#### **Sample size**

Three samples were obtained: 14 lawn bowls players, 28 golfers and 5 golf club personnel (in total 45 participants, with two participants playing both bowls and golf). Each participant is identified with a number reflecting the order of interview (Tables 36 and 41). The final number of interviews was greater than originally expected due to the heterogeneity of club experience. A full range of perspectives had not been covered by the original plan for 16–20 interviews.

Mathematical calculation cannot determine an appropriate sample size in qualitative research, nor does literature provide clear guidance. A qualitative sample size is often a matter of judgement, guided by comparing the range and quality of information with the use to which it will be put (Sandelowski, 1995). After a significant review of literature, combined with his own experience, Boddy (2016) concluded that an appropriate sample size in qualitative research should reflect the specific research context, paradigm and method. Boddy's review identified support for samples between 10 and 30

and that sample sizes over 30 are unmanageable. Ritchie et al. (2014) encouraged consideration of the heterogeneity of the population; the number of selection criteria; number of groups of special interest and number of samples within one study. Ritchie uses a general principle of 50 as an appropriate maximum for a single sample.

The final sample in this study included a number of sub-groups. The sample included men and women, a range of ages, players from both sports and differing playing styles: members, non-members, and discontinued members. Limited ethnic diversity was reflected in the final interview pool, with most participants being New Zealand European. The sample included a range of playing experience (length of time playing the sport), playing level (competitive and social players, differing grades or handicaps) and club experience (stable members of one club and people who changed club sometimes several times).

## **6.2 Sample description and results for bowls players**

The interviews with lawn bowlers revealed pathways into and through the sport. The decision to play lawn bowls appears inextricably linked with the decision about where to play. Reasons for changing clubs and leaving the game emerged, along with issues relating to club membership.

### **6.2.1 Sample description for lawn bowls participants**

The sample of 14 bowls players comprised nine men and five women. The list of participants is given in the order of interviews (Table 36), with each participant identified by an interview number, used to link participants to the data, for example P1, P2.

Ten participants were current players, three no longer played and one had been a short-term member of Business House Bowls. The playing experience of the current players ranged from 5–46 years. One former player had played for many years, while the other two played for only one or two seasons. Ten participants were retired. Only one of the working participants was a current player at the time of the interview.

Most current players were contacted through two large bowling clubs. The former players were contacted from other sources. Five participants were members of a traditional bowling club with a relatively old clubhouse and finance heavily dependent on the bar and gaming machines. Another five participants were members of a club offering a wider range of bowls experiences (Interclub, Roll Ups and Mates in Bowls/Business House Bowls, as described in Section 4.1.2). The clubhouse is modern and hired out for social events. Both clubs had experienced a merger. The older club

resulted from a merger of men’s and women’s clubs two decades earlier. The more modern club was formed from a voluntary merger of two neighbouring clubs more recently. Eight bowls participants had an organisational role within their club. Only two of the current bowlers did not have such a role. All bowls participants were of New Zealand European ethnicity.

Table 36. Description of sample of bowls participants

P	Gender	Age	Years playing as an adult	Existing member	Official role in club	Contact source
1	Male	Retired	46	Yes	Yes	Club
2	Male	Retired	35	Yes	Yes	Club
3	Male	Retired	40 on/off	Yes	Yes	Club
*4	Female	Retired	30+	Yes	Yes	Club
*5	Female	Retired	20+	Yes	No	Club
**14	Male	30s	Former player – 1 season	No	No	Golf club
**27	Female	20s	Short-term	No	No	Other
38	Female	80s	Former player – several decades	No	No	Other
40	Male	40s	Former player – 1–2 seasons	No	No	Other
41	Male	Retired	14+	Yes	Yes	Club
42	Male	60s	20+	Yes	Yes	Club
43	Male	Young	<10	Yes	Yes	Club
44	Male	70s	5	Yes	Yes	Club
45	Female	Retired	10	Yes	No	Club

Notes:

\* Two people interviewed together

\*\* These participants had played both bowls and golf

On/off = Stopped and started playing bowls during adult life.

Vignettes for each participant provide a holistic view of their bowls experience (Appendix 3). The vignettes (based on Tables 37–44) showcase a range of experiences from long-standing and traditional players, to those more recently committed to the game and players not well engaged with the sport. The sample seems to cover all segments of the Australian study described in Section 3.2.5 (La Trobe University, 2013). These were the consumer interested in casual bowls (P14), the socialiser interested in the social aspects of the sport (P27, P44), the clubber with a longer-term involvement in the social life of a club (P41), the bowler strongly interested in competitions (P4, P5, P43) and the identifier heavily involved with the club (P1). Some participants reflected aspects of more than one segment (P2, P3, P42, P45).

A range of playing styles was evident. These included participants active in pennants (i.e., interclub competitions) (e.g., P1, P4, P43), club competitions (e.g., P2,

P45), Roll Ups (P41) and Business House Bowls (P27). None of the current players had a major absence from the sport although two had short-term absence from bowls (one planned and one through injury). Several participants had experienced a club closing, relocating or merging. Three had a disability (e.g., P2, P3). Experiences from six clubs and two regions were described in the interviews.

### **6.2.2 Introduction to lawn bowls and joining a club**

For most participants, a combination of two or three factors featured their introduction to bowls (Table 37). The strongest influence came from other people. The participants are listed in the matrix according to the influence of other people in their first experience of bowls. The matrix provides an explanation of how each participant started to play bowls. Successive columns are based on this description and show the other people involved, other influences and other sports played, in most cases prior to playing bowls.

The strongest influence from other people was shown when the potential new player was taken along by an existing member (P1, P3, P41, P2) or was introduced to the game while on holiday and then started to play when they returned home (P2, P4). An example of this type of introduction is

*I happened to be down at my uncle's place [out of town] – and they were one short of an outdoor bowling team. I never played before, so I bowled my bowls and away we went. I came back up here the next season. (P2)*

The connection between indoor and lawn bowls was evident in two scenarios where the participant first played indoor bowls and was then encouraged to play outdoor bowls (P41, P2).

However, the influence of other people was sometimes resisted. P5 explained that her “*friend said, ‘Come on,’ and I said, ‘No, I’m not going to bowl. I’m not going to bowl.’ So anyway, I went along with her one morning. She bowled and she said, ‘Here’s some bowls’*”.

In other stories the influence was advisory such as recommendation of a club (P5, P42, P45) and the advice was not always followed (P42). Family background (such as parents playing bowls) was mentioned in the stories of four participants (P42, P45, P40, P41). However, in all scenarios it was not entirely clear how this family connection influenced the decision to try bowls. It seemed that family history sat at the back of the mind until something prompted the participant to play bowls themselves.

For several participants, other non-bowlers such as friends (P43, P14, P27) or a spouse (P42, P40) started to play bowls at the same time. Without an existing bowler providing guidance, they derived support from like-minded people.

A change in circumstance was mentioned by eight participants such as a life-stage change, moving to a new house or stopping another sport. The life-stage change ranged from children getting older (P41, P42) to retiring (P5, P45). After moving to a new house, the motivation for playing bowls was to meet people (P3). Stopping another sport was injury related (P1, P4) or age-related (P44).

A pattern of moving from one sport to another was evident for P14. He enthusiastically described in detail how he and a group of friends moved from one sport to another, playing each for a few seasons. They were inspired to play Barefoot Bowls by a friend who was the disc jockey for the event. The group became passionate enough to buy bowling equipment and joined a club for about a year. It was not clear what form of bowls they played after joining the club (P14).

Most bowls participants started to play and joined a club almost simultaneously (P1, P2, P3, P4, P41, P42, P45). For three participants (P1, P2, P3), membership was a precursor to playing with comments such as "*I've always taken it that you had to be a member*" (P3).

No discernible pattern was evident in the range of other sports played. Some participants described themselves as keen sports people (P1, P40). Some had not played sport other than lawn or indoor bowls (P41, P2). Others had been very keen on one or two different sports in their lives (P4, P42, P45, P44).

Table 37. Introduction to bowls and joining a club

P	Introduction to the sport and club	Other people involved	Other influences	Other sports
1	Recently left another sport when injured. Played bowls and joined club to keep elderly family member company.	Went with family	Circumstance change (injury)	Many
3	Moved to Auckland. Wanted to meet people. <i>“A guy up the road”</i> introduced me to club.	Went with someone else	Circumstance change (moved)	One other
41	Family member <i>“moved to Auckland and persuaded me to come to indoor bowls”</i> ... Indoor bowlers asked me to play outdoors as well. I waited until children left school. <i>“I always knew I would play bowls as my father belonged to [a service club] that had an indoor mat. Chose this club as I knew people here”</i> , close to my home and for sociability.	Went with family	Circumstance change (children left school) Indoor bowls Father played	None
2	Started to play indoor bowls after leaving school. <i>“It was in the church hall”</i> of my church. Visited family out of town and went to bowls. Back home I joined a club—same club as the indoor bowlers.	Family out of town Indoor bowlers locally	None	Indoor bowls
4	Injured back playing another sport. No sport for a while. Went to a friend overseas and she bowled. When I came back, joined the local club that I had seen when passing.	Introduced by someone else. Now plays with friend (P5)	Circumstance change (injury)	Previously badminton
5	<i>“I had given up work and I was thinking of something .... to really socialise”</i> . Now older, thought it would be good to play bowls. Went to a club <i>“recommended by a friend who said ‘it’s a small club, you’ll fit in easier’”</i> (The friend went to a different club).	Advice from others Now plays with friend (P4)	Circumstance change (retired)	Not clear
42	Gave up other sport due to knee issues. <i>“Father-in-law played bowls”</i> . Aged about 45 <i>“my wife and I decided to take up a sport. Bowls was the obvious one. The children had grown up”</i> . Tried several clubs. Went to one not recommended (due to its competitiveness). It was handy to home and work. <i>I liked the atmosphere</i> (and the competition).	Advice from others Joint decision with spouse	Circumstance change (children older) Father-in-law played	Previously tennis, badminton
43	At school, bowling club <i>“saw a handful of us”</i> . Free membership offered for a season’s commitment. A game with few injuries. Was good at it. <i>“An older guy took me under his wing. Every year I went up a level”</i> .	Group of school friends	Club initiative Circumstance change (last year of school)	Not clear

Table 40 (continued).

P	Introduction to the sport and club	Other people involved	Other influences	Other sports
14	<i>"I'm going to tell you exactly how I got into lawn bowls. Through Barefoot Bowls... one of my friends was DJing. We even went as far as getting our own bowling set. We bought our own bowls (on Trade Me). We bought our own t-shirts so it became a real".</i> Joined the club for a year or so.	Group of friends decide collectively what sport to play	Club initiative	Several in rotation including golf
27	With others <i>"went to a company's tournament"</i> (through mother of work colleague). Six to eight weeks one evening. <i>"I was surprised at how big it (the club) was. They taught you as you played the tournament"</i> . There were serious people and not so serious people.	Colleague at work	Club initiative	Golf as a junior
40	Friends of family in the UK belonged to a bowling club but didn't play. <i>"They went there to drink"</i> . My wife mentioned a newspaper report about the local club <i>"struggling for membership. Neighbour was also actively trying to save it"</i> .	Joint decision with spouse	Unique circumstances Family	Several
45	Retired and <i>"was looking for something to do. .... Bowling never appealed to me until I stopped hockey"</i> . I knew other people who played. <i>"I thought back and my parents used to play.... Saw the sign at a bowling club saying members welcome.... It was near home. And I went alone and there were just a few old women in the club. They showed me how to play – but I didn't do it very well for a long time. I couldn't get the hang of it. It's not as easy as it looks"</i> .	Others were playing Signage at local club	Circumstance change (retired) Parents	Previously hockey and tennis
44	Stopped playing squash ( <i>"getting past it"</i> ). Wanted social contact. Joined a bowling club rather than other sport because that is handy. Went to Have a Go Day. Joined immediately as a social player. <i>"They've been really welcoming of social players"</i> .	No one and knew no one at club prior to joining	Club initiative Circumstance change (stopped other sport)	Previously squash
38	Unable to remember.			

Club initiatives were relevant for four participants. These initiatives included a Have a Go Day (P44), *a companies' tournament*, probably Business House Bowls (P27), Barefoot Bowls (P14) and an approach to a school (P43). Three of these participants (P27, P14, P45) were young at the time and started with friends. In all cases, it coincided with either a change in circumstances or awakened a desire to play bowls. The language used by the younger people was different to the more formal language of the traditional bowlers:

*I have always wanted to play bowls a little bit and have done it for work 'dos' [social events] .... not knowing the rules ... We received an email through school [workplace] about a companies' tournament organised by a local club and one of the teachers said "Let's do this!" and I said "Yes great". (P27)*

The same enthusiasm was evident in the comments about Barefoot Bowls:

*Barefoot Bowls was a wonderful social event—bowls which was literally a Sunday affair. Everyone rocked up in bare feet and wore whatever you want, not your typical rules. There was always a DJ and bowling clubs are renowned for having cheap alcohol. (P14)*

Two of the sample started on their own with no support. A Have a Go Day was instrumental in first experience (P44). Signage at a local club prompted P45 to try that club. Both mentioned friendliness and welcome from the clubs, however had differing experiences. P44 joined immediately and enjoyed the vibrant social environment of the relatively large club. P45 found the club to be small, with mainly older women and found it hard to learn the game.

The motivation to play was not always clearly articulated. *"I'd always been reasonably attracted to the idea of bowls. I was 30 at that time but, I'd always thought, 'Perhaps bowls wouldn't be a bad idea for me'" (P3). P41, P44 and P45 also thought about bowls for a while before trying it out, whereas others had not previously considered playing bowls, as "it was an old people's game" (P5, P27, P45).*

The inclusiveness of bowls was emphasised strongly. Two people with disabilities appreciated the support and playing opportunities for disabled people (P2, P3), for example, *"So I went along and joined up, because I thought it was a sport that I could play—which I can successfully play" (P2).* Complimentary comments were also made about the Disabled Bowling Association and arrangements for blind and deaf bowlers. The ability of men and women to play together on equal terms was embraced by P14,

with the comment a “*lot of the sporting events I go to are very gender-specific, this was gender diverse, so it was great in that regard. Guys, girls all just played in the same thing together*”. P44 commented that “*you can have people of virtually any kind of physique playing each other*” and proudly noted the “*many people, little old ladies, who bowl me with their eyes shut*”. The possibility of a “*five-year old playing with a 95-year-old*” was mentioned (P3).

All, except two participants, went to the club at which they had been introduced, at least for a while. The participant who tried several options, selected a club handy to home and work that was “*not a boozy club*”. This seemed to reflect a perception that alcohol was available but not central to the club culture (P42).

All except one participant were happy with their first experience of bowls. P45, however, went to a club where the players were older. The club was small did not include interclub tournaments. She felt isolated and uncomfortable with the age difference and the fact that she did not play well.

### 6.2.3 Changing membership club in lawn bowls

The sample included players with stable membership of one club, as well as four who changed club (Table 38). In addition, two participants belonged to a club formed from a recent merger (P41, P42).

Table 38. Membership history: Bowling participants with current membership

P	Club history of adult membership	Any non-member playing time?	Most recent membership
1	Same club throughout	No	46 years
2	Same club throughout	No	35 years
3	Same club (later joined a second club)	No	40 years on/off
41	Same club before and after merger	No	14+ years
42	Same club before and after merger	No	20 years
44	Same club	No	10 years
45	Two clubs	No	Not clear
43	Three clubs	No	Under a year
4	Joined several clubs	No	Several
5	Joined several clubs	No	Several
38	One club – no longer playing	No	Many
14	One club – not playing at present	Short period of time	About a year
40	One club – not playing at present	No	A few years
27	One club	Business House Bowls only	One season

The reasons for changing club varied (Table 39). Two participants changed to bigger clubs offering more opportunity to progress in the game (P45, P5). Only one of these

participants settled at her new club (P45). The other participant (P5) changed club more than once, as did P43 and P4. For P43, moving to a new town drove a change of club. Club facilities were the most important factors for P4 and P5, amongst other significant influences.

Table 39. Changing lawn bowls club

P	Reasons	Other members also changed club
45	<i>“I was the beginner, the only beginner for a long, long time. There were no other beginners. And I knew people in another club and I went along and played with them. And we were at the same level and gradually I improved so that’s why I moved to another club. And we were able to play competitions with other clubs, whereas the club I was with never, ever played any competition outside of the club”.</i> <i>“I also like this club because it’s bigger and more people to play with. They have something all of the time so you’re getting a lot of practice.”</i>	No
43	Moved to a new country/town. A friend took me to a local club. <i>“It was an older club. Was there for a couple of seasons. Then moved to a bigger stronger club in another town. They offered me opportunities”.</i>	No
4	Second club: Met friend (P5) and wanted to play in different district. Went to club in the other district with good arrangements for working women.  Third club: Returned to first club, which closed and merged with men’s club.  Fourth club: Went to another club close to third club (which also closed).  Other clubs were mentioned in quick succession.	No  Yes  Yes
5	Playing on grass was a recurring comment. Most changes undertaken with P5, apart from time overseas.  Second club: <i>“I became more competitive and realised there were grass greens out there, I wanted to know what it felt like on grass. As my game evolved”</i> was looking for more competition. Belonged to both clubs for a while.  Third club: Met friend (P4) and wanted to play in different district. Went to club with good arrangements for working women.  From there the story was the same as P5.	No  Yes  Yes

In addition, reasons for other people changing club were discussed. One dramatic memory arose from a change in zone for a bowling club: *“We changed zones ... Lost a lot of our young players, because they didn’t want to go to [new zone] ... Actually, that was probably the first downturn of the club, going to another zone. They all went to [neighbouring club]”* (P1). The new zone was perceived negatively as one with *“not enough players, too old, their clubs are small”* (P1).

#### 6.2.4 Leaving bowls and temporary absence

Just as starting bowls and joining a club were strongly linked, the same link was evident when leaving a club. Five participants left bowls either permanently or temporarily, with leaving a club and stopping bowls occurring at the same time.

For P38, a permanent departure from bowls arose from the impending closure of her club and her advancing age. It was likely that she would have stopped playing within a few years regardless of the closure. She was aware of alternative clubs but elected not to move to another club.

Temporary absences for P3 were planned due to the demands of another sport. However, he continued to make a donation to his club during his absence and always intended to return. In this case, the club was probably aware that the discontinued membership was temporary.

Three other participants (P14, P40, P27) were unclear about whether their hiatus from bowls was temporary or permanent. They did not renew membership, but they spoke with sufficient enthusiasm that a return to the sport was probable. Their desire to continue playing was clearly stated in the interviews. Their discontinued membership was in part due to a lack of communication from their club about renewal. However, their connection with the club was also weak and short-term. Care needs to be taken with interpretation of these comments. Other participants may also have experienced a similar lack of communication but took their own initiative to re-join. This possibility was not investigated during interviews.

Table 40. Leaving bowls or temporary absence

P	Reason	Playing status
14	<i>“Never got an update message from them when my membership ran out and there was never any coms [communications] in between”.</i>	Playing other sport at present
40	Membership lapsed before the club closed. <i>“I still got the emails but no one followed up on the membership”.</i>	Not playing at present
27	At the end of Business House Bowls season <i>“they took a gathering of everyone’s name, and said, “We play on Saturdays all through the year. Give us your details, and we’ll get in contact with you.” I never heard back from them, which was a shame, because I was quite keen to do something else there”.</i>	May play next season
3	Had a few seasons’ temporary absence while focusing on another sport. Always returned to bowls and gave donation to club when not a member.	Current member
38	My club is closing – <i>“and I decided I was getting too old”</i>	No longer playing

It may have been possible for a club to retain P14 and P40 as members. P14 commented about a group of friends that started Barefoot Bowls that over time dwindled to three

players. He suggested that the club could have proposed an arrangement similar to Business House Bowls. His suggestion was that someone from the club could have said:

*“We see that there’s 20 people that have a similar skill set to you that are all interested in playing weekly. Would you be keen for coming along once a week on a Wednesday night for an hour in a tournament?” We’d be here in a flash and that would have instantaneous membership sign-up ....on the spot without even thinking about it. (P14)*

The focus for P40 was the threat of closure of his club. He attended meetings about the club’s future at which tension was evident between long-standing traditional members and others wanting a change of approach to save the club. He was surprised that such engrained attitudes persisted even when the club was under threat.

Reasons for other players leaving bowls included natural attrition (i.e., death, age, a physical inability to play) or moving house (P1, P2, P5). However, P2 also commented that he had never thought about why people discontinued membership. Two participants (P4, P5) commented that their spouse was now playing at a retirement village, one of whom maintained membership of club when making that move.

The social nature of clubs was evident. P2 noted that his club seemed to have *“a hang of a lot of social members. They seem to have drifted away, but they keep the bar going in a way”*. Bowling clubs had an important role in Auckland suburbs designated as dry areas in which alcohol could not be sold at public venues. In these areas, sports clubs were effectively the local bars/drinking houses. However, only members could be served. Thus, the impact on clubs in these areas was profound when licensing laws changed (P3, P45, P42). P42 maintained that in the 1970s within a five-kilometre radius, 20 bowling clubs could be found, while many now struggle for membership. In addition to a bar, bowling clubs provided other non-bowling facilities, for example a club at which *“members didn’t play bowls but came to drink and play table tennis”* (P42).

### **6.2.5 Issues influencing membership of bowling clubs**

Membership issues included concern about press coverage, the image of bowls and tensions between organisations. These issues were regarded as impacting negatively on recruitment of new members. Positive comments about equipment and the resilience of small clubs were noted.

Recruitment of younger players was perceived as being hampered by the image of bowls as a game for old people. This perception was borne out by a comment from one

of the golf sample, *“I never considered playing bowls—it is an old person’s game. My mother won’t play”* (P24). The image of bowls as an older person’s game was regarded as a myth (P5). However, two participants believed that this image could encourage the older age group with one stating, *“with increasing longevity, people are starting bowls late 80s and in their 90s”* (P4, P5). Social issues highlighted by media reports were linked to declines in club memberships especially amongst younger people, for example *“Saturday shopping and seven-day shopping and shift work”* (P2) and *“too many other things to do”* (P3). P2 was irritated by the generally negative focus of the media coverage about bowls in general.

Relationships between organisations caused stress and give an impression of *“grumpiness”* in the sport (P3). Negative comments were made about the national or regional associations (P1, P2, P3). Different cultures were evident with reference to clubs being *“staid and conservative”* (P3) and *“a drinking club”* (P38, P42).

However, cooperation was evident from an in-depth explanation about the merger of two clubs, with a recommendation that more clubs look around and *“find a club that they are happy with [to merge]”* (P42). Cooperation is crucial to a multi-club arrangement, which can be a *“lifeline”* to smaller clubs (P1, P4). Nevertheless, difficulties occur when clubs and sports join together *“if their fee structures differ dramatically as with golf and lawn bowls”* (P42).

Tensions about dress code were inconsistent. On the one hand, the dress code was *“putting some people off”*. However, at the same time the code of dress was not being enforced and it was getting *“scruffy”* (P4). This concern was linked to a wider issue of etiquette and differing standards of behaviour within a club (P4).

Loan equipment for new players seemed readily available and was considered a positive aspect of the sport. Equipment could be borrowed at most clubs for events such as Have a Go Days and Business House Bowls (P27, P44, P14, P40). Equipment for new players seemed readily available from Trade Me (P14) or from former players giving their sets of bowls to clubs when discontinuing the game (P45).

Contrary to the usual opinion about the club size, was the suggestion that smaller bowls clubs with fewer facilities were more sustainable:

*Some of the clubs are too big to hold on to, see ... If you haven’t got the membership you can’t keep those big clubs going. Perhaps that’s why the smaller clubs are still managing because they are small. They’ve only got one green to look after instead of five.* (P5)

### **6.3 Sample description and results for golf players**

The structure of this section is similar to that for the lawn bowls players. A description of the sample is followed by explanation of the pathways into and through the sport in the following sections: introduction to golf and joining a club, reasons for changing clubs and reasons for leaving the game. Finally, issues affecting membership and suggestions from participants relating to club membership are discussed.

#### **6.3.1 Sample description for golf participants**

The sample of 28 golf players comprised 20 men and 8 women. The list of player participants is in the order of interview (Table 41). Twenty-four participants were current golf club members, one was a non-member player and three were not playing golf at the time of the interview. Playing experience ranged from less than 1 year to over 50 years. Eight players played golf “*on and off*” during their adult lives. The handicap of the players ranged from 2 to late-30s, with five having no handicap and one pending handicap. Two mid-range handicap players previously had handicaps as low as five and nine. Four participants had an organisational role in their club.

The golf sample covered players in every age bracket: aged in their twenties (P27, P33, P34), thirties (P14, P22, P23), forties (P15, P30), fifties (P9, P17, P19, P20, P24, P28), sixties (P11, P31), seventies (P18), eighties (P29) and retired with age not specified (P10, P12, P13, P16, P26, P36). Most participants were New Zealand European, with three Asian and one Pasifika.

Sixteen participants belonged to the same club and eight participants were members at other clubs at the time of interview. Past experience of membership at eight further Auckland clubs was mentioned. In total, the following clubs featured in the interviews: Akoranga, Clarks Beach, Formosa, Gulf Harbour, Manukau, Maungakiekie, Muriwai, North Shore, Onewhero, Remuera, Royal Auckland, Pakuranga, Pukekohe, Titirangi and The Grange, as well as the public course at Chamberlain Park and three unnamed out-of-Auckland clubs.

Even with snowball sampling, current non-club participants were not well represented. However, non-member playing experiences were recalled by 11 current club members (P9, P10, P15, P16, P17, P18, P19, P22, P26, P29, P31).

Table 41. Description of sample of golf participants

P	Gender	Age	Years of adult playing	Existing member	Club official	Contact source	Handicap
9	Male	50+	On/off	Yes	No	Club	17
10	Female	Retired	On/off	Yes	No	Club	39
11	Male	Mid-60s	On/off	Yes	No	Club	28
12	Male	Retired	<1	Yes	No	Club	None
13	Male	Retired	10+	Yes	No	Club	10
***14	Male	30s	<1	Yes	No	Club	None
15	Male	40s	Approx. 1	Yes	No	Club	21
16	Male	Retired/ works	Many on/off	Yes	No	Club	17
17	Male	50s	Many on/off	Yes	No	Club	17
18	Male	70s	Many	Yes	No	Club	19
19	Female	50s	5	Yes	No	Club	29
20	Male	50s	46	Yes	Yes	Club	13
**21	Male	40s/50s	27 on/off	Yes	No	Club	Pending
22	Male	30s	On/off	Yes	Yes	Club	14
**23	Female	30s	Discontinued	No	No	Club	None
24	Female	50s	25	Yes	No	Other	19
25	Male	NA	On/off	Yes	No	Club	12
26	Female	Retired	8	Yes	No	Club	29
***27	Female	20s	Discontinued	No	No	Other	None
**28	Male	50s	Discontinued	No	No	Snowball	None
29	Female	80s	50+	Yes	No	Snowball	25
30	Male	40s	16	Yes	No	Club	10
31	Male	60s	20+	Yes	No	Club	High
32	Male	NA	20	Yes	Yes	Snowball	2
*33	Male	20s	3	Yes	No	Snowball	NA
*34	Male	20s	Not clear	No	No	Other	None
35	Male	NA	24	Yes	Yes	Other	14
36	Female	Retired	22	Yes	No	Other	20+

Notes:

\* Two people interviewed together

\*\* Interview undertaken by phone

\*\*\* These participants had played both bowls and golf

NA = Information not available/obtained

On/off = Stopped and started during adult life or had no clear starting point.

Vignettes for each participant provide a holistic view of their golf experience (Appendix 3). The vignettes (based on based on Tables 37–44) summarise a diverse range of playing experiences. Temporary absence from the game was reported by six participants (P9, P15, P18, P21, P25, P31), whereas other participants played golf consistently once they took up the sport (e.g., P11, P13, P16, P17, P20, P22, P29, P35, P36). The most common reasons for absence were going overseas or having a family and other responsibilities.

Other sports featured in the stories of most participants. Only one participant had not played any other sport (P37). Seven participants played many other sports at some stage in their lives (P13, P14, P15, P16, P18, P30, P34). Four participants (P17, P21, P27, P29) had played two to three other sports. Racket sports in general (P9, P11, P12) and tennis in particular (P10, P13, P19, P24, P26, P35, P36) were mentioned.

While all stages of PCM for golf (Funk et al., 2011) were evident in the sample, few participants were at the weak stages of connection: the awareness stage with minimal attitude formation and no or random golf playing (P14, P27) and the attraction stage with infrequent playing and positive perceptions of the game (P9, P12, P19). Most participants seemed at the attachment (P11, P17, P18, P21, P36) or allegiance stage (P13, P16, P20, P24, P26, P29, P31, P35). Movement down (P9) and up (P10) the continuum was also evident. Six participants showed characteristics of more than one stage of connection (P10, P15, P22, P23, P30, P33).

### **6.3.2 Introduction to golf and joining a club**

Starting to play golf and joining a club was complex. Following a suggestion from a golf club manager (GCP7), the sample was analysed in four groups based on the age when golf was first experienced and whether support from an existing player was part of the experience. The four groups are: first experience as a child or teenager (Table 42); first experience as a young adult (Table 43), first experience as an older adult (Table 44) and adults with no prior experience and no support from an existing player (Table 44). Thirteen golf participants were introduced to the sport as a child or teenager (Table 42), five participants had their first experience as a young adult (Table 43), six participants as an older adult (Table 44) and four started as an adult unsupported (Table 44).

### **6.3.3 Introduction as a child**

For the group with the first experience in childhood, the childhood experience is noted, along with the first adult experience. In this matrix, cases are ordered according to the length of time between the childhood experience and playing golf as an adult. Only one participant continued straight from junior golf into a long-term adult membership (P20).

Another participant attempted to continue from junior into adult membership but found the demands of work precluded golf (P18). Most participants ceased membership and/or playing for a period. Some (P21, P22) joined in their early twenties after a short break, while some (P25, P15, P14, P32) went overseas or pursued other interests before joining. P15 explained how he “*always thought about getting back into golf*” but a knee injury precluded his playing another sport and an invitation from a flatmate provided the impetus. For others (P9, P31, P16), a longer period of time elapsed before they took up golf again, usually when their children were older. All of these participants maintained that nothing would have encouraged their playing while their children were young. However, some participants played other sports, especially racket sports, during this time such as the less time-consuming game of squash (e.g., P18).

When the first golf experience occurred in childhood, participants generally had no difficulty returning to the game as adult, even if their re-introduction was years later (Table 42). However, one younger participant had not restarted golf after moving from her hometown, partly due to the lack of playing companion. She did not feel able to go to golf courses on her own (P27). She was able to describe in detail the junior coaching and support from her local club. She was unaware of the New Zealand Golf find-a-buddy initiative (described in Section 4.2.2). She had undertaken Business House Bowls, as mentioned in Section 6.2. She would have loved a similar option in golf.

P16 felt “*nervous as a new member*”, even though he spoke about golf confidently. He explained that during his initial adult golf experience “*I picked a quiet time during the week and had a hit on my own when coming back to golf. On my own – not comfortable playing with others initially*”.

Table 42. First introduction to golf as a child/teenager

P	Introduction to golf	First adult membership experience	People involved in adult experience	Other influence
20	<i>“Dad started to play and the golf club was just a walk down the road”.</i>	From junior membership.		
25	Started at <i>“a club in town and a few of the guys played”</i> . Also played at boarding school. No lessons – self-taught.	Continued on to adult membership until went overseas.	Friends	
21	Played as junior. Parents played.	In early twenties became a club member.	Father	
32	Lived overseas. As 11- or 12-year-old with father.	Joined early in adult life.		
23	Came across golf and had natural ability. Parents played.	Joined early in adult life.	Parents /friends	
18	Played as child. Lived near golf course (neither parent played).	Played little for about 15 years. Joined club. Gave up/infrequent play/ working long hours.		
22	<i>“At high school into all sports. Probably one of my friends was giving it a go”</i> . So I tried.	Joined when played more regularly, <i>when I entered workforce in early 20s</i> .	Joined with friends	Started working
14	Played a bit at school. Then went overseas.	Group of friends took out trial membership (introductory offer).	Friend organised	
15	<i>“Followed dad around when I was five with a cut down set of clubs”</i> . Took long period off <i>“chasing girls and other things”</i> . Played five to ten times a year at public course, as hackers.	<i>Flatmate joined with an affiliated membership and so I did too</i> (with introductory offer of eight games). Then joined full-time. Flatmate likely to join as full member.	Flatmates and friends	Knee injury
9	Played as teenager.	Played infrequently with father-in-law. Joined a club when kids older. Same time as a friend. Joined a cheap club.	Started with friend	Kids got older
16	Started playing a school with keen family member.	When working played once a year at social events. Taught wife to play. Wife was playing. I joined same club. <i>Was looking for a decent golf course (not a hack course) and camaraderie</i> .	Family	
31	School friend said <i>“come and play”</i> , went to public course.	Restarted aged about 40. <i>Joined best local course</i> .	Friend	Children got older
27	Played with dad as child. Went to coaching at local club.	Not played as an adult but would like to.		

### 6.3.4 Introduction as a young adult

Five participants first played golf as a young adult during their university years and/or their twenties (Table 43). All joined a club at the same time or shortly after starting to

play. For three participants, the reduced fee for students or young people influenced their membership decisions. None had any difficulty picking up the game and they spoke with enthusiasm about golf and their experience of joining a club. Two participants used the word “*bored*” in relation to another aspect of their lives and this prompted them to take up golf (P33, P34).

Table 43. First introduction to golf as a young adult and joining a club

P	Introduction to golf	Joining a club	People involved in experience	Other influences
28	Encouragement from friend at university away from home.	Special discount for students. Remained a member in second year but played less.	Friend, a competitive golfer.	Moved away from home
33	<i>Got bored one day and decided to play golf.</i>	Joined club almost straight away, after trying a few courses. Joined one based on price (young person’s membership).	Reignited interest of father and other family member in playing again. Also encouraged friend (P34).	
34	Joined with friend.	Brief membership with friend.	A friend (P33).	
24	Parents. Keen and enjoyable. Did golf schools.	Joined club with good reputation. Good pro. No joining fee.	Parents and school friends.	<i>Bored with tennis</i>
29	Had a friend who was a good golfer. <i>Played at public course to get comfortable with it.</i>	Joined club shortly after starting.	Encouraged by husband and good friend.	

### 6.3.5 Introduction as an older adult

Seven participants joined a club as an older adult (Table 44). Participants in this matrix are listed according to the time between their introduction to golf and their joining a club. Only two of these participants joined the club at the same time as starting to play (P35, P36). Most participants in this group played golf before taking up formal membership. Two participants described this previous experience as “*hacking*” (P17, P13). One participant had a country club membership, which was not regarded as a “*proper*” membership, but a mechanism for gaining entry to Auckland golf courses. Family members influenced three participants to take up golf: son (P11) and husband (P36, P26). In two cases the family had learnt golf together (P11, P36). However, in the third case the family member could already play (P26).

Table 44. First introduction to golf as an older adult and joining a club

P	Introduction to golf	Joining a club	People involved in experience	Other influences
35	Stopped tennis because need a partner.	Joined a golf club near home straight away.		Stopped tennis
17	Hacked with friends at public course. Played about 20 times a year.	Five–six years ago joined a country club.	Friends	
13	Hacked during summer while staying at beach house. Learnt <i>by whacking the ball</i> and maybe from watching television. Had country club summer membership.	Wanted to play a competitive sport. Joined a club at which friends played. They had looked and found it to be the friendliest.	Group of friends already members	Knee injury prevented other sport
11	Weakness in knees coincided with teenage son wanting to play golf. <i>So I then picked up golf</i> . Lived overseas at the time.	Returned to New Zealand and joined local club with son.	Started with family	Injury prevented other sport
36	Went to tennis with husband <i>and from there we went to golf</i> . Went to pro shop and had about 10 lessons.	Joined ladies' team. Played twice a week initially.	Husband	
26	Husband started golf again after stopping another sport <i>and I didn't want to be a golf widow</i> . Played at public course to get feel of it.	Joined club shortly after starting. Initially played with husband, then joined Business Ladies.		Stopped playing tennis

Four participants started to play golf on their own or felt alone while learning (Table 45). All started as older adults: two were still working (P30, P19), one was retired (P12) and one started years ago but was retired by the time she joined a club and regarded herself as a golfer (P10). Each of these participants explained in detail the difficulty of being a new golfer. The length and intensity of their stories shows the effect on morale of their experience.

Table 45. Started to play golf alone

P	Introduction to golf	Joining a club	People involved in experience	Other influences
30	Christmas tournament for work – an Ambrose tournament.	Gift of year's membership.	On own	
10	"I met [husband] and he loved golf. He took me a couple of times. Went to coaching lessons". Then played about once every five years. Moved to Auckland. Went to a six-week series of lessons at a club. Could only play once a week/didn't improve.	Moved here and retired. Joined a local club 9-hole mid-week. (Husband joined a different club)	Introduced by husband but started alone	Circumstance change (retired)
12	"Tried it as a kid. I knew I could hit the ball". Retired. Wanted to play golf.	"Drove past the club and went in and said I want to join the club".	Joined on own. Now plays with neighbour.	Circumstance change (retired)
19	Bored with tennis. With friend decided to play golf. Went to lessons and women's clinics at driving range for about four months. "Tried a public course and realised we weren't ready for a big course yet". Went back to lessons.	Friend knew someone at a local club. Went there every second Wednesday and "could tee-off after the ladies and just play by ourselves".	Friend who was also learning.	

P30 was invited to an Ambrose competition pre-Christmas through clients at work. This social competition is played in teams. At each hole players tee-off and the team decide which shot is best. The second shot for each player is from near this best ball. The procedure is repeated until the hole and the tournament are completed. P30 really enjoyed the experience. He was then gifted a year's membership at the golf club through work. He described the ensuing experience in the following way:

*It was a nightmare. I played early in the morning, because I wanted to get there on the link before the players start to come in. So I played with old pensioner guys ... So I tagged along with them, and I whacked a ball, and I didn't know any rules. And I was placing my ball on the tee right through to the green, which you are not supposed to do. But I didn't know that 'til probably a couple of months after that. They told me I'm not allowed to do it. At first they didn't really talk to me a lot. But as I got to know them, they got to know me, they were quite good and I played with them for the next three years. And they taught me everything. Not how to play golf, but they taught me a lot of the rules ... it's really important to look, to dress right. And to present yourself right around the course. All the golf rules. (P30)*

He remained with the game and explained that by learning “*to hit the ball better, the more it hooks you in*”. Over time, P30 began to feel more comfortable and now tries to support new players:

*Yes, because I didn't have a group where they know me and I know them. Where at the moment there's a lot of guys here who I brought through golf, and I make sure I play with them. And I make sure I introduce them around the club, so they're comfortable ... I love it here. It's the people. I found it hard when I first started, because nobody brought me through here. So it was just hard. Had I come with somebody I knew as a member here, it would have been a lot easier. (P30)*

P12 described that he knew he could hit the ball from a childhood attempt but had not played as a child. He found that the welcome for a new player “*was not particularly enthusiastic. I would like to have seen them have a prepared package that a new member can use*” (P12). Outside the club he unexpectedly met another member, with whom he often plays with. Without this contact he would have a difficult time as “*groups of people book their games. I guess they book their games and bugger off. Not a lot of interaction between club members*” (P12).

Two women (P10, P19) had long-winded experiences. P10 had three attempts to learn golf. Her first coaching session left her lacking in confidence. She made little progress at her second attempt. She later joined a club when she retired.

*I did some coaching with someone to learn to start. Hit grass. I don't think I ever hit the ball in the whole six lessons I was there [laughter]. I didn't join a club but sometimes I'd go out with my husband over the courses here but really didn't take it up until five years ago when I joined [current club]. (P10)*

P19 played for three years and visited six courses before joining a club. Her story could be hard to follow at times with inconsistencies such as wanting to be able to play golf on her own, but also looking for other people with whom to play. Nevertheless, her desire to play was evident, as were the barriers of feeling misunderstood by golf club personnel and restrictions on playing times for working women. She maintained that only her determination kept her playing golf.

### **6.3.6 Changing membership club in golf**

Only nine participants belonged to one club throughout their whole golf experience. Most participants changed club and/or played as a non-member for a time (Table 46). The non-

member participation occurred at a public course (P17, P19, P26, P27, P29), a driving range (P15, P19) or paying green fees at a club (P19). The non-member playing time occurred while learning the game or when playing only one or two games a year.

Table 46. Membership history: Golf participants with current membership

P	Club history of adult membership	Any non-member playing?	Current membership
10	One club	Yes, when learning (two different clubs)	5 years
20	One club	No	Decades
30	One club	No	16 years
12	One club	No	<1 year
31	One club	Yes, for annual tournament over several years prior to re-starting	20+ years
26	One club	Yes, for 18 months while learning	5–6 years
19	One club	Yes, three years learning, playing public course	1 year
15	One club	Yes, during teens years when hacking	<1 year
14	Trial membership	No	<1 year
13	Two clubs	Summer membership when hacking	14 years
29	Two clubs	Yes, briefly at start	40 years
24	Two clubs	No	>20 years
9	Two clubs	Yes, when playing a few times a year	11 years
11	Two clubs	Possibly in early days when overseas	19 years
26	Two clubs	Yes, about 18 months while learning	<1 year
17	Two clubs	Yes for 15 years	1 year
16	Two clubs	Yes, when playing once a year	Not clear
21	Two clubs	No, always join	<1 year
35	Two clubs	No	22 years
32	Two clubs	Not clear	20 years
33	Two clubs	No	3 years
36	Two clubs	Yes	Not clear
22	Four clubs	Yes, when at university	4 years
18	Four clubs	Yes, when playing once or twice a year	1 year
25	Five clubs	Yes, when playing once or twice a year	10 years

One change of club was common, with 12 participants having this experience (Table 47). These participants fall broadly into three groups: players for whom the original club had served its purpose, players who had an issue with their club and players who actively investigated a range of clubs. It was also more common for the change to be made with other people than alone.

In the first group, the initial club served a specific purpose such as providing membership for a summer hacking experience (P13) or while waitlisted for another club (P24, P29). For P9, the first club provided an introductory golf experience. He joined a club, aware that an uncertain lease arrangement may result in its closure.

For the second group, problems with a club instigated a change (P11, P26, P 17, P16). Three participants (P11, P17, P26) were heavily influenced by friends in their choice of subsequent club. However, P16 made his own decision after looking a number of courses.

For the third group, the nature of the course featured strongly in the explanation about their change of club. P21 and P35 visited a number of courses and selected an attractive course that also provided a good golf experience. However, P33 moved to an inferior course—motivated to do so by the cheaper membership. When financial circumstances allow, he will undoubtedly upgrade again. P36 commented about the nature of the new course; however, the move was initiated by a friend.

Table 47. Changing membership club in golf: Single club change

P	Reasons for changing club	Others involved
13	<i>“It was a country club, because you had to belong to something if you wanted to use the course you see, so, it was just a 9-hole course .... where you used to just hack ... But 14 years ago... I obviously wanted to play, get to a high level or a reasonable level”.</i>	Followed group of friends to club
29	Changed club – joined one while waitlisted for another. Belonged to both clubs for a while. Was on waiting list for 12 years.	Spouse
24	Joined one club while on waiting list for another club. When place at the other club became available, changed club. <i>“The club is like an extension of my school – lots of school friends there”.</i>	No
9	Club closed. Would have outgrown the club eventually anyway. Moved to a club at which workplace had corporate membership and then remained as a member.	One friend
11	<i>“It didn’t really fit my needs as a golf club, I was there for three years. And a friend of mine .....said, ‘Well, why don’t you come and join our group ... We’re looking for a fourth to make up a regular foursome’ so I did”</i> (previous club had a policy of not having visitors play at weekends).	No
26	Played Twilight elsewhere for a season. Didn’t enjoy the attitude of the club – difficult for female members. Husband didn’t like the course. Friends played at current club. So went there.	Husband
17	Previous club had few facilities. Had several problems at previous club. Formally resigned giving reasons. Went to Twilight Golf at current club. Played many courses with friends. Was about to join another club with friends. The current club offered a membership deal for 18 months.	Yes.
16	Had an incident with other players at previous club. Other experiences at the club were not sufficiently good to make up for it. Had played other courses with club reciprocal arrangements. Was looking for a financially sound club.	Other family followed
21	Left club when had children. <i>“Selfish to play when you had young kids”.</i> Changed club when returned to golf 15 years later. Visited all local clubs and chose one with good quality greens, reasonable price, close to home.	No
35	Played on a number of Auckland courses and liked this one. <i>“Very good for challenge with good course design. Grounds in good condition. During winter the water drains. A good view”.</i>	Yes
32	Changed club when moved overseas. Many comments about the nature of a good quality course.	
36	Moved to a new course with other people of same ethnic group. No complaints with first club, it was just that friends moved. Many positive comments about the course at the new club.	Yes
33	Started on a student membership. Price went up when got older so not as affordable. Went to another course, which was not as good but cheaper.	Father

Three participants changed club four or five times (Table 48), with a problem prompting at least one membership change. The problems ranged from an unpleasant experience to a desire for a better course or better facilities. In two cases a fee discount was a motivator to take out membership; however, this was relatively short-lived and later followed by a change of club (P22, P25). In addition to changing club, three participants had absences from the game while overseas (P22, P25), changed country, experienced health issues (P18) or started a business (P25).

Table 48. Changing clubs in golf: Multiple changes of club

P	Reasons	Other people also changed
22	<p>First club – Summer membership close to home. For a year. Offered a good deal to entice members.</p> <p>Second club – <i>Another good country course</i>. Full member for a few years. <i>Course was more challenging but we looked at rates and proximity.</i></p> <p>Third club – <i>Then moved over to another local club. Can't remember reason but think we knew someone there.</i></p> <p>Overseas for five or six year – rarely played.</p> <p>Came back to NZ and joined a third club for about three years – price of membership was a factor. An unpleasant incident occurred.</p> <p>Fourth club – Moved to current club about four years ago. Had a good deal of 18 months for price of a year.</p>	<p>Group of four</p> <p>Same group but now eight people</p>
18	<p>First club – Gave up membership as young adult. Infrequent play.</p> <p>Second club – Moved to New Zealand. Joined local club.</p> <p>Left the club when health issues made playing impossible.</p> <p>Third club – Took up golf more seriously and joined a different club for about 10 years. Work friends belonged to that club.</p> <p>Fourth club – Left that club a year ago following unfortunate experience and joined current club.</p>	<p>No</p> <p>Yes – son</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p>
25	<p>First club – left to go overseas.</p> <p>Did not play while overseas.</p> <p>Second club – joined with wife but played a few times a year. Relinquished membership after four to five years.</p> <p>Had children. Started a business. Two games a year for 30 years.</p> <p>Third club – Joined obscure country club to get better green fees at Auckland clubs.</p> <p>Fourth club – An inexpensive Auckland club.</p> <p>Played a lot of Auckland clubs.</p> <p>Fifth club – Joined current club – liked the culture and the course.</p> <p>(Was definitely not interested in re-joining second club)</p>	<p>With wife</p> <p>Group of friends</p> <p>Group of friends</p> <p>Group of friends</p>

The quality of course was rarely mentioned in the initial choice of club (Tables 42–45). Once golf playing was established, the course quality featured more frequently in the club selection criteria (Tables 47–48).

The role of membership deals varied in these scenarios. In these cases, a balancing of cost and value of membership was discussed. In only one case, a deal attracted a player to a club, and they continued as a member (P17). Conversely, in two cases (P33, P25), a deal or discount encouraged membership but not long-term. P22 was attracted by deals on two occasions. He joined one club for a short time and another for at least four years.

In addition to changes of membership, social golfers played at other clubs. This enabled participants to explain in detail and compare the characteristics, pricing and culture of Auckland clubs (P11, P17, P31, P33, P34, P35, P36). Two commented positively about the reciprocal agreement of a golf passport that enabled members to play at neighbouring clubs (P11, P21). The ability to play other courses was sought by several participants (e.g., P14, P34). P10 used a GrabOne deal for an out of town holiday for herself and her husband playing at a “*swish course*”. This was the only comment about GrabOne deals during the interviews with players.

### **6.3.7 Leaving golf or temporary absence from the game**

Four of the sample no longer or rarely play golf (Table 49). One participant left golf after having a baby (P23), another did not have a playing companion (P27) and two did not play sufficiently to retain club membership (P28, P34).

The practical difficulties of playing golf after having a baby were explained (P23). However, this participant was able to play squash as the game was shorter, could be arranged around feeding the baby and the safety of the baby could be ensured behind the transparent back wall of the squash court. Her level of interest in golf seemed sufficiently high to return to the game at a later date.

No playing companion proved difficult for P27, especially as she was too busy at work to seek a solution to the problem. However, she explained the importance of finding the right companion. The issue of playing with like-minded people was also important to P28, who believed that golf was a social thing, “*I am not a competitive player. I learnt badly. Hard when playing with someone who is not in same league*”.

Table 49. Discontinued playing or membership in golf

P	Current circumstance	Reason for not playing/joining club
23	Gave up after child born. Took up squash but now injured.	Returning to golf too difficult. <i>“It’s not safe for a baby on a golf course. Game too long. How would I manage feeding a baby during a round of golf?”</i>
27	Played with Dad and sister as a teenager. Not playing at present.	<i>“I think if I found someone else who enjoyed it in the way, who wasn’t a... it’s real tricky when you’re trying to play sports with someone who’s super-competitive, if you’re not very competitive. They get annoyed at you, and you get annoyed at them ... So [I need to play], with someone else who’s just out there to enjoy being outside and whacking things”.</i>
28	Hacks around public course spasmodically.	Student membership ceased and was not playing enough to join again. Also does not have people to play with.
34	Plays with friend (P33) and pays green fees.	Gave up membership when fees increased as he got older. Does not play often enough to warrant membership. Will probably join later. At present focusing on another very physical sport. <i>“Golf can wait”.</i>

In addition, experiences of family members giving up membership included a medical issue preventing a wife from playing golf (P16). The son, who influenced P11 to play, is now overseas and playing highly active sports. One contrary case was a spouse unable to play with ill health but still joined and supported the golf club (P29).

### 6.3.8 Club membership issues

The range of issues demonstrates a difficulty for golf as a sport. Passion for golf was an overriding theme in most interviews and can be summarised in one paragraph. An equal number of participants had concerns about the game, the wide range of which cannot be easily summarised.

The unique nature of golf was emphasised passionately by participants (e.g., P15, P34, P29). That is *“a truly marvellous game”* was repeated by P29 several times. Other players also echoed their passion for the game (e.g., P33, P11, P13, P14, P18). Younger players endorsed enthusiastically the opinion learnt from their parents that the game provides a good way to identify someone’s character (P15, P34).

Friendship and camaraderie were important to most participants. All except two participants commented about *“friends”* in their interview. Distinctions can be made between a group of friends who already knew each other and went to a club together and the friendships made at golf clubs. Both were evident in the interviews. Amongst male participants the word *“camaraderie”* was used (e.g., P11, P16, P22), which implied a strong bond that went beyond friendship. Some saw camaraderie as existing within their group of playing friends and as such we, *“play together quite regularly and we enjoy the camaraderie”* (P11). Whereas camaraderie throughout the club was also embraced, *“The*

*best things? The camaraderie and the best ones I've been involved with try to involve the majority of the club, where possible"* (P22).

Throughout the interviews the inclusiveness and exclusiveness of golf emerged. One opinion was that *"good and hopeless people can play together"* (P13), as a person plays against the course (P13, P33, P34), unlike tennis which can only be played satisfactorily by people of similar standard (P13). However, this inclusiveness seems to be negated by the uncomfortable environment for new players. This environment is in part due to golf having *"got away from its roots. It began on poor land – the links. Not on even prepared greens – and only a few clubs were needed. The equipment now demanded has increased"*. Historically exclusiveness was not part of the initial impetus for the game (P31).

A feeling of inclusion and exclusion is not simply a characteristic of a club. It emanates from the relationship between a player and the club. Seven participants (P10, P12, P13, P16, P18, P30 and P36) related different experiences of the same club. P12 was unhappy about the treatment of new players, whereas P10 found the club very supportive after two attempts to learn golf at other clubs. P30's experience was in-between—he found it hard to go to the club on his own but was mentored by a group of older players (Table 45). P13 and P36 spoke highly of their club and their club experiences. P16 and P18 came to their clubs after critical incidents elsewhere and found the club to be extremely friendly.

Concerns about golf identified from the whole sample form a significant list, similar to the media log in Appendix 2. However, most participants only raised between one and three concerns of varying importance. Only two participants (P31, P32) raised five or six concerns. Alternative points of view were expressed on most issues such as inclusiveness of golf, critical incidents, hierarchy in membership, coaching, involvement of Asian and Pasifika players, dress code and golf clubs as a business. These concerns did not directly impact on the enjoyment of every player and every club. The only issue of universal concern was the difficulty for new players in the game.

The difficulty of progressing in the game was inherent in several stories (P10, P12, P15, P19, P29). P15 reported spending *"five nights in a row at a driving range"* to progress. He took a lesson once a week and then practised at the driving range *"to practise the movements"*. A driving range featured significantly in the stories of four other participants, who commented about the lack of practice facilities at clubs (P12, P16, P19, P33). The word *"daunting"* was used (e.g., P15). A younger participant commented that *"it's like breaking into any micro-society. You feel like an outsider at first until people*

*get used to you and I suppose it's a time thing, that it takes to settle*" (P27). Other participants also made comments about the time needed for new members to settle into a golf club (P19, P30). P19 firmly stated that golf clubs do not explain things well to new members. She also commented that no one enquired about her needs but explained emphatically the times that "*she could and could not play*". Many participants expressed the view that generally golf clubs need to be more welcoming of new players (P16, P21, P28, P31). Each of these participants emphasised that this comment did not apply to their current club. P32 felt that clubs were more welcoming now than in the past, for example people "*can now wear their cap sideways*", however further improvement is needed.

Varied views on group bookings emerged. Two participants regularly booked with a large group of friends (P20, P13). They commented about the importance of this group to their enjoyment of golf and the need to "*work around the booking system*" for a group booking (P13). P20 also noted the difficulty group bookings create for other members and recognised that their behaviour potentially caused problems, but added that group play is what he and his friends enjoy. The perspective of new members was expressed by P21, P12, P30, including the opinion that new players must have a reasonable chance of booking a game at a good time (P21).

Seven critical incidents were described in-depth when unpleasant behaviour was witnessed or experienced. The critical incidents were unpleasantness to a new player over dress (P20), chiding a relatively new player for using a golf cart on the course (P19), unpleasant attitude consistently demonstrated by the club committee (P18 & P17 both referring to the same club), and unpleasant behaviour by club members to a club manager witnessed by a number of people (P26). P27 was able to compare golf and bowling. She remarked that at bowling everyone was very welcoming. At golf, her immediate network was welcoming, but "*the same could not be said for other members*". P12 compared his experience of minimal welcome at a club with the inclusiveness experienced by a friend in Australia.

Hierarchy of membership was evident. P11 did not believe that he was really a club member because he was "*very much as a social player*" and was happy with the situation. His opinion was formed from his own philosophy of membership rather than any prejudice experienced at the club. However, prejudice against the 9-hole game was demonstrated by P24 who "*would never play 9-hole*". P15 would rather start early and play 18 holes than play 9-hole. P26 felt 9-hole golf could be good for beginners (and only beginners). Nevertheless, P29 thought that 9-hole would become more popular over time. The prejudice against 9-hole women members seemed significant to two participants

(P13, P32). One male participant explained that controversy over restricted course access for women was not new. He described two legal cases in the New Zealand Supreme Court in 1932 and 1952 in which women had taken action against golf clubs over restricted access and subsequent membership issues (P31). One high-profile court case occurred when a group of women took legal action against the Pupuke Golf Club over course access and resultant membership issues (Adlam, 2019; *O'Neill v Pupuke Golf Club Incorporated.*, ).

The nature of the golf course featured strongly in a few interviews. Greens and fairways are the most important feature of a club (P21). Concern was expressed that the televising of US championships raises expectations of New Zealand golf courses and players are becoming more demanding (P31). However, a comparison with overseas lead P32 to rate New Zealand courses as needing improvement. In comparison with Canada, membership fees were lower, all services were more casual and the condition of courses inferior (P32). P33 and P34 recognised the balancing act of retaining fees at a lower level while also looking after grounds. Course must be “*up to scratch*”, however the cost of maintenance was recognised (P34).

Views on coaching were divided. It was deemed to be essential when learning the game, with the alternative view that coaching was something to be avoided. P14 had been advised against coaching as “*a coach would try to change too much of your game at once*”. Coaching left P19 feeling incompetent, whereas the importance of coaching/lessons was expressed by four participants (P13, P15, P16, P32). P32 felt this had to be at a driving range in a big golf centre that loaned equipment. P15 enjoyed the experience with a coach who emphasised the importance of practice after coaching but found it hard “*because he [the coach] changed quite a lot to give me a bit more accuracy. Yeah, the grip, the swing, sort of stance and everything. So just concentrated on a few movements*”. P13 had one lesson in which he established his grip which has not changed since then. P16 was clear that lessons were important early on (when starting to play golf) otherwise “*if you go along to a driving range and hit a thousand balls, a pro won't be able to fix your habit*” (P16).

The differing perspectives on the involvement of Asian players in golf could be a thesis in itself. One participant changed club after two consecutive games with Asian members who did not speak throughout the game, “*all three to four hours of it*” (P16). The extensive course usage by Asians playing two rounds a day created a problem with access for other players (P24). One club was perceived as taking steps to limit the influence of Asian players (P24). Comments were made about lack of integration with

Asians not understanding the course rules, for example, an incident with an Asian family having a picnic on a fairway in the middle of a game (P33). Yet another participant was concerned that clubs were not welcoming enough of Asian players (P18). However, the three Asian participants really enjoyed their golf and were loyal members of their clubs. They play with other Asians and Kiwi players. They all felt welcomed, but also took part in activities specifically for Asian players. The interviews were undertaken in English, which may have placed some restriction on the topics these participants were able to raise.

The difficulties for Pacific Island players was noted with regard to their low average pay/wages in comparison to the cost of joining a golf club. Discussion also focused on difficulties for a new demographic group playing at a club if no one similar was already a member.

The extent to which a golf club is a business was the focus of discussion for two participants and was inherent in the stories of other participants. P24 believed strongly that golf is a business and that the practice of successful clubs should be studied. Past business experience led P12 to expect a greater level of “*customer service*” at his club. The manner in which participants evaluated their experience at golf clubs showed similarity to the evaluation of services in a profit setting.

Dress code was only spontaneously mentioned in three interviews: the critical incident previously mentioned (P20), the relaxation of dress code for women over the years (P29) and the difficulty of going straight from work to golf due to the dress code (P34). P20 was concerned that the dress code was “*putting people off the game*”. However, when asked about specific examples, he acknowledged that people had told him about the issue of dress code rather than him observing the problem himself. When asked at the end of the interview, most participants supported the dress code completely (P30, P33, P26) or to some extent. P21 was irritated about need for shoes (rather than sandals) in the clubhouse during summer but was otherwise happy with the dress code. P31 commented about idiosyncrasies such as a club requiring white socks for men wearing shorts. However, he also felt that overall the dress code was no longer an issue, but that criticisms were “*a hangover from past*” (P31). However, P15 felt the dress code was a good thing about golf. He was unaware of the dress code at his club, but felt that it must have been reasonable. P30 felt it was important to set a standard to young people. P34 made comments that he did not think he would be allowed to wear his cap backwards. However, he did not like to see people “*playing golf wearing hoodies—it does my head in*”. P34 and P33 both felt that a club expends effort creating a nice course, therefore scruffy dress is inappropriate and spoils the view. P17 respected the dress code when “*the*

*coach explained I prefer you to wear a collar*". It was not the participant's normal dress, but he was happy to accommodate the request.

Participants had given little thought to the ownership of golf clubs and the ensuing implications for members. Participants rarely spoke about a club as if they owned it, rather as a service—used and evaluated. The participant showing the greatest sense of ownership was a young player who commented "*I act like I own the place*" (P33), explaining that entails "*responsibility to keep the place nice and notice and report problems with course*". This sense of belonging and respect for the course ("*as it's yours*") was also mentioned by P30. When asked about the ownership of golf clubs, a few participants made a comment such as "*now that you mention it, yes members do own it and that's why we have an AGM*" (P16). Few went to the AGM, mainly because they were happy with the running of the club (e.g., P30, P13).

Other comments were made about the length of the game (P3), managing the other players and slow play (P18), difficulty knowing the rules (P32, P31) and the practices of a premium club in Auckland which differ markedly from other clubs (P24, P31). The financial issues of two clubs, prevalent in the media at the time of the interviews, were discussed by several participants (e.g., P11, P30). The general consensus was that financial management was a key criterion for a good golf club.

### **6.3.9 Suggestions for golf clubs**

One spontaneous answer to the request for suggestions for golf clubs was "*that is a really big question*" (P18). Most other replies were given hesitantly. Suggestions related to players, clubs and the game overall.

The most common responses related to making the game more accessible, by increasing course availability to a wider range people at increased range of times. For example, every member needs to have a reasonable chance of booking and "*good rights to the course*" (P16). Ambrose or team tournaments enabled new people to play comfortably (P19, P 30). An introduction to golf at school would create greater diversity of players (P14). Most importantly, the "*stuffiness*" needed to be relaxed (P32). Nine-hole golf should be promoted more (P10, P19) and 9-hole players or businesswomen should be able to play on a Saturday. This opinion was strongly held by two participants (P19, P29).

Better introduction for new players would create "*less stressful ways to enter the sport*" (P32). The suggestions of golfing legend Jack Nicklaus were considered to have merit such 12-hole courses, bigger holes and greater use of local, less formal rules (P32).

New players needed to ease themselves into the game on an easy course or by playing six or nine holes until they “*have worked up to something more challenging*” and they should avoid worrying about the score for as long as possible” (P32).

Introduction of new members also received focus (P16) such as a time slot for meeting each other. Structured induction was suggested of 20 minutes discussion, a mini competition and a session on booking procedure and course rules. However, P21 felt a better induction would be an interactive video that could be viewed at any time. A key message from P21 was to “*value new members, treat them like a customer and not take them for granted*”. P12 emphasised the importance of speaking to members personally, rather than relying on newsletters.

Membership options were suggested such as a “*circuit of 12 clubs for a set fee and then pick the one you like to join*” (P14), coaching as part of membership fee (P15) and a joint package for couples would “*make it something you can do with partner*” (P28).

One participant felt that “*a solution [for golf] is simple, obvious but unpalatable—merge clubs*” (P31), a suggestion also made by P20. The strict economic solution to most of golf’s problems is easy. Sensible limits on clubs and balls, courses relying on narrower fairways. Could soften balls so they won’t go so far—and retains the skill (P31).

However, a less experienced participant embraced the passion felt by so many of the sample. He felt the greatest opportunity for golf clubs was to “*celebrate the community that they can or could embody*” (P14).

## **6.4 Sample description and results for golf club personnel**

Golf club personnel discussed similar issues as the players: how players are introduced to the sport, how they decided where to play and issues related to leaving a club or the sport. Additional issues of membership renewal, payment of green fees, player life cycle and membership initiatives were also raised.

### **6.4.1 Sample description for golf club personnel**

Five club personnel were interviewed: four managers (GCP6, GCP7, GCP8, GCP37) and one coach (GCP39). All are male, play golf and had previously worked at other golf clubs, but not necessarily in a similar role. Most had experience in other types of business. The time in their current role ranged from a few years to approximately 10 years. The coach worked for a club overseas where he developed a programme for introducing new players to golf and developing their skills. The club personnel were interviewed about their perceptions of membership issues and club initiatives to encourage membership. In order

to protect confidentiality of opinions, interview numbers have not been provided when the information could identify the participant.

The clubs differed substantially in their member profiles. At one club, 80% of the membership lived within eight kilometres of the club. For another club, less than half the membership lived in the locality. One club had high Asian membership, representative of the local demographic profile, including both Asian-born members and New Zealand-born members of Asian descent. The other clubs had predominantly New Zealand European membership.

#### **6.4.2 Introduction to golf**

When asked how people start to play golf, the options were similar to those given by golf participants in Section 1.3.2. Friends or family were the most important influence (all managers). A differentiation was made between “*kids starting either through mum and dad or from school programmes*” (GCP7). People in their forties may have played before being “*waylaid by sex, drugs and rock and roll and can now afford to play golf*” (GCP7). The need for exercise also brought players to golf (GCP7). The only answer not given by the participants was the inspiration of New Zealand elite players winning tournaments (GCP6).

Most new members were existing players rather than new players (GCP6). A few people “*walk in and say they want to play*” (GCP8). In this case “*it is important to find out what is motivating them and develop an approach that will work for them*” (GCP8). The manager explained the introduction used at that club of guiding the new member around the facilities and discussing their needs. Another manager commented about problems a potential new member can face at a golf club from being referred between the club office and the pro shop. He commented that processes for joining a new member may not be clear within some clubs (GCP37).

A careful introduction to golf was emphasised as a precursor to membership. “*If [the introduction is] done well, membership occurs*”. Membership needs to occur at an appropriate time and a club must “*not to go from a nice experience to shoving a membership form in their [a potential member’s] hand*” (GCP39).

All club personnel emphasised the difficulty of starting the game and becoming part of a club, in particular, for the older age group. GCP7 stated that, “*Golf is a hard game to learn as you get older*”. The coach spoke about the courage needed to walk into a club, especially for women (GCP39). Golf clubs are hard to break into when learning to play. It is easier for outgoing people (GCP6, GCP7), otherwise “*it is a barrier*.”

*Breaking the ice and getting involved*” (GCP7). The coach believed that “*even if all the ingredients are right it can take two years for players to feel comfortable about joining a golf club. The more competitive they [the players] are, the quicker they join*” (GCP39). He felt that clubs do not understand the nature of social competition, and in general, clubs focus too much on formal competition. Intense competition has made clubs seem unfriendly (GCP39). In general, golf processes have not been modernised in the way that other sports have. GCP39 noted that, “*Clubs and courses need to think about newcomers a lot more*”.

#### **6.4.3 Deciding where to play**

When asked how people decided where to play, one manager replied, “*it’s a real tough one*”, but later mentioned that it is probably not a deliberate decision (GCP8). Selection of a club arises from friends (all managers), trialling other courses (all managers), comparing the fees at one club with others (all managers), moving to a new area (GCP8), relocation of work (GCP7) and fitness. Hilly or wet courses are harder for older people if dependent on using a golf cart (GCP8). Choosing the best course in the area was also important (GCP8).

Each manager expressed a slightly different view about the benefits of membership. Friendship and camaraderie were mentioned by all participants. Other factors were competition (GCP7), business contacts (GCP7) or networking (GCP6). An alternative opinion was that the “*main benefit of club membership is the sense of ownership ... of being part of like-minded people, getting to know your course. Sense of belonging and getting to know people*” (GCP8).

Two comments were made about the role of club websites in player decision-making. The managers were clear that even though potential members may not have mentioned websites in the player interviews, information from websites was evident in the managers’ conversations with players (GCP6, GCP7).

#### **6.4.4 Membership renewal**

All managers acknowledged the possibility of members renewing but not playing. They were mostly unclear about the reasons and preferred not to enquire. They felt it usually related to older members. One manager commented that discounts for older members are as important as discounts for younger ones.

Most managers clearly described their renewal process. The most detailed process involved sending notices, with information about options to upgrade or downgrade membership, along with payment options such as direct debit weekly or monthly as an

alternative to lump sum payment (GCP8). The level of follow-up varied from sending one or two reminder notices to telephoning the non-renewals. The traditional process of formal resignation in writing was mentioned, with the added comment that now most non-renewals no longer formally resign. Players renew membership if “*happy with what they get—socially and facilities*” (GCP37). This point of view was expressed by all club personnel.

#### **6.4.5 Leaving a club**

Many reasons explained members leaving a club: family circumstances (children, wife, relationship start or break up), moving away, health and work pressure. These factors were not something a golf club can control (All managers). Moving to another club was also noted (GCP6).

The contribution of a bad experience was discussed, for example, annoyance over slow play. If players did not move around the course at the expected pace, the people behind them were also slowed down (GCP8, GCP37, GCP37).

The maintenance and improvement to playing surfaces was paramount (GCP7, GCP8, GCP37). This could be “*small things such as improving paths or bunkers. Stuff that people can see—ongoing*” (GCP8). Two managers commented about past problems with drainage on their courses and resultant loss of membership. During this time members were encouraged to play elsewhere during the winter. One manager noted that the membership of the alternative club dropped noticeably when his club’s drainage problem was rectified. The issue highlighted the importance of a club being aware of an artificial membership increase driven by a short-term problem at another club.

Individual localised issues included the loss of membership for clubs in geographic areas that had been dry (with no public venues selling alcohol). In these areas, golf clubs, like bowling clubs, became drinking venues. When licensing laws changed and the area was no longer dry, large membership loss was experienced. This issue occurred sufficiently recently to be remembered by some Auckland clubs. Clubs with high Asian membership noted members going back to Asia for long periods of time. Members could disappear without warning and then reappear months or years later.

#### **6.4.6 Paying green fees**

Green fees are paid by non-members when they play at a club. However, the fees differ depending whether a player is a member elsewhere. The highest green fees are paid by people who do not belong to any club. Non-members playing with a member pay lower

green fees. Some clubs also offer a reduced subscription that requires the payment of a small green fee when playing (GCP7, GCP8).

Perception of value influences a player to pay green fees rather than join a club. Unless a player plays once a week, full membership is not viable. The majority of people paying green fees are likely to be infrequent players or on holiday. All the club managers mentioned personal circumstances as the predominant factor influencing players to pay green fees, for example life-stage such as “*a man married with kids, time-poor, mortgage, big job, playing five – six times a year*” (GCP7).

All managers spoke disparagingly about internet deals. For example, internet deals have “*bastardised the market*” (GCP6). The main deal was a commercial internet service offering low green fees after negotiating playing time with clubs. Two managers acknowledged the temptation to solve cashflow problems with such deals, which cause members to question the value of membership. One manager acknowledged having done this and was clear that he would not repeat it. A downward spiral occurs when a membership decline encourages the club to gain short-term cash by further discounting. One manager (GCP6) was clear that this issue was driven from within the golf community and that external forces must not be blamed. Clubs are allowing the practice of internet deals. Similar issues occur with convenience clubs, which are out of town clubs with low cost membership enabling their members to visit other clubs at member rates.

In addition to low cost green fees, internet deals have been associated with freedom. “*The freedom for people who don’t belong to clubs has been magnified over the last few years through*” deals for green fees. The green fee player has increased the freedom to play a range of courses and control their own experience as they “*will never be asked to buy a raffle ticket or volunteer*” (GCP7). For these people, the perception is that golf clubs are “*behind the times in expectations of dress standard and behaviour and everything else. They don’t want to be part of something that takes away freedom*”. Freedom is achieved though buying on internet “*and never having to deal with anyone face to face*” (GCP7).

The effect of green fees players was contested. One manager quoted that 6,000 visitor rounds accounted for approximately 15% of the total rounds played at his course. However, many visitors were members of other clubs. Two managers felt the concern about casual golf was disproportionate to its impact. A large number of non-members players were reported; however, they played infrequently. Few people played casually on a regular basis.

Nevertheless, all managers supported New Zealand Golf's imminent casual golf initiative to encourage "*casual golfers to register on an area of the New Zealand Golf website*". This initiative would provide data about the "*300,000 players in the wilderness*". After registering, the casual golfers log in, record scores and receive an average score rather like "*an introduction to golf*". Clubs will benefit by obtaining information about this type of player and will be able offer targeted promotions to them.

#### **6.4.7 Concept of lifecycle**

The concept of golf as part of a lifecycle was mentioned by all managers. Each golf club has a unique profile and needs to analyse its own membership (All managers). The strength of a club can be analysed by looking at the number of members at each life cycle stage (GCP7). The usual pattern shows a number of juniors and young adults. When people establish households, have a family and a busy job, membership is discontinued. It is then picked up again later in life (All managers). Clubs attract juniors more easily if located where "*kids can get there without parents*", depending on roads and transport (GCP7). Other clubs may be attractive to 40-year-olds or cater well to retirement. Clubs may not need to be worried about the high average age of golfers, as the New Zealand population is aging (GCP8). The promotion of golf is a balancing act and should not be solely focused on young people (GCP8, GCP37).

A comparison with the past was made. A few decades ago, especially in smaller towns, limited options for sport were available. "*The choices are now huge*" for both younger and older people. "*Not only [physical] sport but all the electronic options. As people get older, they seem to be more interested in being members. However, these people also now have huge choices*" (GCP7). One manager queried whether today's younger people will age in the same way as the older generation (GCP7). If so, they may come to golf at an older age, as past generations have.

#### **6.4.8 Membership initiatives**

All participants commented about the need to take a strategic approach to problems, both financial and marketing. Cashflow and financial management were important to "*avoid being overcapitalised*" (GCP2), with emphasis on identifying essential expenditure and club improvements and then ensuring income to cover these costs. The concept of convincing "*people to stay local and play local*" (GCP6) was mooted as a strategy to counter the low prices of country clubs.

The implications of the declining number of full members were noted as this category is currently “*where the dollars are*” (GCP37, GCP6). With the decline in this category, it seems important to establish new options (GCP8).

Playing times for membership groups were discussed in detail. The most common approach reserved the popular weekend playing times for full members who paid the highest membership fees. However, the coach (GCP39) commented that this approach disadvantages new and infrequent players. Working people paying green fees or with an introductory package do not have access to the course at weekends. He commented about the importance of weekend time for other membership categories if new people are to be encouraged to play golf.

All except one golf manager talked about a success story at their club such as increasing the number of 20- to 40-year-olds, increasing the number of juniors and attracting people from a wide geographic base. Each success arose from activity with a clear strategic purpose, implemented in a focused way with considerable input from a range of people at the club.

Wide-ranging initiatives were encouraged such as adding value to membership rather than discounting, targeting activity at specific demographic groups, altering fee differential between categories, making the club easy to join and questioning dress code (Table 50). A consistent welcome is important, as is the ability for new members to play straight away. In addition, “*if someone joins – we don’t want people to be playing alone – unless they want to*” (GCP8).

Table 50. Initiatives for membership

Marketing plan with membership strategies specific to the club, with analysis of member data.
When subscriptions increase, try to add a new non-monetary benefit.
Note the advantages of location of the club, for example, emphasis on the bar will be stronger in some locations, whereas an out of town club may emphasise summer or secondary members.
Work with other clubs so members can play at other courses, e.g., Six clubs involved in the Golf Passport, giving members two rounds at each of the other clubs.
Stay away from discounting. “ <i>For time-poor people 20–40 years, no amount of discounting will attract them</i> ”. Develop alternatives to GrabOne and convenience clubs.
Deals such as 18 months for the price of one year or two people for the price of one. Use strategically rather than as competition with other clubs. It can give a nudge to people who are contemplating joining. Only effective a limited number of times.
Member-bring-member – rebate on subscription for bringing a member.
Focus on full-playing membership which continues to decline. Decrease or retain level of fee for full-playing membership. Increase the fee for all other categories.
Emphasis on juniors – reduce the age for junior to begin to six-years-old.
Activity targeted at people 20–35 years: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media (campaign not just activity)</li> <li>• Promotional day on course targeted at young people, with disc jockey. Teams must include a non-golfer</li> <li>• Two younger members volunteered to run a stall at orientation day at university</li> <li>• Cheeky Nine competition—nine holes in pairs. Golf score card on phones (overseas idea)</li> <li>• Discounting for younger age groups</li> </ul>
Implementation of young people’s activity aided by young employees at golf club.
The importance of an Asian presence in marketing such as local newspapers, Asian media, social media, Asian content on website.
“ <i>The dress standard should be under question</i> ”. Have a “ <i>dress standard applicable when there is something on</i> ”, but not at other times (an example given of a club that abolished dress code. Within a year, most players were back to the original dress code as it is the most sensible dress on a golf course).
Have a mufti Monday or day when dress code is relaxed.
“ <i>Join and play today – so that it is easy for people to join</i> ”. When potential members enquire about membership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enquire about their needs or hopes such as when they were hoping to play golf</li> <li>• Explain a range of options</li> <li>• Walk them around. Get them involved.</li> </ul>
For people to be “ <i>mixed and matched – rather than playing with the same people all the time</i> ”. Set the booking system to prevent people booking into a specific spot with specific people. A player books and is allocated to a place.
Make slow players aware of their slowness. Marshals need to move people along or encourage them to walk a hole to catch up.

One manager was clear that more emphasis is needed on “*what a good sport it [golf] is—rather than how difficult it is ... It’s a wonderful social activity*” (GCP7). This opinion was also echoed by the coach who had developed a programme to bring people into golf in a supportive environment. He commented that potential new players have “*an image in their minds of playing on a beautiful golf course. And then find themselves learning on a driving range, in a situation far removed from their vision*” (GCP39).

The new player programme began on an express course, with a new golfer playing on the course right away and completing a round of golf in the same time frame as an

experienced person. The playing environment was adjusted to the player's level, which the coach identified during lessons. The express course followed a route similar to the 9-hole players. Holes are selected to avoid difficult hazards, preferably out of view of the clubhouse. The player begins their play much closer to the hole. As they become more experienced, the distance of the starting point from the hole increases. A 15-inch hole can be inserted into the standard hole if required. The player can use one golf club (rather than the minimum of a set required on most courses). After a five-week programme, the player can either repeat the programme or sign-up to a pathway programme. The coach did not encourage anyone straight into 18-hole golf. The newly developed Pathway programme, a bridge between the beginner course and fully experienced playing, includes tuition, free use of equipment, practice time and six rounds of golf on the express course or the main course. With a group culture developed, the new player does not feel alone. Similar ideas were also expressed by P32 when describing initiatives endorsed by former champion Jack Nicklaus to improve the appeal of the game for new players.

The coach was concerned about the common approach of a new player being "*dragged round by a friend*", usually an experienced golfer. "*An experienced group who play together—is that a good environment for a new player?*". This common approach is unlikely to be an effective way for most people to learn golf (GCP39). He also noted the importance of managing the expectations of other players, so they show tolerance to new players not adhering strictly to the rules. A heartfelt comment was also made, "*how on earth do players learn, if golf clubs don't give them the chance?*".

## **6.5 Discussion**

This study focused on club perspectives of membership. With sampling organised through clubs, only a limited number of non-member players and former players were interviewed. However, existing members discussed their previous non-member and pre-membership experiences.

In spite of the heterogeneity of participants, evident in the sample descriptions and the vignettes, the sample has limitations. The heterogeneity can be seen in the range of demographic groups (age and gender) and playing experiences in the participant samples. However, both samples have limitations with regard to ethnicity. In addition, the bowls sample came predominantly from two large clubs, did not include any current non-member participants or recent new players. The golf participant sample came from a wider range of clubs and playing experiences. Nevertheless, the regular non-member player and discount/internet purchaser are not covered.

The discussion in this chapter draws on Paul's (Moseley et al., 2005) critical thinking principles (outlined in Section 2.10; noting similarities and differences in situations, comparing theory with practice and exploring contradictions and implications). Cross-case comparison and consideration of unique cases are important aspects of the discussion.

### **6.5.1 Cross-case comparison: Bowls and golf participants**

Passion for golf and bowls was evident. The dominant tone of most interviews showed participants enjoyed not only the sport itself, but also the social networks of their club. Nevertheless, cross-case comparison between the two samples identified issues for golf and bowls. The issues relate to reliance on current membership for new member attraction, inclusiveness and exclusiveness in these sports, the ease or difficulty of trialling the sports, transition between informal competition and membership, the nature of tension in the sport or clubs and the implications of temporary absence from golf membership.

A key issue in both golf and bowls is the prevalence of the introduction to the sports being from existing players. This practice aids the creation of strong social networks in a club. However, these networks also perpetuate the profile of a club and make it difficult to extend into more diverse membership. Three golf club personnel and one bowling participant talked about success in strengthening a minority demographic group at their club and the amount of effort needed to do this. In all cases it emanated from a core of people in the minority group being at the forefront of activity.

Inclusiveness is potentially a feature of both sports. Support for bowlers with disability was evident in the sample and is consistent with the emphasis placed on diversity by the national organisation (Section 4.1.2). The welcoming of new players at bowling clubs was a common theme. The ability for a diverse range of people to compete together was heralded by bowls participants. Only one participant mentioned the same inclusiveness in golf with the possibility of strong and less experienced people playing together. With a player competing against the course, people of mixed ability can play together. However, the social environment and concern about attitudes of other players seems to negate this possibility, except for one-off events such as Ambrose tournaments.

The most evident difference between the golf and bowls stories was the relative ease of trialling bowls compared with golf. Most bowlers went to a club, had a go and took up bowls comparatively quickly. Two bowlers in the sample started on their own and quickly met other players. While one bowler did not like the environment, she

acknowledged the friendliness of other bowlers and her ability to move to another club. By contrast, the pathway into golf differed depending on the age at which a person first tried the sport and whether the new player knew an existing member. The difficulty of learning golf at an older age was evident and also acknowledged by golf club personnel. Not only is the game harder to master, difficulties arise when players are unable to fit into a structured golf club environment. The people who started alone or with non-golfing friends all found it hard to break into the golfing community.

The uptake of bowls was not solely influenced by other players. Support for new bowlers covered availability of loan equipment, outreach to workplaces and signage for open days and similar events. By comparison the availability of equipment for new golfers was rarely mentioned. Two players (P31, P32) and the coach commented about the range of golf clubs needed to play. However, no participants commented about how new adult players could obtain equipment when learning the game.

Joining a bowling club occurred almost simultaneously with starting to play. The lower cost of bowls membership would make this easier. A golf club membership costing hundreds or thousands of dollars per year is a more significant outlay. Golf club personnel alluded to difficulties and lack of clarity at clubs about new membership, and several participants appreciated the support from driving ranges, rather than clubs at the early stage of learning.

However, the transition between more 'casual' forms of sport to membership was more evident in golf than for bowls. A number of golf participants transitioned to full membership from limited membership, Twilight Golf and Ambrose tournaments in a way that did not occur from Barefoot Bowls or Business House Bowls, even when participants showed a strong desire for further bowls experience. Whether or not this was a widespread pattern cannot be determined from this qualitative sample.

The nature of tension within the two communities differed. Golf participants described critical incidents, which were memorable upsetting events in which players experienced or witnessed unpleasant treatment from other players. Critical incidents caused participants to change golf club. However, there must be other people who simply gave up golf. The need for resilience was mentioned by all club personnel and several players. For bowls, underlying tensions were between traditional and less traditional members, consistent with the study by La Trobe University (2013). For each participant from the more traditional club, grumpiness about at least one issue was expressed in the interviews (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5). The participants from the other club alluded to tension between bowls clubs (P41, P42, P43, P44, P45).

Temporary absence from golf was a common phenomenon—either a gap between junior and adult playing or within adult playing experience. This highlights the importance of re-engagement strategies for golf in addition to attraction and retention of new members. The golfers in this sample re-engaged relatively easily, albeit nervously. Only two absences in the bowls sample were noted. This may be due in part to the older age at which people start bowls.

### **Comparison with literature and media**

The participants' stories were compared with the categorisation of reasons for discontinued membership into controllable and uncontrollable factors (East et al., 2013), the decision-making model of Shank and Lyberger (2015), the bowls segmentation of La Trobe University (2013) and PCM golf stages of Funk et al. (2011), theoretical discussion about bonding capital and bridging capital and gendered golfing behaviour described by McGinnis and Gentry (2006). The directly applicable literature (PCM model and bowls segmentation) had been derived from research specifically related to golf or bowls. Where more general theory was compared, applications and contradictions were both evident.

Participant interviews were also compared with media, and this comparison showed awareness of membership issues and negative stories prevalent in the media relating to golf and bowls. The media coverage tended to generalise a number of issues. As can be seen particularly for golf in Section 6.3.5 and from the range of vignettes, few issues were so widespread as to affect all members/players. However, the number of issues raised across a sample of 46 people is wide-ranging.

### **Controllable vs uncontrollable reasons for discontinued membership**

Reasons for discontinued membership do not fit neatly into the categories of controllable or uncontrollable factors defined by East et al. (2013). A third category of semi-controllable factors was evident. The nature of member-owned organisations creates limitations on the level of control compared with organisations offering paid services.

The concept of controllable and uncontrollable factors for discontinuation of membership was applicable to both sports. Controllable factors could be described as a “failure” in the club, and in this study, led to players changing club. In many cases, the problem was a result of the behaviour of other club members. These factors were more prevalent for golf participants, even with predominantly committed golfers. Without that failure, membership may have continued. However, the nature of member-owned organisations creates limitations on the level of control of a club in situations such as critical incidents. When these incidents occurred between members, the club administration may have limited ability to prevent them and/or manage the outcome. This

situation is technically within the control of the club as an entity, however possibly outside the control of the management of the club.

Uncontrollable factors are beyond the club's control. Given the age of bowlers, a high level of membership loss is out of a club's control. It is important in both sports for a club to be honest in the assessment of its membership loss. Golf club personnel seemed to embrace uncontrollable issues more readily than the controllable ones.

Semi-controllable factors during temporary absence from a sport were due to playing other sport, having a young family, general pressures of work or starting a business. The golf participants all said nothing could have made membership more attractive in these situations. Most expected to return to the game; however, that may not been evident to a golf club and the return was often to a different club. This situation creates semi-controllable factors with nothing physically preventing people from joining a club. However, other priorities were so overwhelming that the golf community in its current form cannot easily compete.

### **Decision-making**

The process of club identification resembled a trial and error learning experience more than active decision-making. A decision-making process was evident if a change of club was needed. The decision-making model of Shank and Lyberger (2015) was rarely evident when the sport was a new experience. The most common scenario related to following the guidance of a friend. This practice is consistent with the emphasis on friends described in Section 4.3.3.

Introductions to golf and bowls do not show a linear, clear-cut process as in the decision-making model of Shank and Lyberger (2015) (discussed in Section 3.3.1). East et al. (2013) believe decision-making models imply rationality and are more evident for a first-time decision or when a habit is broken. However, Shank and Lyberger's (2015) process was not evident even in the first-time experiences. When other people were the influencing factor, the process was straightforward: follow the suggestion of the friend or existing player and evaluate the outcome. In some cases, identification of a need such as a change in circumstance, preceded the trial of the sport. All influencing factors in Figure 6 could be seen in at least one participant's story. However, each story featured only three or four of these factors. The process of Shank and Lyberger (2015) was evident when players changed club for both bowls and golf (i.e., when a habit is broken). Participants identified the need for change, sought information and evaluated alternatives.

Consultation with other people is not a feature of the decision-making model. While not specifically stated, Shank and Lyberger's (2015) model implies individual

decision-making. For both golf and lawn bowls, the most common scenario involved more than one person joining or leaving a club at the same time. Consequently, a membership success or failure can have flow-on effects beyond one person.

The lack of rationality as identified by East et al. (2013), was evident in cases where the decision was made by someone else and the participant acquiesced. One golf club manager commented that the choice of club is often not a deliberate decision. A player's introduction to these sports resembles a process of trial and error rather than a decision.

### **Segmentation and PCM**

The bowls segmentation (La Trobe University, 2013) and the PCM golf stages (Funk et al., 2011) could be readily applied to the sample. Most participants displayed attributes of a bowls segment or a PCM stage. This qualitative study gives indications about the barriers to golfers progressing between stages in the PCM model. The lack of induction in golf seems to be a barrier between the first (awareness) and second (attraction) stage. The barriers between 2nd (attraction) and 3rd (attachment) stages arise from family circumstances and work (lower priority of golf) and personal circumstances (difficulty of playing golf at certain stages of life).

### **Emotional nature of clubs: In-groups and out-groups**

The impact of other members on the experience of players at both bowling and golf clubs is profound. Both bonding capital and emotional exclusion are illustrated in this study. The contribution of golf and bowls to social networks (Section 3.1.7) was evident throughout the interviews. The introduction of friends arises from and enhances the positive benefits for bonding capital, formed from the homogeneity of demographic and psychographic characteristics of members. Bonding capital was evident when friends played together and introduced people similar to themselves to the club.

The concept of emotional exclusion (described in Section 3.1.4) is demonstrated in several golf scenarios, not only from actions perceived as unkind but from ignoring new players. This may not be deliberate. Lack of acceptance by other people was evident in the critical incidents. None of the sample acknowledged being unkind to another golfer. Therefore, either none of the sample had been unkind or they were unaware of the negative effect of their behaviour on other golfers. In the critical incidents, it is not clear whether unfriendliness was unintentional or an unintended consequence of an attempted explanation of the customs of golf.

Bourdieu (1978) noted informal rather than formal mechanisms that prevent working classes from joining golf clubs. Informal mechanisms were evident in this study;

however, these mechanisms disadvantaged several minority groups and new players rather than working classes. In bowls, the mechanisms are subtle and relate to lack of empathy towards people different to the cohesive profile of a small club, for example younger people. Mechanisms are more evident in golf such as the lack of clear process for new players, as well as the plethora of unwritten rules and practices. However, formal mechanisms are also evident such as the protection of Saturday play for 18-hole golfers. A coach and one participant recommended that new players build up to 18-hole golf. This approach is difficult for anyone unable to play during the week. From a marketing sense, allocation of the prime playing time to full-fee paying customers is a sound strategy, similar to peak pricing (Kotler et al., 2013). However, this strategy is in conflict with social development of a community and extending the sport into new demographic groups. Difficulties with course access were significant for some players. An older player was clear that restrictions adversely affecting women are not new and have been significant enough in the past to result in legal action.

The protection of 18-hole membership favours men more than women, a greater percentage of whom are 9-hole members (Section 4.2.3). Gender issues were rarely discussed overtly in interviews. However, these interviews covered a number of aspects of club membership, unlike the gender-specific studies of McGinnis et al. (2008). A few bowling and golfing women identified favourable arrangements for women as a criterion for club selection. Aside from this, during the golf interviews, men rarely mentioned women at all and vice versa. The two groups appeared to play quite separately. A few players commented about the playing behaviour of their spouse and that they played together from time to time. For both bowlers and golfers, a husband and wife did not necessarily play at the same club. In spite of one younger bowls participant commenting enthusiastically about the gender equity at Barefoot Bowls, few people made comments about men and women playing together, apart from one man proud of the fact that older women could out-bowl him.

This study demonstrated ways in which the needs of a group of players unintentionally discourage other players. For example, for several male golfers, a huge part of their enjoyment was derived from playing with a group of friends, to such an extent that they needed to work around the club system to book games. They were aware that their behaviour could be problematic to others and expressed this with discomfort. They were not intending to discourage other players; however, their network was a considerable factor in their enjoyment of golf.

This principle was not evident in the interviews with the bowls participants. However, the La Trobe University (2013) study from Australia gives examples of such practice in Australia (Section 3.4.3). This omission from the current study could be a result of the sample being taken from two positive and inclusive clubs.

### **6.5.2 Individual cases**

Discrepant or outlier cases are important in qualitative research, typically to ensure that conclusions are relevant to outliers as well as the majority of cases. In this study, outlier or unique cases illustrate problems likely to be found more widely in the population. In addition, three cases of current members with no handicap were studied and compared with the logistic regression findings in Chapter 5.

Five participants (two women and three men) had unique stories which highlight potential issues for sport in general, not just golf and bowls: a woman trying to return to sport after having a baby, a sport ‘sampler’ who moved from sport to sport with a group of friends, two people (one bowls and one golf) joined a club and found themselves playing with people demographically different to themselves, and a man changing golf club after language difficulties with players from another ethnic group. One of these players had stopped playing the sport, three changed club and one moved from bowls to golf and showed considerable enthusiasm but low attachment to both sports.

The new mother had concerns about managing the care of a baby on a golf course, in particular breast-feeding during a long game of golf and the safety of the baby. She also described difficulties of returning to fitness for sport. Few other women in the sample had played golf with a young family. The two older long-standing golfing women could not remember how they managed when their family was young.

Younger people joining an older club must be a common scenario, especially in bowls. The female participant in this study moved to another bowls club. The male golf participant played with a group of older men for a few years, appreciative of their support. However, it is more than likely that other players in similar situations have been lost to both sports.

Other scenarios described by the sample are likely to be prevalent in golf or bowls: an older woman giving up bowls when her club closed, a woman unable to connect with a companion with whom to play golf and a working woman unable to access a golf course at suitable times. In addition, two bowls players alluded to the potential impact of retirement villages on bowls clubs. These scenarios were all recalled by women. Two of

these scenarios demonstrate difficulties for new players fitting into an established structured environment.

Issues relating to handicap raised in Chapter 5 were borne out of this study. The three current golf club members with no handicap had either started golf within the previous year or reconnected recently. One was retired and the other two were in their 30s or 40s. The continued membership of two of these participants could not be assured from the interviews due to their weak connection with the game (a sport sampler and someone starting alone with no social network). In addition, the four participants with no handicap were not current club members.

### **6.5.3 Cross-case comparison: Golf participants and golf club personnel**

The comments from golf club personnel are generally reflected in the experiences of players. In particular, the life cycle mentioned by one golf club manager was evident in the interviews with older participants (P16, P18 and P31), that is playing as children or young adults, giving up golf in their twenties and thirties and then returning to golf at a later age.

As suggested by the golf club personnel, the past behaviour of these older players was similar to the current behaviour of the 40/50-year-old participants (P16, P18 and P31 compared with P21, P25 and P31). These participants all gave up golf and/or membership due to work or family pressures and came back at a later time. P23 and P34 are younger and have given up golf but show sufficient interest to re-engage in the future. Just as 80 old P29 began with non-membership playing experience and subsequently became a loyal club member, so did P33 currently in his 20s. The loyalty of P33's membership was indicated when his father mentioned that he might become a green fee player and P33 felt that he "*might have to have a word with him*" about his inappropriate behaviour. P29 commented that she "*appreciates golf more now than when younger*".

In spite of this demonstration of a general life cycle in golf, it is important that assumptions are not made about the needs and attitudes of any age group. People in one age group can show disparity of motivation for golf. For example, amongst the 20/30-year-olds, P22 is a committed low handicap competitive player, P33 is also a committed loyal club member, P34 is taking a break from golf and P14 is a social player. Amongst the 50-year-olds, P9 is reconsidering membership options due to grandchildren, P17 is a hacker, P20 is a committed club member involved in administration, P21 is returning to golf and P24 a committed long-term competitive player. The same diversity can be seen in other age groups.

Three areas of difference between the club personnel and players related to reasons for discontinued membership, use of websites and appreciation of difficulty of the game. Golf club personnel focused on uncontrollable factors when discussing discontinued membership. They made little mention of the controllable causes. All of the managers discussed the importance of websites in attracting members and communicating information about the club. Not one of the participants made any reference to consultation of websites. This may be that the use of websites is now so commonplace that it is automatic behaviour and not worthy of mention. Alternatively, websites may be more important to people outside the existing golf community. Golf club personnel were all aware of the difficulty of learning the game. However, with the exception of the coach, they focused purely on the actual game rather than the social environment, with few references to the impact that experienced players can have on new people.

## **6.6 Conclusions**

The conclusions cover the implications and consequences of this study. It covers the extent to which the results in this study are consistent with previous studies in this thesis, the implications for an individual club and the implications for golf and bowls overall.

### **6.6.1 Comparison with previous studies in this thesis**

The results in this chapter reflect the statistical information in the two previous chapters. Chapter 4 shows the low percentage of golf players who started or restarted in recent years (Table 18). Chapter 5 demonstrates that predictors of discontinued membership are an absence of handicap, being younger; limited friends in the handicap system. The difficulties for new golf players are consistent with these statistics, as is the lifecycle of players.

In comparison, the trialling and uptake of bowls was relatively easy. This is consistent with the high percentage of new players (Table 18). Active outreach from clubs into the community reflects the national organisation's strategy, more evident in bowls than golf in this qualitative sample. However, the progression from the programmes such as Business House Bowls and Barefoot Bowls into full membership did not seem to be as evident as in golf. However, on this point it would be dangerous to generalise based on this qualitative study.

### **6.6.2 Implications for an individual club**

The challenge for a club is to identify issues of relevance to that club. The issues in this chapter have arisen from players at several clubs. Not all issues will apply to every club.

As every member may have a different experience, it can be difficult to ascertain a clear picture of the issues for that club. This study highlights the importance of understanding the extent to which discontinued membership is due to controllable or uncontrollable factors. While the number of less engaged members in the sample was limited, these participants offered guidance about issues that golf and bowls clubs need to consider. The difficulties in starting to play golf can be summarised as no obvious way into golf, 'negative' experiences when learning, negative experiences from other players and the allure of other sports ("*Golf can wait*").

Current recruitment is heavily dependent on friends and people already engaged in the sport. As membership numbers decline, a spiral effect will be evident with fewer members able to introduce friends to the sport. Bigger clubs gain more from the 'bring a friend' principle. Clubs with long-standing members have a weaker ability to draw on the external networks of existing members. Their members may be heavily dependent on the club for their social network and/or may have already introduced any interested friends.

Most clubs need consider the potential conflict between the needs of member groups. For example, are existing members unintentionally creating exclusionary practices? What impact is the protection of Saturday play having on developing new membership? Each club needs to investigate and tackle these questions in discussion with its own membership, which highlights the value of a club-specific action research. Mechanisms for dealing with critical incidents will more than likely be needed in a club's membership strategy.

Clubs need to bear in mind that two members can experience the same environment differently with a negative experience for one and a positive experience for another. Unique cases in this sample gave strong indicators of issues for the golf and bowls communities and should not be overlooked when considering how to improve membership arrangements.

The executive of a club needs to understand the experience of new players at that club and provide appropriate support. However, for the good of the sport, it is also important for a club to recognise if it is unable to provide a good experience for a player and ensure that the player is given other options. It may be hard for a club keen to increase its membership to refer another player to a different club. No incidents of a club doing this was reported in this study. When a member found a club was not meeting their needs, an alternative was identified from the player's social network or their own initiative. Clubs could have a role as ambassadors of their sport in welcoming new players, not just new members. Clubs belong to a network of organisations with which they both

collaborate and compete, especially in bowls where a number of clubs are located in a suburb.

### **6.6.3 Implications for golf and bowls overall**

Club membership is complex, especially in golf. The passion of the committed golfers and bowlers was evident and easily summarised. Golf, in particular, seems to have an allure that draws players to the game and gives impetus to overcome negative experiences. Bowling seems to be a game where players are almost surprised when they enjoy it. Nevertheless, in both sports, a degree of resilience is needed if the initial social environment is not comfortable for a new player.

A key issue for golf is enabling the new players, especially someone on their own and at an older age. With decline in junior membership, fewer adults will have past experience on which to draw. Temporary absence, particularly from golf, means that re-engaging former players is as important as the recruitment of new players and retention of existing ones. However, this re-engagement may well be at a different club. Re-engagement was not evident in the bowls sample. However, with such large numbers trialling the relatively recent initiatives of Barefoot and Business House Bowls (Table 5), the potential for re-engagement may occur in the future.

Inclusiveness is a complex issue for both golf and bowls. Proponents of these sports perceive inclusiveness. However, the image of both sports does not universally reflect this potential inclusiveness. The negative media reports influenced the perception of dedicated players. If these players are influenced by negative reports, it would be logical to assume that non-players will also be influenced by them.

A life cycle is evident in golf with players stopping during early to mid-adulthood or starting or re-starting golf at an older age. Nevertheless, assumptions cannot be made about how or why a specific individual wants to play a sport. Demographic profile does not determine the aspirations of players.

The extent to which players have been lost to these sports cannot be ascertained from this sample as it was predominantly drawn from clubs. This study has shown scenarios in which the club would not have known about problems leading to membership discontinuation.

## **6.7 Chapter summary**

The aim of this study was to examine the behaviour and attitudes of lawn bowlers and golfers in relation to club membership. In this study, semi-structured interviews were

undertaken in three samples: 14 lawn bowls players, 28 golf players and 5 paid employees of golf clubs.

Two stages of analyses, inductive and deductive, were undertaken. The first inductive stage comprised analyses based on the data. Second, at the deductive stage, data was compared with themes from literature. The data-driven analysis for player interviews had two components: a) to follow the thought process and actions of each participant and b) to identify issues relating to club membership through thematic analysis. The analysis of golf club personnel interviews focused on issue identification. Thought processes and sequential actions were displayed using matrix and network approaches.

The qualitative research in this chapter generates greater understanding about the engagement of members and complements previous studies of context and statistical analysis of membership data. Differences between actual behaviour and consumer behaviour theory were evident. Implications for golf and bowls communities were identified, as well the implications for clubs.

## CHAPTER 7: ACTION RESEARCH AT CLUB A

This chapter outlines the first of two club-specific studies. This study of Club A, a golf club, is a two-cycle action research project.

A long standing club in a residential area, the club has an eighteen-hole course on relatively flat land. The clubhouse includes a bar, dining area and outdoor deck overlooking the golf course. The clubhouse facilities are available for corporate golf days and private functions.

An elected board of five members (including president) oversee the club. A men's and women's captain and vice-captain are also elected. A full-time general manager is employed. The club sub-contracts its pro shop, coaching services and course maintenance. At the beginning of this study coaching was offered but ceased during the 2015/6 season. Capacity membership of 1,300 members was achieved in 2003 (Club document). The financial and membership year concludes at the end of February towards the end of summer. Membership fees are lower than the closest club. In addition to fees, there is a \$100 annual drainage levy. In 2015, membership fees constituted approximately 70% of club income, similar to other New Zealand golf clubs in the study of Cordery and Baskerville (2012).

Access to the course is organised as follows: One weekday for all players, including those paying green fees; one day for 9-hole players; one day for 18-hole women players; one day for senior men and members formerly or currently connected to an external association; one weekday for all players; Saturday full membership (18-hole) players, with men and women members hitting off at different times; Sunday full membership players.

The actions in each cycle of this study arose from investigation and evaluation phases, also drawing on the results of the previous thesis studies. The study began with a meeting between the researcher, the club president and the club manager in 2015. Both club officials changed during the study: the club manager left during the first cycle of action and the club president after the first evaluation. I had the facilitating role of a 'friendly outsider' (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). The club personnel were responsible for the final selection and implementation of actions. The actions addressed areas of discontent in the club. Over the two-year period, adult membership increased and was maintained.

This action research study began with an issues identification phase, followed by two cycles of action and evaluation (Table 51). Future actions and issues were also identified.

Table 51. Action research cycles with Club A

Time frame	Stage	Specific activity
2015	Issue identification (Section 7.1)	Analysis of club membership data Focus groups
2015/6	Actions: Cycle 1 (Section 7.2)	Lapsed member survey undertaken New membership categories and review of benefits for each category and discounting policy Combined meeting of 9-and 18-hole women members Promotion as part of “She loves Golf” Use of Pro Shop vouchers altered General actions to demonstrate approachability by management
2016	Evaluation: Cycle 1 (Section 7.3)	Analysis of club membership data Focus groups
2016/7	Actions: Cycle 2 (Section 7.4)	Lapsed member repeated New member survey undertaken Repeated the promotion as part of “She loves Golf” Investigation of toilet block options General actions to promote harmony in the club
2017	Evaluation: Cycle 2 (Section 7.5)	Analysis of club membership data
2017/8	Lifecycle analysis (Section 7.6) and discussion of total process (Section 7.7)	Future actions identified

## 7.1 Issue identification and investigation

The original plan was a three-part issue identification phase: a) development of a club-specific retention strategy based partly on the logistic regression study (Chapter 5); b) analysis of club membership data and c) focus groups. A club-specific retention strategy was not developed. Following considerable discussion, club personnel did not believe it was possible to apply the results from Chapter 5 with sufficient specificity to have meaningful effect. They were also concerned about highlighting infrequent play to members planning to renew their membership. In addition, the focus groups and the analysis of club’s membership data raised more pressing club-specific issues.

In the remainder of this chapter, the membership analysis is presented, followed by discussion of the method and results of the focus groups. The four aspects of membership data are presented: longitudinal analysis of total annual membership (Section 7.1.1); longitudinal comparison of men’s and women’s membership (Section 7.1.1);

comparison of membership categories (Section 7.1.2) and membership fluctuation in the past year (Section 7.1.3). The data were obtained from AGM reports and the club’s membership database.

### 7.1.1 Total annual adult membership – Longitudinal analysis

In 2015 the club had 724 adult members (Table 52), 58% of the 1,300 capacity reached in 2003 (Club document). Adult membership declined in nine of the 10 years from 2006 to 2015. The annual decline ranged from 1% to 7% in all years, except 2009 when membership increased by 4.1%. Over the 10-year period, the club experienced an overall decrease of 25% in adult membership. This decline was greater than the 19% drop experienced nationally and within the local region over the same 10 years (Table 13). With increasing fees and a strategic focus on full-playing membership, revenue from club membership revenue dropped by only 10%.

Table 52. Membership data 2006–2015

Year	Total number of adult members	% change in number of adult members	Gross fees all members*	% change in membership fee income	Average fee per member*
2006	968		\$627,393		\$572.44
2007	958	-1.3%	\$655,623	4.5%	\$625.00
2008	925	-3.4%	\$680,697	3.8%	\$675.29
2009	963	4.1%	\$563,069 **		
2010	908	-5.7%	\$656,190		
2011	860	-5.3%	\$646,460	-1.5%	\$688.55
2012	803	-7.0%	\$621,803	-3.8%	\$722.30
2013	755	-6.0%	\$571,883	-8.0%	\$741.12
2014	744	-1.5%	\$585,682	2.4%	\$751.84
2015	724	-2.7%	\$583,968	-3.6%	\$744.12

Adapted from Club Documents.

Notes:

\* Income from membership fees includes juniors, as income per membership category was not available. The number of juniors ranged between 35 and 128 and had minimal impact on membership income trends.

\*\* Data for this year is for ten months only due to change in end of membership year.

The membership is predominantly male (71% by 2015). Female membership decreased from 32% of membership in 2006 to 29% in 2015 (Table 53). The steady decrease is similar to national and local region figures. However, the percentage of women at this club in 2015 was higher than in the local region (22%) and New Zealand as a whole (24%) (Club document).

The study of gender disparity in the club identified another significant point. The club has a category of membership called “other”. The “other” memberships are not differentiated by gender. As of 2015, this category comprised people purchasing limited playing options such as a specific number of rounds of golf. It also included staff,

honorary members, non-playing members, corporate and life members. The “other” category decreased substantially from 177 to 43 members between 2006 and 2015. By 2015, the reason for the substantial decline in 2009/2010 could not be established. While the category is now only 6% of club membership, at its peak in 2009 it constituted 17% of memberships.

This decline masked increases in both men’s and women’s membership packages in 2009 and 2010. Men’s membership also increased in 2008 and the women’s in 2014.

Table 53. Gender split for adult membership: 2006–2015

Year	N		%		Other adult categories
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2006	539	254	68.0	32.0	177
2007	536	246	69.6	30.4	149
2008	<b>549</b>	245	69.1	30.9	130
2009	<b>553</b>	<b>250</b>	68.9	31.1	160
2010	<b>555</b>	<b>257</b>	68.3	31.7	96
2011	532	248	68.2	31.8	80
2012	515	219	70.2	29.8	66
2013	501	198	71.7	28.3	56
2014	479	<b>209</b>	69.6	30.4	56
2015	486	195	71.4	28.6	43

Adapted from Club Documents.

Note: Bold figures denote increase in membership in that category.

### 7.1.2 Membership categories

Full paying members dominated the membership profile in 2015 (Table 54). The high proportion (75%) of full-playing members, particularly for men, is reflective of the club strategy at that time. More women (31% of female members) were on 9-hole membership at the club than local region and national figures. Comparable figures for the local region are 26% of women golfers and nationally 22% (New Zealand Golf, 2015a).

Table 54. Membership categories for male and female members in 2015

Membership type	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Full-playing memberships	395	81	115	59	510	75
Reduced memberships	91	19	80	41	171	25
Total	486	100	195	100	681	100
Other					43	
Total adult memberships					724	
Reduced memberships						
Six day	42	9	7	4	49	7
Weekday	49	10	12	6	61	9
9-hole	0	0	61	31	61	9

Adapted from Club Documents.

### 7.1.3 Membership turnover in 2015

Turnover compares the number of members joining and the number of members discontinuing membership within a given period. About 25 new members joined in and around the 2015 season. One hundred and seventy-three members either resigned or did not pay their annual membership fee during the membership renewal period (1 February–30 April). Given the relatively small number of new members, no profile of these members was prepared.

A profile was developed by analysing a list of discontinued members identified only by a membership number. This analysis identified that the majority (two-thirds) did not formally notify the club of their resignation—they simply did not renew their membership with no explanation. Therefore, the reason for the discontinuation for most members is not known. Fifty-six members formally resigned during the membership renewal period, of which 34 gave reasons for resignation that were beyond the club’s control (Table 55). The incomplete information about discontinuations led to the discontinued member survey as part of the first action cycle.

Table 55. Reasons for discontinuing membership in 2015

Reason	Discontinued members ( <i>n</i> )
Membership lapsed (no response to renewal request)	116
Resigned with no reason given	5
Joined another club	1
Not playing golf	16
Reasons beyond club’s control	
Moved to a new house	16
Health reasons	15
Died	3
Total	173

Personal communication, club manager, 30 April 2015.

Note: This table covers only discontinued memberships in the months of February, March and April.

With an incomplete year of data for discontinued members, comparison with the total club profile needs to be undertaken with care. Of the 173 discontinued members, reduced memberships, females and new members were over-represented, compared with total club membership in Table 61. Forty-two percent of discontinued members did not have full membership, 34% were female and the majority were newer members (Table 62).

Over a third (34%) had belonged for one year or less; 18% belonged for two years; 10% for three –five years, 28% for 5–15 years, 12% for 11–15 years, and 6% since prior to 2000. Weaker retention amongst recent members is consistent with literature (East et

al., 2013; McDonald et al., 2014) and was discussed with club personnel. A contributing factor to this high attrition may have been a discounted membership package two years earlier (i.e., an 18-month membership for the price of one year's fee).

#### **7.1.4 Investigation: Focus groups method**

In addition to statistical analysis of membership data, members' opinions were sought through focus group discussions. The aim of the focus groups was to identify membership issues and to generate ideas for resolving those issues (i.e., gaining new members and retaining existing members).

Four focus groups with a total of 27 participants were held during the week of 16th March, 2015 at the golf club: two groups of women (of six and eight participants) and a group of men (10 participants) and a small mixed group (two men and one woman). Focus groups were held before or after members played golf. The women's focus groups were held on the days of 9-hole and women's 18-hole play. The men's group was held mid-week and the mixed group on Saturday.

The women's groups included membership experience from 18 months to 25 or more years. All the men had been a member for at least eight years, ranging up to 25 years or more. The men, except for three, booked their golf games with a regular group of players. Some men in the mid-week group also played on Saturdays. Over half the participants had taken a break from golf and/or club membership at some time due to family or work commitments. Both men and women attributed the break to having a young family. Some played other sports at that time. Most participants had played golf elsewhere before joining the club. However, the more recent female players had joined through women's clinics at the club. Some participants had played since childhood, some since early adulthood and some took up golf later in life.

The discussions of approximately 45 minutes were facilitated by me in the club meeting room. The participants were recruited with an announcement in the club newsletter, followed by an invitation on the noticeboard. 'Word of mouth' contributed to attendance with many participants arriving with golfing friends. The majority of attendees knew most other participants at the focus groups.

A range of issues were discussed in each focus group. The groups began with introductions, including the length of membership, frequency of play and other playing behaviour. Open-ended questions stimulated discussion about key issues such as: a) the best thing about playing golf at the club; b) how the club currently attracted new players and members; c) how the club encouraged players to continue their membership; d) other

suggestions/changes that could benefit the club and its members; e) one thing about the club that could be changed and f) the aspect of the club that players most wanted to remain unchanged. The mixed nature of the discussion about issues was noteworthy. Positive aspects and concerns about the club were often discussed at the same time. For example, when the best aspects of the club were discussed, another participant often offered an opposite perspective.

The analysis followed the process of Spencer et al. (2014): familiarisation with data; development of an initial thematic framework; sorting the data in this framework; and reviewing data transcripts for coherence and accuracy of analysis. The groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim using a transcription service. I developed a thematic framework by listing issues whilst reading transcripts and listening to the recording. Description of issues and verbatim quotes were highlighted or coded. As identified by Spencer et al. (2014), particular note was taken of interaction between group members, including issues on which the members agreed or disagreed. Care was taken to note whether the issues were discussed by all or only some groups and the extent to which groups were in agreement on the issues. As a form of qualitative research, generalisation of opinions from the groups to the whole club needs care. Nevertheless, some issues were so evident within and between the groups that importance for the whole club was likely. However, comments from solely one person can aid idea generation. Verbatim comments have been used extensively as described in Section 6.1.4.

## **7.2 Investigation: Focus groups results**

The results are presented in five sections: the best aspects of the club; concerns about the club; recruitment of new members; retention of members and a list of additional comments from one or two people. The verbatim comments and contributions of each group are identified in the following way: WG9 are women's 9-hole players; WG18 are women's 18-hole players; MG18 are men's 18-hole players and SATG are Saturday players.

### **7.2.1 Best aspects of the club**

The three best aspects of the club mentioned at all groups were the location of the club, the course and friendships or friendliness in the club. Other issues discussed by two or three groups were the low cost of membership, the organisation of play in general and specifically the way women's play was organised.

The location of the club was described as being “*local*” or “*the closest*” to work or home. This was clearly important, although it was only a brief part of the conversation. The “*flat course*” was also spontaneously mentioned by all groups. Some participants compared the flat terrain of the course with another club, which was described as “*hilly*” (SATG). “*As a novice player, this course suits. ... It was a course that I felt I could learn the game*” (SATG). For others, the flat course was preferable for people with hip and knee problems (SATG).

The comments about the friendliness of members or the friendships at the club were made spontaneously and discussed at length with descriptions such as “*a good social club*” (SATG). Aligned with the friendships was the “*culture of the club*” (SATG), the “*relaxed*” nature of the club (MG18 and SATG) and the “*good people*” who play here that are “*not pretentious*” (SATG) or “*snobbish*” (MG18). The friendliness of other players mitigated the difficulty of learning golf:

*The 9-hole ladies were all very friendly, no matter what—two ladies ended up playing with us were really friendly and knowledgeable, it was difficult at times and all this knowledge and rules and they were really willing to share their knowledge of rules and things like that.* (WG9)

The membership fee was important to three groups (WG9, MG18 & SATG). However, other positive aspects of the club were discussed prior to the membership fees. “*And basically it was the cheapest as well. When I first joined, the other clubs that were local were a lot more expensive so this was probably the best value*” (WG9). In MG18, “*subscription (membership fee) comes into it*” was a reason for playing at the club, with further explanation of “*it is cheaper than elsewhere on Shore*”. The membership fee seemed more prevalent to the people for whom the club was not the closest to their home.

Other comments in one or two groups related to the golf manager, the online booking system and the organisation of women’s play. The golf manager (who organised the play) was mentioned by name by two groups as someone who was helpful. The new online booking system was heralded as an improvement, especially for people who are new to the club and did not know anyone:

*Something that’s good now is the way we book online, you don’t have to have somebody to ring, you can just look and see, “Oh there’s a gap there” so if you’re brave enough and I think that’s quite important that you can now put your name down and if your friends are away, you know you can still play golf.* (WG9)

The women's groups appreciated the way in which their play was organised and having their own time to play. The organisation of women's play was explained as "*women don't book online like the men*" (SATG). With a smaller group they sort out their field and "*everyone gets to play with everyone else and everyone knows everyone. Really friendly. Wouldn't want to change the women's draw*" (SATG). The exclusivity of the time for women was important, as was the organisation of play that enabled social time together.

*I think the women's having—like Wednesdays just set aside for women. Compared to playing on a Saturday where you're dodging the men's balls as they [laughter], and I mean their golf balls ... Not many clubs have, what Ian calls the sawn-off shotgun start, which is we all start together, and we all finish together, and we all eat lunch together. (WG18)*

However, it was acknowledged that the single start time could disadvantage some women, for example "*Mothers with children at school can't be here for 8.30am start*" (WG18).

Similarly, the historic relationship between the club and an external association was regarded positively. A formal relationship was established for membership, with one weekday set aside for members of this association. Now the local association "*still has a presence*" (SATG) based on past tradition rather than a formal relationship.

General comments such as "*The club ticks all boxes*" were enthusiastically endorsed by participants in the men's group (MG18). Similar comments were made in other groups.

### **7.2.2 Concerns about the club**

A highly appreciated aspect of the club, friendliness, also gave rise to concern that this may not be the perception of all members. Four concerns were: the introduction and welcome of new players (all groups); block booking (MG18); division between the 9-hole and 18-hole women members and whether the 9-hole membership package was fair (WG9 & WG18). The women's groups also discussed at length the lack of a toilet block on the course and a range of memorable uncomfortable incidents experienced by members.

The leading concern about the club was whether the perceived friendliness was universal or only experienced by those involved with a group of people: "*Are we a friendly club or a club of friendships?*" (MG18). This concern dominated the discussion for the men's group (MG18) as their most significant concern, whilst in WG18 and SATG, it was raised in amongst a range of comments.

Several comments were made about the difficulty for new people who did not know other players (WG9, WG18 & SATG). An existing member commented that they had *“never been introduced to a new member—not too sure what they would face”* (MG18). Even long-standing male players expressed concern *“There are some guys here who... I mean I’ve been here 15 years and never played golf with them, I don’t even know them. And I’m just not sure that’s totally right”* (MG18). A comment from a relatively new player in WG18 reinforced this concern:

*I’m relatively new in years. But because I play mainly weekend or just occasionally starting to play weekdays, it’s very easy to feel the outsider, and I noticed that because there are long-established friendships and people like to play together and all these sorts of things, so underneath the rosiness, there is an effect.* (WG18)

Some women suggested that playing at club could be fearful. An example of this concern was *“It’s very scary when you first come out to play”* (WG9). Both of the women’s groups went further and suggested that club members were the cause of this fear with comments such as *“We seem to be people that are scary, for some reason”* (WG18).

The use of block booking by groups of members was acknowledged by MG18 and SATG. *“On a Wednesday night my group books three tee-off times ... that’s 16 slots”* booked 10 days before play (MG18). It was also acknowledged that this may cause difficulties for people not in a group, especially new people. *“You’re trying to encourage new people so they look at the start times and ... ‘Shit, there’s nowhere to play”* (MG18). A specific comment about Saturday play was made: *“I mean Saturday afternoon is genuinely full from 11:25 until when the men finish and there’s gaps today because people pulled out but that’s the only reason”* (MG18). However, a player in SATG believed that it was still possible for a single player to find a slot and play on a Saturday. Concern was expressed about block bookings for which *“people don’t show up”* (SATG). People already at the club with no booking can use the slots; however, others may not travel to the club if all timeslots appear to be booked.

Positive comments were made about a male member who gathered a group of players and made a block booking. He ensured that players with no network *“could just turn up and play”*. Quite a large group of about 40 people had developed, along with an informal competition and a kitty to support prizes (SATG).

Both women’s groups were concerned about the division between the 9-hole and 18-hole women members, and expressed a desire to bring the groups closer together: *“Maybe there needs to be dialogue around the fact that ... there is this division.*

*Acknowledge that it's a division and talk about it*" (WG18). The disparity in treatment of the two women's groups seemed to be part of the reason for this division:

*It's just a little thing about 'you get treated better than what we do' and that's what we've got to get rid of because ... I mean, I've got friends that play nine and that's how they feel.* (WG18)

The attitude of the management was observed by the 18-hole group with the comment *"the management here are not keen on nine holes"* (WG18). Considerable discussion in the 9-hole group about their position in club occurred with comments such as *"The 9-holers don't get any benefits"* (WG9); *"I think the 9-holers get a bit of a rough deal financially"* (WG9) and *"there is no incentive to encourage you to be a 9-holer actually"* (WG9). However, some 9-hole players appeared to defend their package in relation to the membership fee: *"No other clubs have 9-hole memberships like we've got"* (WG9) and *"we've got the lowest 9-hole fee for all our area but they [the 9-hole members of other clubs] get more days to play, they get more options that we don't get"* (WG9). When the 9-hole group was asked if they would prefer to retain the lower fee or increase the benefits, they felt that it was appropriate to have both. They acknowledged their lower fee than other members but felt greater access to the course was warranted: *"I would prefer the same fee, Monday's a quiet day, Friday's a quiet day with no-one on the course. Why can't 9-holers come and have a hit?"* (WG9).

Both women's groups expressed concern about the need to review the 9-hole membership package, whilst still recognising that a lower membership fee was paid. In addition to course access, particular areas of concern were the drainage levy and restriction of member-get-member discount to 18-hole players. With regard to the drainage levy, comparison was made with student members who did not pay the full levy: *"Nine-hole ladies play the full levy whereas students don't"* (WG9). Only the 18-hole members received the discount for prompt payment when introducing a new member. *"Only 18-holers get discount for paying fees on time"* (WG18). Nine-hole members *"don't qualify for that..... Which is a negative vibe really"* (WG9). *"Not only do we not get the fee discount we still have to pay the full fee for the drainage"* (WG9). This sentiment was also expressed by the 18-hole women who also supported several concerns raised by the 9-hole members: *"I just think if you introduce a new member it doesn't matter whether you play eighteen or nine"* (WG18).

The lack of a toilet block on the course was the subject of prolonged discussion in one women's group (WG18) and was also mentioned in WG9 and SATG. The discussion was disparate. The need for a toilet block was raised at many AGMs. Views

differed about why the building of a toilet block on the course was difficult. WG9 and WG18 believed that it was financial. WG18 and SATG believed the difficulty to be the low level of the course and the possibility of vandalism. New technology was mentioned that should facilitate building a toilet block (WG18). In SATG, it was noted that after playing 9-holes, a player is traditionally back near the clubhouse and so could use those facilities. The issue of toilets on the course was only discussed by women players.

Relativity between men's and women's play prompted comments in one women's group. Some women seemed aware that the male members outnumbered the women. However, many did not know: *"I don't know what the proportion of women members to men members is, but it always seems that the men get preferential treatment"* (WG18). Few players could give specific examples of this preferential treatment, apart from two or three long-standing players. These players commented about the arrangements for play on Saturdays when the women have only a few slots after the men play. In past years they had to protect these slots: *"We nearly lost those slots, you know that. About four years ago. We nearly lost a lot of Saturday because there were so few business ladies turning up."* (WG18). One woman gave the explanation from management *"It was a proportion ... You only got five women turning up, and you've got eight slots."* (WG18). One woman was concerned that this type of issue was not discussed properly because *"we don't have women's meetings anymore really"* (WG18).

Seven specific incidents were described of an uncomfortable experience for a visitor or member. They were memorable incidents with all details recalled. The time frame over which these events occurred is not known (whether they all occurred within one year or over several years). Thus, the prevalence of this type of situation is not known. Some participants felt these types of events may be more prevalent than club members would like to think. The seven incidents embraced three examples of new players receiving unpleasant comments from more experienced players (WG18); two incidents of players being ignored or not receiving information about the course layout (WG9); an incident witnessed by women of men swearing in a manner that was considered excessive (WG18) and stern behaviour towards a young person whose attire was outside the dress code (WG18). One participant also commented they had *"met a man who said 'Gosh, I've never seen such unfriendly people' after a tour of the club"* (WG9).

In addition, two situations relating to the payment of fees were considered unfair. A few weeks after fee payment, a member was injured and unable to receive a refund or carry fees over to another year (WG18). Another woman had taken a short break from the club due to injury and was then required to pay a joining fee (WG18). When asked if

these situations had resulted in members leaving the club, the comment was made that *“there certainly would’ve been, over the years, members that would’ve left because of instances like that. But you don’t hear about them. But we’ve heard about two, so there has to be others”* (WG18).

### **7.2.3 Recruitment of new members**

This discussion focused on how existing players came to play at the club, the way the club attracted new members and suggestions for additional ways to recruit new members. The decision-making processes and pathways to the club were similar to the results in Chapter 6, although not as diverse. The majority of participants came to the club through existing members; either they were invited to the club or friends influenced their choice of club. Other factors were club signage and attendance at a women’s clinic.

Preference for the club over others in the region was based on knowing an existing member, the location and flat terrain:

*I took an interest in the game. Chose to join a club. I felt I could learn the game. Knew a few people at the club. Was going to join a club and this was the best location and terrain.* (SATG)

It was acknowledged that it was very hard for someone who did not know anyone at the club, especially for men. *“For a brand new guy to come and join a golf club, it’s bloody hard, if you don’t anyone”* (MG18). Most men were unsure how a new male player would join in a group:

*That probably identifies an appeal for golf. You play with people you’re comfortable with and you know usually. Our preference to play amongst ourselves, you know with your own little group. And I suppose if people they knew... if they come with mates, that will be easier for them.* (MG18)

One man had started at the club on his own and explained *“how I got in was I just started playing and meeting people, and they invited you. Or [I] just bother the different groups”* (MG18).

The club signage attracted some participants as they drove past the club. This however was only a prompt and was usually accompanied by other reasons: *“I drove past. Well I’d just recently moved here and so I thought, ‘How can I get to meet people?’ and I thought, ‘Oh I’ll go to golf club’”* (WG9).

The value of the women’s clinics and the accompanying introductory membership package was discussed in relation to value for money and the ability for women to support each other:

*Four-week course for individual membership and included lessons and everything like that and if you joined in October our fees were paid until the end of February. So it was really good package and it cost about \$340 so it wasn't a huge investment to see if you actually liked it or not.*  
(WG18)

Views varied about the success of the women's clinics, with one view being that half the clinic people still played and an alternative view that only one or two people continued (WG18). Two focus group participants had attended a women's clinic. They credited the clinic with helping them to continue in golf, as they believed that they would have "drifted off" if they had not met each other. "We did the clinic and then the three of us just clicked together and we thought 'We're going to do this and we're going to have a round of golf', and we did" (WG9).

No participants came to the club through advertising in the local paper, although most were aware of it. Most viewed this activity as necessary but not particularly successful in attracting members. Most were also aware of the member-get-member activity, whereby existing members have an incentive to recruit new members through a discount on their own fees. This was considered to be a more successful activity (MG18 & SATG). Twilight golf over summer was noted as a good recruitment strategy, as was the discount of fees by a month or two (i.e., pay an annual fee and receive 14–15 months' membership). The recruitment of new members was considered the responsibility of the committee: "We're not part of the process about how they're trying to attract members unless you're on the committee" (MG18).

One group questioned whether new members were needed. At the AGM, all board and other positions were filled and "to me, it indicates that there's a fairly strong membership if those positions are always full" (MG18). A lack of awareness of the membership situation was further indicated with comments such as: "We need to be honest. I don't even know whether we want new members ... I mean I don't know whether we're chock-a-block or whether we're something desperate for money" (WG18).

Suggestions for attracting new members (Table 56) were made hesitantly, most of which were made by one person with no real discussion about any ideas. All groups seemed to find this a difficult question to answer. One member commented that "it's a worldwide problem". The general sense in SATG was that membership issues in a golf club were inevitable: "As for encouraging new members, I think, things have been tried over the years to try and encourage members that just don't work. It's hard to get someone new" (SATG).

However, in the same group, discussion evolved about whether or not allowing players to play green fees was appropriate: “*One of the things we’ve done to facilitate this problem is that we have made it easy to pay green fees*” (SATG). This member believed strongly that the possibility of paying green fees should not be advertised. “*Advertising green fees—shouldn’t happen*” (SATG).

Table 56. Suggestions for attracting new members

Suggestions made
Run a 9-hole ‘come back and play golf’ to get people back who played in the past (WG9)*.
Nine-hole for older guys – at which they can get a handicap – also for people who don’t have time? (bear in mind that the group suggesting this did not think that this would have attracted them when they were younger and did not have time) (MG18)*.
Refine 9-hole package in order to attract 9-hole ladies (WG9)*.
Offer a membership with a reduced round rate for less keen members (such as young people) so they can get a handicap. Perhaps they can play on Saturday with a member or maybe book on a Saturday after others have booked – filling in any gaps (WG9)*.
Interaction with other groups in community – e.g., other sports clubs. Links with community – or local school (MG18).
Open days – difficult to fit into weekend (WG18).
Hold a competition specifically for new members, to welcome them to the club (SATG).
How do you attract young members? Or even 40 years + (WG18)*.
Business House with discussion about whether it is available or suitable for the club (WG18).

Note: \* indicates a suggestion that was later developed into an action.

Discussion about the love for golf evolved: “*People who join golf are dedicated to it. It’s a lifelong thing to do. Not limited by your age*” (SATG). The following quote suggests that the role of a club is to attract people who are already committed to golf rather than develop that love:

*I mean, you’re either a golfer or you’re not, to be honest. You either love the sport or you hate it. And once you decide I’m a golfer, that’s that. And really it’s a choice of which club do I go to, or how do I play because not everyone likes golf, but the people that do, are hooked. Once you start playing, I’d say 90% of people stay with golf because they get hooked. And really it’s the case of how do you get them to your club?*

The challenge of competing against other activities was noted by one participant, with so many options are now available. The importance of finding a competitive advantage was noted and “*get them participating*” (SATG).

#### 7.2.4 Retention of members

Discussion about retention of members focused on course improvements and welcoming of new members. However, two groups questioned whether the club did anything to retain members: “*Does this club do anything to encourage members to stay?*” and “*Well, they*

*really don't. There's no sort of move to encourage me to stay. I don't know what would happen if I suddenly didn't pay. Would they say something to me?"* (WG9).

Individual comments were made about improvements to the course. *"The club is trying to improve the course—and has done this well."* One group commented that as far as they could see *"this only way the club is trying to encourage membership. As long as improvements can be seen – will continue membership"* (Two groups).

Numerous suggestions for welcoming new people to the club, all related to having a more structured approach. It is noteworthy that in general, it was perceived that the responsibility for welcoming new members rested with the management or board, or other people (that is someone other than the person making the suggestion).

Table 57. Suggestions for retaining members

Suggestions
Give advice to new people – get into a group. It's a process – getting to know people and putting your name down.
It's up to the board members to introduce new people – so that club members will say "Hello" next time they meet. (WG18) It's the board members to introduce people around the place. Experience of other clubs was noted where <i>"you didn't have new people new to golf without some sort of structure"</i> , a committee member or something like that, playing with them the first few times. (WG18)
The club approach to new members could be a bit more formal... A phone call after somebody's had their first game to say, "Look, how did you go, and let me know if you need any help". (WG18)
A couple of club members could take on the role of welcome. Pick a couple nice, warm, fuzzy people to phone "Okay, how did you enjoy today? Anything we can help you with? Or would you like someone to play with you?". (WG18)
Activities that encouraged <i>"greater mixing of club – across the club but without disturbing our groups. Probably twice a season, but there will be resistance"</i> (MG18 and WG18). At present <i>"we get locked into our own groups –this doesn't matter to me"</i> . <i>"People play with who they are comfortable with"</i> (MG18).
Extend or formalise group organised by the male member who informally arranges a block booking for people with no network (SATG).

Positive comments were made about a male member who gathered together a group of players and made a block booking. He appeared to be making sure that players with no network *"could just turn up and play"*. Quite a large group of about 40 people had developed, along with an internal competition and a kitty to support prizes (SATG).

Reasons for members leaving the club were generally perceived to be factors that the club could not control such as members retiring and no longer able to afford membership (WG18); members moving out of the district (WG18); people working longer hours (WG18) or older people more involved with child minding (WG18). Nine-hole women participants did not believe that the club was losing 9-hole members through unhappiness. A strong belief was evident that health and age were the main reasons for members leaving. They believed that 18-hole women were moving to 9-hole membership and this was helping to keep them at golf when no longer playing 18 holes of golf.

Course closures a few years ago due to rain were also noted: *A lot of people moved from here a couple years when we had lots of closures because of rain, and they felt they were paying 1,000-odd dollars for a membership.* (WG18)

### 7.2.5 Individual comments

A range of individual comments were made by one or two people (Table 58).

Table 58. Individual comments (in some cases with alternative views)

Positive comments/Suggestions	Concerns/Alternative perspective
Caterers – great (WG18)	Need to improve health management (money handling and food preparation) (WG18)
Pro shop: People happy having had good experiences with the shop (MG18)	Relationship between club and shop – not the best. A bit tense: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prizes on Saturday. Cannot use prize money to buy anything on sale.</li> <li>• No reconciliation of amount of prize.</li> </ul>
<i>“Pro shop probably have arguments with us – some members don’t buy much or support it”</i> (MG18)	
Financial incentive – definite attraction (WG9)	Discounted memberships don’t work (WG18)
Course: Suggestions to management – they always respond. If you want something on the course changed, it pretty much gets done (MG18)	Bunkers (don’t have enough sand) (MG18)
	Impact of drink drive laws on use of the bar.
	When the bar is closed – need a vending machine to cover when bar closed (WG9)
Ambrose tournament is good for mixing people up and helping people new to the club (MG18)	Not a good suggestion as a score cannot be submitted after an Ambrose tournament (MG18)
Women appreciated etiquette and rules meeting (WG18)	
<i>“I had a friend who moved from here out to [another club] and he said when he had too many rounds talking another language and he was just couldn’t understand what was going on”</i> (MG18)	
	The lack of an honours board for 9-hole golfers (WG9)
	Men’s changing rooms – constantly smell like someone’s died (MG18)
<i>“The ladies membership do more in terms of replanting and doing things than what we do”</i> (MG18)	There’s quite a few big trees been chopped out over the years, but I can’t see a replanting programme in place (MG18)

Not all members had awareness of the declining membership at the club, accompanied by a belief that the club was actually managing membership well:

*It’s a hard thing to do, a lot of clubs have this situation. Their memberships are dropping... it has done steadily over the years ... Fortunately, down here we’ve had the ability to reach out for even the average guy. And it’s maintained itself, it hasn’t hit these highs and lows. So that of itself is encouraging the present members to stay on.*

### **7.2.6 Investigation: Summary**

The investigation identified that membership had been steadily declining over a period of time. Focus group participants showed varying levels of awareness about this decline.

The key strength and weakness of the club related to friendliness. The friendliness of the club was heralded by most participants, some of whom were also concerned that it may not be extended to all club members. People who were not part of a network within the club may feel isolated. While the overall impression was that the focus group participants enjoyed playing golf at the club, some issues were discussed in an irritated tone. The extent to which these issues influenced member recruitment and retention could not be determined from focus groups. However, it was apparent that attention to these issues was more pressing than attempting a member retention strategy based on the logistic regression results in Chapter 5.

The competitive membership fees were appreciated. Importantly, no one commented solely about the fees. These comments were made in conjunction with other positive aspects of the club. However, two of the other positive attributes were fixed features: the location of the club and the nature of the course. Women appreciated the way in which their play was organised but were concerned about the extent of differential treatment between 18-hole and 9-hole members.

### **7.3 Action – First cycle**

This section describes the actions arising from the investigation, the rationale for these actions and the relationship between the investigation and the actions. The first action was a discontinued member survey early in the cycle. This was followed by the introduction of new membership categories and review of benefits associated with each category; removal of discounting policy; a “She Loves Golf” Promotion; expanded use of pro shop vouchers; combined meeting of 9-hole and 18-hole women members and general actions to promote a harmonious club.

The purpose of the discontinued member survey was to identify the extent to which membership loss was within control of the club. It helped identify whether the focus group issues were widespread and related to membership decline. The survey was regarded as an action rather than part of the investigation, as it was undertaken by the club management with the intention of repeating in subsequent years as part of the club’s communication plan. The questions were discussed by me and the club manager. The questions were: a) reasons for no longer belonging to the club; b) what was liked about the club; c) suggestions for improvement; d) whether these suggestions would have

encouraged continued membership; e) questions about playing behaviour; f) demographics.

The results of the survey were discussed with me. From a summary of the results (Appendix 4), it was concluded that the feedback from the questionnaire aligned with concerns of the focus groups and that these concerns may be impacting on club membership numbers.

Both uncontrollable and controllable loss of members was evident. The uncontrollable membership loss included people moving to a new house and giving up golf due to health and fitness. However, controllable membership loss was concerning. Of particular concern was the indication from a third of the sample that changes at the club may have led to continuation of their membership. Strongly worded negative comments about attitudes of people at the club seemed to be contributing to discontinuation of membership. In addition, a few comments were made about each of the following: lack of practice facilities; slow play; condition of the course; difficulty of the course (that it is not a challenge); block bookings; membership options and dress code.

The development of the actions from the investigation are shown in Table 59. The actions in the first cycle aimed to remedy the most pressing concerns about the club and to provide membership packages for a range of golfers. The targeted groups for this cycle of actions were 9-hole golf members, older men and younger people. The actions to encourage women into golf and to improve the profile of women at the club were planned in conjunction with Girls Love Golf campaign of New Zealand Golf (described in Section 4.4). The final two actions in Table 59 were inspired by comments from only one or two people in the focus groups. However, they were considered good ideas and were implemented following informal consultation within the club.

Table 59. Description and development of first cycle of actions

Description of action	Development of actions and relationship with investigation phase
Discontinued member survey	Discussed by researcher and club manager Implemented by club manager Prompted by number of members giving no reason for discontinuing membership (Table 68)
Review of membership categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New category for 9-hole men</li> <li>• Amalgamation of weekday and off peak</li> <li>• Additional course access for 9-hole</li> <li>• Reduced fees for members up to age 35</li> </ul>	Reviewed by club manager Categories approved by the board Fees approved at AGM Prompted by concerns in the focus groups
Removal of discounting policy (prompt payment and for ‘member-gets-member’)	Reviewed by club manager Approved by the board Prompted by discussion in the focus groups
Structured approach to introducing women: Open Days and “She loves Golf” promotion in conjunction with New Zealand Golf Hour-long training, followed by wine and social time	Implemented by club manager using materials from New Zealand Golf Prompted by discussion in focus groups
Combined meeting of 9 and 18-hole women in November	Organised spontaneously by the women themselves following the focus groups
More accommodating approach such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively encouraging communication between members and management</li> <li>• Enabling pro shop to sign-up new members especially at weekends (rather than ask a potential member to return during the week)</li> </ul>	Prompted by the negative tone of comments in focus groups and discontinued members survey
Grounds Working Group: A group of older players undertaking work on the grounds	Initiated by men wishing to contribute to the club Inspired by discussion in focus groups about importance of course maintenance
Use of pro shop vouchers extended to cover more items	Implemented by club manager Prompted by one comment in one focus group and followed up by informal consultation with other club members

Discounts for prompt fee payment and for introducing new members were not considered necessary and so this practice was discontinued. As highlighted in Chapter 6, introduction by friends occurs without discounts. The removal of these discounts also addressed one source of inequity between 9 and 18-hole women members.

Changes outside the action research process were the introduction of a new electronic scoring system and a change in club manager. The incoming manager joined the club after the presentation of the investigation results, during the time that the actions were being discussed and agreed.

## 7.4 Evaluation – First cycle

The evaluation followed the same format at the original investigation: analysis of membership data and focus groups. The main emphasis of the evaluation was to review the total package of activity, rather than any individual action.

### 7.4.1 Total annual membership 2016

In 2016, an increase (8.3%) in the number of adult members occurred for the first time since 2009. However, income from membership fees continued to fall (Table 60).

Table 60. Membership data as at end of 2016 membership year

Year	Total number of adult members	% change in number of members	Gross subs all members*	% change in membership fee income	Average fee per member
2012	803	-7.0	\$621,803	-3.8	\$722.30
2013	755	-6.0	\$571,883	-8.0	\$741.12
2014	744	-1.5	\$585,682	2.4	\$751.84
2015	724	-2.7	\$583,968	-0.3	\$744.12
2016	784	8.3	\$564,786	-3.3	\$684.59

Adapted from Club Documents. .

Note: Income from membership fees includes juniors as income per membership category was not available. The number of juniors ranged between 35 and 128 annually and had minimal impact on membership income trends.

### 7.4.2 Membership categories 2016

The growth occurred in the reduced membership categories, while the number of full-playing memberships was maintained. The number of full-playing memberships in 2016 was 510 (Table 61), the same as the previous year. Reduced memberships increased from 171 in 2015 to 229 in 2016. The growth was most evident in 9-hole membership. The gender split was the same as the previous year. Combining the weekday and six-day options did not seem to reduce membership in those categories.

Table 61. Membership categories for men and women adult members in 2016

Membership type	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Full-playing members	401	75.5	109	52	510	69
Reduced membership	130	24.5	99	48	229	32
Total	531		208		739	
Other					45	
Total adult membership					784	
Reduced memberships						
Weekday	113	21	25	12	138	20
9-hole	17	3	74	36	91	12

Adapted from Club Documents.

### 7.4.3 Membership turnover 2016

A profile of new and discontinued members was obtained from data in the membership system. Overall, the profiles for both discontinued and new members were compared with the existing total club membership. The profiles were obtained by analysing lists of members identified only by membership number. The difference between the number of new and discontinued members on these lists was an increase of 96 members. However, the net gain shown in Table 60 is only 60 members. This difference was caused by the use of slightly different cut-off dates and processes when producing lists of members compared with that used for the total membership numbers. This difference could not easily be reconciled, and these lists were considered sufficiently accurate to create profiles of new and discontinued members.

The gender profile of discontinued members was in keeping with the gender profile of the club (Table 62). Reduced, rather than full memberships, are more heavily represented amongst discontinued members. Fifty-five percent of discontinued members had joined the club within the past five years.

Table 62. Profile of discontinued members for 2015/6

Characteristic	2015/6 ( <i>n</i> = 61)
Membership type	
Full-playing members	52%
Other adult membership category	22%
Not identified	26%
Gender	
Female	23%
Male	77%
Handicap	
None	11%
Under 20	25%
21–30	14%
30+	10%
Length of membership	
Since prior to 2000	21%
11–16 years	7%
5–10 years	16%
2–4 years	39%
1 year or less	16%

A similar pattern was evident for new members: the gender profile of discontinued members was in keeping with the gender profile of the club and reduced memberships more heavily represented (Table 63).

Table 63. Profile of new members for 2015/6

Characteristic	2015/6 ( <i>n</i> = 160)
Membership type	
Full-playing members	55%
Other adult membership category	45%
Gender	
Female	20%
Male	80%
Breakdown of membership categories	
Full-playing members	
Full-playing	33%
Full-playing 19–24	5%
Full-playing 25–29	11%
Full-playing students	6%
Other adult membership categories	
9-hole	14%
Limited	4%
Off peak	19%
Other	8%

#### **7.4.4 Evaluation: Focus groups method**

The purpose of the second round of focus groups was to evaluate the actions in the past year, and to identify future actions. The questions were the same as in the earlier focus groups, with one additional question relating to changes in the club over the past year.

Five focus groups/interviews were undertaken during July, 2016, at the club with 23 adult members. Approximately one-third of the participants had participated in the focus groups the previous year. The focus groups were held during the week of 16th March, 2015, at the golf club: two groups of women (six 9-hole and six 18-hole participants) and two groups of mid-week men (eight 18-hole and three men in the new 9-hole men's category). The discussions were held either before or after members played a round of golf. The women's groups were held on the days of 9-hole and women's 18-hole play. The men's groups were held mid-week and on Saturday. Interviews were completed with members who arrived late or needed to leave early from the groups.

The groups of women included a range of membership experience from a few years to 25 years or more. A wider range of male players were interviewed compared with the previous year. The men were either new to the club with membership of only a few months, members for 7 to 10 years or members for 20 years or more. The new members had re-joined the club after a break as a result of the new 9-hole membership option or were first-time members (had played irregularly but not previously belonged to a club). All had previously played golf.

The labelling of the groups enabled easy comparison with the corresponding group from the previous year. The verbatim comments and contributions of groups are identified in the following way: WG9.2 for women's 9-hole players, WG18.2 women's 18-hole players, MG18.2 men's 18-hole players and MG9 for the new men's 9-hole members.

#### **7.4.5 Evaluation: Focus groups results**

Overall, a happier feeling was prevalent in all the groups, even when talking about criticisms. All participants spoke positively about the changes at the club over the previous year. Nine-hole members spontaneously mentioned these changes, whereas other groups only commented when asked if they had noticed anything different in the club.

The general consensus was that new membership options had a positive effect on the club. Changes in membership options and the attitude of management towards 9-hole membership was spontaneously mentioned by both men and women who held this

category of membership. Appreciation was shown for the increased benefits for 9-hole women members and introduction of the option for men. Both men and women believed this option would “*take off*” as more men came back to the club (WG9.2). Some 9-hole men recommenced membership, whilst others had moved from 18-hole membership but “*at least it keeps them as members*”. “*Some of them are well into their 80s*” (WG9.2). Without the new option they would either have left; gone to a neighbouring club or paid 18-hole membership but played nine holes and grumbled. The 9-hole women members explained that the 9-hole men “*play behind us on a Tuesday ... they play after we tee-off*”.

Other changes were also noted relating to the course, the management and the absence of a ‘pro’ (professional), as well as changes mentioned by one or two people. In all groups, significant positive mention was made of improvements to the course over the past few years, as well as improvements in the past year. Most participants made positive comments about the change in management, such as the new “*management are obliging pleasant, help in any way and don’t put obstacles in the way. As well as the good guy in the shop*” (WG9). The absence of a pro was the only change met with reservation as a pro was considered essential to a golf club. Other changes mentioned by a few people were: the handling of funds on the pro shop card with ability to use it everywhere in the club (WG9.2), the introduction of the Grounds Working Group and a new scoring system so results were available more quickly.

### **Best aspects of the club**

Discussion about the positive aspects of playing golf at the club produced a wider range of comments, with less emphasis on the location of the club than in the original investigation. The comments related to community, camaraderie, being able to play with a group of friends (both men and women made this comment); friendly club “*where everyone talks to you*”; flat course; feeling comfortable here (knowing the course and the people); good facilities; good management; beauty of the course—“*but not an easy course it is flat and narrow with trees lovely atmosphere*” (WG18).

Concern was still evident that friendliness may not be universal in the club:

*We’re trying to promote ourselves as a friendly club, and we do that as much as possible. ...But you can’t guarantee that everyone is going to be [laughter] friendly. Some of them are quite difficult to get on with occasionally [laughter].* (WG92)

Limited awareness was still shown about how the club encouraged new people to join or renew membership, with “*Don’t know*” and “*not very much*” (WG9.2) as the predominant

answers. The factors each mentioned by a few people were: signage, local paper, prompt payment discount, course improvements, facilities (WG9.2); women's clinics (WG9.2) and competitions (WG9.2).

Considerable discussion about the effectiveness of women's clinics in recruitment was again evident. The number of women who came to the clinics and then did not join was noted. A query was raised about whether membership was sufficiently encouraged: *"I understand there's about 15 or so coming along, ...but I can't guarantee that it's completely right, that we just got one member out of it"* (WG9.2). When asked about the other women, the reply was: *"They just sort of disappear. You don't know whether they go and play somewhere else or they don't play at all, or whether they just thought, 'Oh, this would be nice for summer'"*. (WG9.2)

### **Concerns about the club**

Widespread concerns were not as evident as the previous year. The most common concern was slow players. The other comments were the impact of drink-driving awareness on the use of the bar and lack of practice facilities at the club.

The relationship between 18-hole and 9-hole women members was now discussed inconclusively—a major concern in the previous year. This year, a joint session of the two groups was held following the first focus groups. Communication to improve the relationship had occurred but had been difficult. Fundamentally, the two groups of women had different approaches to playing golf and this difference was acknowledged.

One woman mentioned the recent AGM discussion over a member wanting to change the system of women's competitions.

*We had a bit of a tiswas (anxiety) recently with a member trying to change the system of the way the women run the competitions. And that went down like a lead balloon. And we certainly would not like to change the system. What we have encourages the women to mix amongst each other a lot and ... to come upstairs afterwards. And we'll mix and chat together.* (WG9.2)

The AGM discussion had actually encompassed a wider range of issues including the demarcation of men's and women's golf on Saturdays and had been foreshadowed at a previous AGM. The insertion of a gender equity clause was proposed at the AGM but was only supported by the proposer and seconder (Club Documents). .

Few improvements at the club were suggested. The only suggestion widely discussed was about the need for a pro at the club. A few of the women also wanted *"a rules session for ladies from someone who knows about the rules"*. *"We used to do this and it was good but not done recently."* (WG9.2). Two other suggestions were shotgun

start (or two tee-start) for 9-hole women members more often so that they could finish playing at the same time and socialise together (WG9.2). It was noted that this type of activity was already undertaken about four times a year but would be nice to do more often. In the discussion about how this might work, one person said she would talk to the manager about it.

Comments about facilities covered toilets on the course, a sprig bar and the position of the final hole. The lack of a toilet on the course caused widespread discussion the previous year. This year it was only mentioned by one person, who felt very strongly about it: *“There are no toilets on the course – which is difficult for 2.5 hours. Surely a Port-a-Loo or something would be possible”* (WG18.2). A sprig bar (for refreshments) on the course was suggested following discussion about the reduced use of upstairs facilities. The position of the final hole was noted in comparison to other clubs where the clubhouse overlooks the ninth or eighteenth hole *“so that people can see you come in”* (WG18.2). This was considered a positive feature of the other clubs.

### **Recruitment and retention of members**

Suggestions for attracting new members were again wide-ranging but with each noted by only one or two people. In relation to comments about the cheap memberships of some country clubs, a suggestion was made of a reduced membership that required payment of a low green fee when paying. An increased number of junior clinics and a more relaxed dress code were also suggested. Several incidents from years ago were recalled, some of which had been explained at the previous year’s focus groups.

Women discussed in more detail than the previous year about how daunting it can be for a new member.

*Because it is quite daunting, as a new member, “Well, I’ll put my name down.” And I’m putting my name down and, hopefully, somebody will join me, but I don’t actually know who that person is. Whereas, if there were more opportunities to meet people. (WG9.2)*

This was followed by considerable discussion about new “girls” being left to play at the bottom of the field (later than other players) and how it would be better if they played further up the field (WG9.2).

Some women took a long time to join due to the feeling of *“not being good enough to join”* (WG9.2). One woman commented that she played for 15 months before joining. She explained that *“nothing could have changed [that] because that was my perception”* (WG9.2). She believed that other women also had the perception that they could not be members until they were better players *“we had to be better than we were”* (WG9.2). One

player explained that it was six months before she put in a card, during which time she and some ladies “*would come down, yes, and hack around together*”. Prior to that an experienced woman had given a few lessons:

*Mm-hmm. And was nice because I didn't play on club day for ooh, at least six months or so. But a nice older lady, ...she sort of took a beginners' group around on a Tuesday morning, I think it was. Yes, so she'd take us around and sort of teach us core things. (WG9.2)*

A mentor for new players was considered important. Some groups noted the lack of a clear development plan after taking initial lessons (for ladies). In two discussions, the positive impact of a welcoming person was noted as having smoothed over problems caused by other players. This person was the ladies' club captain (WG18.2) and other male players following an incident involving men (MG18.2).

Critical incidents were recalled, such as examples of people being put off by comments from other women, with reported examples of people leaving as a result. The word “*intimidating*” was used (WG9.2 and WG18.2). Two incidents had also been mentioned the previous year. As in the previous year, the details of the incidents were vividly described along with the emotion felt at the time. In addition, five incidents were recounted of players being put off by rudeness or an unwelcoming attitude. In one case, the member had the experience when “*someone said to me, 'I don't really think you're good enough to be playing out here'*” (WG9.2). This type of comment reinforced the view of the need to play to a certain level before being a member.

The men's groups spent time discussing the booking system, with most men saying that it was easy to use and works well. However, some men commented “*they (club management) don't like block booking*” (MG18.2) as other players can be left out of the groups. Nevertheless, the men felt that some allowance could be made for loyalty for long-standing members. It was difficult to book through the current computer system for a group.

## **7.5 Action – Second cycle**

The actions for the second cycle were identified from the evaluation of the first cycle and also from reviewing the initial investigation, as some comments from the initial investigation were still to be actioned.

As with the first cycle, the second cycle began with a repeat of the discontinued members' survey. However, a key difference from the previous year was that only two people had a ‘major grumble’ about the club. In the previous year, nearly a quarter of

discontinuing members complained about some aspect of the club with strongly expressed comments. This survey was consistent with the happier atmosphere from the focus groups. Five of the 28 would have remained at the club if the concern was remedied. This indicates that some membership loss was controllable but not to the same extent as the previous year (Appendix 4).

Given the focus of women in the New Zealand Golf and club strategies, the sample of seven discontinued women members was analysed separately to identify the extent to which this member loss was controllable. The analysis showed that loss of three of the eight was unavoidable as they moved or went overseas. For two it may have been preventable as they made both positive comments and criticisms of the club and were giving up golf, although one maintained that this was for health reasons. Two of the discontinued members had issues with the way women’s golf was organised (single start on Wednesday and lack of mixed competitions) and that resolution of this issue may have encouraged them to renew membership.

The summary of new members’ responses showed a range of age groups and handicaps. Over half the responses came from people who had joined the club on their own. The importance of friends and locality was reflected in their reason for joining the club and in the positive points about the club. Warning signs could be seen in the suggestions that the club could be more welcoming of new members and a range of concerns about the restrictive nature and organisation of Saturday play (Appendix 4).

With the improved membership numbers and the happier feeling at the focus groups, the decision was made to continue or repeat actions from the first cycle namely: new membership packages; Open Days and “She Loves Golf” promotion and the Grounds Working Group.

Table 64. Description and development of second cycle of actions

Description of actions	Development of actions and relationship with evaluation phase
<p>Repeated actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuation of new and altered membership categories</li> <li>• Discounting policy still discontinued</li> <li>• Open days and “She Loves Golf” activity</li> <li>• Extended use of pro shop vouchers</li> <li>• Grounds Working Group</li> <li>• Enabling pro shop to sign-up new members</li> <li>• Actively encouraging communication between members and management</li> </ul>	<p>Following evaluation, discussed by me and the club manager</p>
<p>Repeat of discontinued member survey, which was also extended to the new member survey</p>	<p>Repeated due to insight gained from previous survey</p>

Full-playing membership fee remained the same as previous year, with a 5% increase in fees for all other membership categories	Financial review
Course development committee established to continue improvement with emphasis on tree replacement	Suggestion of tree replacement arose in 2015 focus groups and had been under discussion for some time prior to introduction
New 'pro' team	This action had been intended when the previous pro left; however, had not been implemented at the time of the evaluation

## 7.6 Evaluation – Second cycle

The evaluation of this cycle was undertaken by analysis of membership data. Focus groups were not undertaken for two reasons. First, focus groups had been undertaken in each of the two preceding years, with a third of the participants from the second groups also having attended the first groups. Repeated discussion from the first groups occurred in the second round of groups. I was concerned about asking participants to give their time on a third occasion when the actions in the second cycle were predominantly a continuation of the first action cycle. The club manager and I discussed the possibility of leaving a longer time period before re-undertaking focus groups.

### 7.6.1 Total annual membership 2017

Following the substantial increase in membership in 2016, adult membership was maintained the following year, however with an increase in membership fee income arising from the fee increase in all except the full membership categories (Table 65).

Table 65. Membership data as at end of 2017 membership year

Year	Total number of adult members	% change in number of members	Gross subs all members	% change in membership fee income	Average fee per member
2012	803	-7.0%	\$621,803	-3.8%	\$722.30
2013	755	-6.0%	\$571,883	-8.0%	\$741.12
2014	744	-1.5%	\$585,682	2.4%	\$751.84
2015	724	-2.7%	\$583,968	-0.3%	\$744.12
2016	784	8.3%	\$564,786	-3.3%	\$684.59
2017	782	-0.3%	\$593,521	5.1%	\$718.55

Adapted from Club Documents. .

The number of both women and men increased compared with two years ago (Table 66). However, the number of women fell back a little in 2017, while the number of men continued to increase as a result of the introduction of a new category for men. The gender split therefore shifted slightly so that the percentage of female members was the lowest in over 10 years.

Table 66. Gender split for adult membership 2012–2017

Year	Members ( <i>n</i> )		%		Other adult categories
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
2012	515	219	70.2	29.8	66
2013	501	198	71.7	28.3	56
2014	479	<b>209</b>	69.6	30.4	56
2015	486	195	71.4	28.6	43
2016	531	208	71.9	28.2	45
2017	534	201	72.7	27.4	47

Adapted from Club Documents.

Reduced membership increased as a proportion of members from 25% in 2015 (Table 66) to 31% in 2017 (Table 67). The increase was particularly evident in 9-hole membership for which the number of members increased from 61 to 109. This was achieved with only small reduction in full-playing membership from 510 to 506 members.

### 7.6.2 Membership categories 2017

Table 67. Type of membership for men and women members in 2017

Membership type	Men		Women		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Full-playing membership	408	76	98	49	506	69
Reduced membership	126	24	103	51	229	31
Total adult	534		201		735	
Other					47	
Total adult membership					782	
Reduced memberships						
Weekday	96	8	24	13	120	16
9-hole	30	6	79	39	109	15

Adapted from Club Documents. .

### 7.6.3 Membership turnover 2017

Membership reports showed 114 new adult members in 2016/7 and 136 discontinued adult members. The differential between these two figures is clearly greater than the two-member difference in membership shown in Table 65.

The reports came from different sources within the membership system and differing cut-off dates would appear to be the reason for the difference. The date at which lapsed members were removed from the membership list could differ from year to year. This shows that analysis of membership data is not an “exact science” and the importance of understanding the data before forming conclusions. Nevertheless, the reports have been checked and were considered sufficiently accurate for creation of member profiles.

However, comparing profiles from one year to the next needs to be undertaken with care (Table 68).

The key points that arose from this profile is that the number of people allowing membership to lapse is considerably lower than in 2015 (Table 55). This may indicate stronger communication around the resignation process. Forty to 50% of the discontinued memberships were for reasons beyond the club's control. In addition, a number of people stopped playing golf and the reasons for some of this discontinuation may also be beyond the club's control.

Table 68. Reasons for discontinuing membership in 2016 and 2017

Reason	Number of discontinued members	
	2016/7 ( <i>n</i> )	2015/6 ( <i>n</i> )
Membership lapsed (no response to renewal request)	36	4
Resigned with no reason given	7	6
Joined another club	2	1
Not playing golf	34	20
Reasons beyond club's control		
Moved house	39	22
Health reasons	15	6
Died	3	2
Total	136	61

Forty-two percent of discontinued members did not have full membership, 25% were female and the majority were longer standing members, with 36% having belonged since prior to 2000 and only 23% had joined within the last two years. Discontinued members had a range of handicaps.

Table 69. Profile of discontinued members for 2016/7 compared with previous year

Characteristic	2016/7	2015/6
<b>Membership type</b>		
Full-playing members	58%	50%
Other adult membership category	42%	50%
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	25%	22%
Male	75%	78%
<b>Handicap</b>		
None	29%	11%
Under 20	35%	25%
21–30	21%	14%
30+	15%	10%
Average	22.0	21.2
<b>Length of membership</b>		
Since prior to 2001	36%	20%
5–15 years	14%	13%
3–5 years	27%	34%
1–2 years or less	23%	33%

With greater clarity about when a member joins, the profile of new members is more reliable than the previous year. A key point from this profile is the strengthening of reduced membership categories. Twenty-seven percent of new members were women, similar to the percent of women in the club. However, few new women were full-playing members.

Table 70. Profile of new members for 2016/7

Characteristic	2016/7 (%)
Membership type	
Full-playing members	40
Other adult membership category	60
Gender	
Female	27
Male	73
Breakdown of membership categories	
Full-playing members	
Full-playing men	24
Full-playing 19–24	2
Full-playing 25–29	7
Full-playing students	7
Full-playing women	0
Other adult membership categories	
9-hole	16
Limited	14
Off peak	12
Other	17
Total	100

## 7.7 Overall evaluation and future actions

The evaluation following the second cycle, in discussion between me and the club manager, reflected on the process, the results from the 2017 membership data analysis and club lifecycle analysis. This discussion was based on Mezirow's (1998) three forms of reflection as applied to action research by Coghlan and Brannick (2014): content, process and premise.

Content covers what happened: the cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). The overall outcome was regarded as successful by club members and personnel, with the key indicator being an increase in membership, achieved and then sustained for at least one further season. An eight-year trend of declining membership had been broken. Initially, the increase came at the cost of a reduced income from membership fees. However, with the later increase in fees, membership income also increased. Other positive indicators were the less irritated tone in the second round of focus group discussions, the return of former members and a reduction in discontinued membership for controllable reasons. The actions addressed the structure of membership in the club and were organised predominantly by paid management, and so required little effort from the members. Cultural issues still need to be addressed such as the relationship between male and female membership, the welcome

or isolation of members and the potential conflict between the needs of differing member groups. These cultural issues became more evident when the membership structure had been addressed.

Reflection about process evaluates the development of actions from research and the tools for issue identification and evaluation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). Every action arose from an issue raised in research (focus groups or membership analysis). Most actions addressed concerns raised by a number of members. However, unique cases were considered, with two actions suggested by one or two members. Positive comments from several members about these actions were noted in the evaluative phase. The evaluations repeated the tools from the initial investigation: analysis of membership data and focus groups, providing direct comparison of member opinion before and after actions.

The actions were evaluated as a package rather than identifying the individual effect of each action. From the focus groups, each aspect of the package received positive comment from at least some members. Isolating the impact of any one action would generally have been difficult. The “She Loves Golf” event was one action that may have benefitted from specific evaluation. No data was collected about the number of new people attending this or the ladies’ clinics. The focus groups and club manager reported good attendance at these sessions and that some women became members as a result. Past event attendees in the focus groups appreciated the support of these sessions. Future direction about the promotion of golf to new female players would benefit from data about the ladies’ clinics, such as the number of women attending the sessions, why they came, the number continuing and feedback from those not continuing with golf.

A number of tools provided in-depth analysis of the club membership data: longitudinal analysis of overall membership, analysis of membership categories and analysis of the number of members joining and discontinuing. These analyses were relatively easy to undertake in a golf club with a comprehensive membership database. However, a full understanding behind the construction of the data proved more complex than expected.

For the more qualitative aspects of the clubs, focus groups proved effective, in conjunction with two ideas from the literature review: surveying discontinued and new members and lifecycle analysis. The organisation of groups around playing times kept them short and focused. Each group proved relatively homogenous in playing behaviour, but more heterogeneous in attitudes towards their club. This enabled discussion with alternative points of view on several issues and caused members to think about taken-for-granted matters. The surveys showed significant membership loss from factors within the

club, which came as a surprise to some members, and demonstrated that concerns raised in focus groups were adversely affecting the club. Proven reduction in controllable membership loss provided positive reinforcement for the club personnel and board. The lifecycle analysis proved extremely useful in highlighting the progressive and traditional aspects of the club.

With any investigation, it is always important to consider the possibility of additional influences, in this case, the change in club manager during the first cycle. It is hard to determine the effect of this change on the process. The new manager had enthusiasm for broadening the membership beyond the long-standing emphasis on full membership. It is hard to know how much of the activity would have been undertaken without this change. Decisions about membership categories were made by the board who had already received a summary report from focus groups by the time the incoming manager presented the new membership categories.

The predominant philosophical underpinning of this thesis is an interpretative approach which attempts to understand multiple perspectives. Nevertheless, with the gender imbalance in the club, it is impossible not to incorporate some critical discussion. At this point premise reflection is important, with consideration of unstated assumptions that may be governing attitudes and behaviour. Assumptions were evident in the lack of discussion about the voice of women in the club. While the club history describes women as gaining parity with men in 1988, this is not strictly accurate. Restrictions on Saturday play are still evident. In addition, voting rights were an overlooked area in which women do not have parity. Nine-hole golfers at the club do not have voting rights. The absence of this point from focus groups is noteworthy, especially in light of the first cycle discussion about the lack of equity between the 9-hole and 18-hole women members. It emerged only during an informal conversation between me and the club manager towards the end of the second action research cycle. With the heavy emphasis on 9-hole membership amongst women players, this effectively means that a significant number of women have no formal voice in the governance of the club. Other forms of reduced membership do have voting rights.

Gender differentiation is strong within the club. Men and women generally play separately. Gender was inherent even in the naming of two actions: Grounds Working Group and “She Loves Golf” activity. The club names for these activities contained a strong association with gender. No one commented about this point in any focus groups. Many women were unaware of the men in the club or even the relationship between men’s and women’s play. They were initially more concerned about parity between two groups

of women members. Gender equity was raised from time to time even in the early groups; however, focus on this matter increased in the second cycle, once disparity between 9-hole and 18-hole membership had been addressed. Continuation of the status quo for separate playing arrangements was the predominant tone amongst current women members, with acknowledgement that it may not suit working women. Signs from the discontinued members show that this arrangement is causing some membership loss.

A widely reported assumption is that men are discouraging women in playing golf (McGinnis & Gentry, 2002; McGinnis et al., 2008; McGinnis et al., 2005). While club structures may disadvantage women, discouragement from critical incidents came from other women rather than men. Critical incidents were more commonly described in the women's groups than the men's.

Inclusion (described as friendliness) was a second area for which assumptions played a significant part. The initial overall member perception was that the club was friendly, largely because many members appreciate their friendships or networks in the club. However, as the focus groups progressed, this perception was questioned. The momentum of questioning increased in the second round of focus groups with concern about members with no social network.

Many nuances were not reflected in the simple description of course access for each membership category (described at the beginning of this chapter). Organisation of play by membership category has effectively created several 'clubs within a club'. Each day of play is almost like a separate club, each with its own cohesive culture and unwritten customs. Many players seem unaware of what happens on other days. In addition to gender differentiation, member categories within gender have different customs and practices. However, the cohesion within these group cultures may have contributed to the constructiveness of discussion in the focus groups.

Arising from the premise reflection came ideas for future action research cycles that would focus on specific issues relating to the culture of the club, ensuring that the friendliness of the club is experienced by all players, how best to recruit and support new players, gender equity and the position of women in the club. Future focus groups are more likely to be mixed groups so that players from differing days of play come together. For the next stage, a unified club approach would be needed, and hence cross-category groups would be best. Membership analysis and surveys of new member and discontinued members would continue. Steps to analyse the retention of new players and women attending clinics will also form part of future cycles.

## 7.8 Conclusions

This study demonstrates that sustainable membership increase is possible after seven years of decline by making an honest assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in club and developing changes based on member-generated ideas. The action research process assisted the club in addressing long-standing, structural membership issues, demonstrating that some declining membership was due to factors within the club's control. The next stage of addressing more deep-seated cultural issues will be more challenging. However, during this study, club members showed a willingness to at least acknowledge those issues. The process reflection indicates few improvements to the research process.

The results of this study are consistent with previous studies in this thesis. The context chapter (Chapter 4) provided useful comparisons with the wider golf community. In spite of gender disparity in the club, the percentage of women members at this club is higher than the national and local region figures. The gendered playing arrangements illustrate segregation discussed in Sections 3.1.6 and 4.2.1. The majority of women interviewed in this study are in the category described by McGinnis et al. (2008) as accommodating participants, who prefer the status quo with respect to women and not only accept, but almost cherish, these structures of the club. The higher percentage of women in this club compared with national and regional averages may make it more difficult to move away from the current approach. However, signs are evident that this approach does not suit all women and the impact of women's weekday play on the long-term recruitment of new female members is unknown. It is noteworthy that in spite of the strong emphasis on introducing women to the game, actions during this study were more successful in recruiting male players. This was largely because men at this club were happy to embrace the traditionally female 9-hole membership category. This introduction is innovative in light of the current profile of 9-hole golf nationwide.

The action research process in this study identified the aspects of Chapter 6 relevant to this club: protection of Saturday play for full members, the difficulty for new people to start golf (especially men), the possible re-engagement of past members and the extent to which the enjoyment of the game is affected by other members. Greater emphasis on slow play was identified in this study compared to the study in Chapter 6. The negative power of critical incidents was well demonstrated in this study. However, this study adds a new dimension by also showing the potentially positive impact of one person. This was shown by the support of a club captain in mitigating the effect of a critical incident, the initiative organised by one man to support male players with no social

network and the positive response to ideas raised by one or two people. While a club committee may not be able to control the behaviour of members, it can put in place processes to mitigate critical incidents.

Reservations towards implementing a strategy based on the logistic regression study proved well-founded. The number of discontinuing players with no handicap was lower than in the Chapter 5 study and appeared to differ from one year to the next. The average handicap was also higher than in the Chapter 5 study. This may be due to the club recruiting few new players. The new members tended to be former players.

The action research process embodies the marketing concept of identifying the needs of members and tailoring action to meet those needs. One pertinent issue raised in this study is the difference between discounting and offering a specific segment a reduced membership package for a lower fee (segmentation and targeting). Members in the first cycle were clear that the discounting was not a good policy. The prompt payment and member-get-member discounts were removed at this club with no adverse effects. New membership categories were offered for a lower price than the full membership package, with most new categories offering reduced access to the course or club facilities. However, the reduced fees for younger people indicates a marketing mindset of tailoring a fee to the needs of a specific target. Based on Chapter 6, future actions may be needed to retain these members when they no longer quality for lower fees. With an action such as this, a fine line exists between discounting and targeted pricing.

## **7.9 Chapter summary**

This study with Club A (Golf Club) is a traditional two-cycle action research project. The actions in each cycle arose from the investigation and evaluation phases, drawing on the findings of the three prior contextual chapters where needed. This study reinforced the need for a club-specific approach to membership issues.

Over the two-year period, adult membership increased and was sustained for at least one further year. In the process, this study highlights the use of a marketing approach towards membership: to identify the needs of members, tailor actions to meet those needs, evaluate the result and begin a new cycle of activity. In this study, the actions were predominantly arranged by management. The club could not be described as integrated in the goal of membership satisfaction.

## **CHAPTER 8: MEMBERSHIP STUDY WITH CLUB B**

The second club membership study was conducted between 2015 and 2017. The club was founded in 1945 in an Auckland suburb. The club is the second largest bowling club in its centre and the only bowling club in its suburb. Three other large clubs are located within a 30-kilometre radius. Two neighbouring clubs are in a growing retirement suburb to the north, and the other is in a suburb to the south.

The club owns the land which consists of three outdoor grass greens, one artificial green and a well-maintained clubhouse with indoor and outdoor social facilities, a dining area and kitchen. The venue is available for corporate and private functions, including regular bookings.

An elected board comprising a president, chair, office bearers, club captain and five board members manage the club. Greenkeepers and a bartender are employed on a casual basis. The club offers a full range of products to cater to all segments: pennant and interclub competitions, club competitions, Roll Up Bowls, Business House Bowls, Blind Bowls and indoor bowls. The weekly schedule allocates one weeknight for Business House bowls during the summer, one weeknight for indoor bowls and one weekday and one weekend afternoon for Roll Up Bowls. Pennants and interclub are held on weekends and club competitions occur mostly on weekdays. A weekly club night (a social evening) is held. Membership fees are comparable to neighbouring clubs.

At the 2014 AGM, a new board was elected, reflecting member unease with a recent financial loss. The new chair and board took steps to improve financial performance and be inclusive with the objective of increasing participation in bowls. Participation was the key focus rather than membership. At the end of 2014, the club considered becoming a partner club. By mid-2015, the club was working towards doing so.

This study began with a meeting between the researcher and the club chair at the end of 2015. The chair had been in office for just over a year and a half and continued in the position for most of the study. The club had already pursued initiatives and increased membership. Board meetings were well structured with the minutes available on the club's website. The meetings and initiatives were undertaken within a review, action, evaluation framework. A holistic approach to club management meant that membership issues were rarely considered in isolation from the other club processes. The philosophy was that a well-run club is a precursor to strong membership.

For the duration of the study, the researcher guided further reflective and evaluative processes, and board members engaged enthusiastically. Discussion between researcher and board members achieved enhanced understanding of the principles behind the actions. As part of this collaborative relationship, the researcher had the role of a “friendly outsider” (as described in Chapter 2). The two aspects of a friendly outsider most relevant to this study are: a) making evident tacit local knowledge and b) helping local people recognise their expertise (Greenwood & Levin, 2007).

In Table 71, participation and membership action cycles throughout the study are outlined in relation to each financial year. The actions are those related to retaining existing members or obtaining new players and members.

Table 71: Action cycles relating to participation and membership with Club B

Timing	Stage	Specific activity
2015/6	Issue identification and evaluation of activity prior to study (Section 8.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document analysis of club minutes with review of membership numbers and activity since mid-2014</li> <li>• Review of preceding years through informal discussion with board members</li> <li>• Initial meeting and interview</li> <li>• Discussion of results from qualitative study (Chapter 6)</li> </ul>
2015/6	Actions evaluated (Section 8.2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a Go Days (September 2015)</li> <li>• Barefoot Bowls (December 2015 and February 2016)</li> <li>• Support for new bowlers</li> <li>• Fee increase</li> <li>• Community partnerships with other clubs</li> </ul>
2015/6	Evaluation (Section 8.3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document analysis of club minutes and review of membership numbers</li> <li>• Review of preceding years through informal discussion with board members</li> </ul>
2016/7	Actions evaluated (Section 8.4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a Go Days</li> <li>• Business House Bowls January–March 2017</li> <li>• Community partnerships</li> <li>• New bowler support</li> <li>• Indoor bowling club</li> </ul>
2017	Overall evaluation (Section 8.5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus group and interview with Business House Bowls players and social member</li> <li>• Document analysis of club minutes and review of membership numbers</li> <li>• Review of preceding years through informal discussions with board members</li> <li>• Final interview</li> </ul>

## 8.1 Issue identification and investigation

The first stage involved identification of action prior to the study, analysis of membership data, document analysis and one interview with a board member (BP1). The researcher

met with individual committee and club members informally at approximately three club nights, as an invited attendee to meetings and at two sessions of Barefoot Bowls. Reporting of informal contact is not within the guidelines of ethical practice. Relevant information from this contact was identified from an interview with a board member and the document analysis of club minutes and newsletters on the club website, which provided a systematic overview of club activity in chronological sequence.

Minutes reflect an interpretation of events and can emphasise some features and ignore others. This is especially the case for minutes that are publicly available. Although minutes are confirmed as accurate, this simply means that the people at a subsequent meeting did not perceive any inaccuracies (Denscombe, 2014). The minutes for this club were particularly thorough and followed a consistent structure (Appendix 5). The minutes demonstrate Bowen's (2009) point that minutes are "a remnant or artefact of organisational proceedings; they (tell) a story of situations, processes, and outcomes in the organisation". The systematic nature of this club's minutes provided a highly structured and comprehensive view of activities and issues raised by members.

Nevertheless, as with any qualitative information, care needs to be taken when interpreting. To show the link between the information in the minutes and the interpretation, key information from the minutes is presented in Appendix 5. Listed in the appendix are items relating to the recruitment of new players or members, the retention of members or the overall atmosphere at the club. A key limitation of the minutes is that they only provide the board's perspective.

The first step in issue identification was to identify the significant amount of activity undertaken mid-2014 to mid-2015. In line with the club's holistic approach, all activity relating to the overall 'health' of the club is noted (Table 72). Participation and membership activity are listed first, followed by facility refurbishment designed to make the clubhouse a welcoming place. The modernisation of the clubhouse included replacement of the wooden honours board with an electronic display. The removal of gaming machines was similarly aimed at improving the social environment and the machines were in fact contributing little revenue to the club.

Five strategies as articulated by BP1 in place by mid-2015 were:

- a) Obtain and maintain alternative sources of income, in particular from sponsorship and hiring the facilities for corporate events
- b) Enhance the social life of the club
- c) Enhance club rooms and facilities (to facilitate both of the above strategies)
- d) Spread the tasks of running the club across all club members

e) Attract and support new players

Recruitment of new players occurred through Have a Go Days and other activities, promoted through an email list, sponsors and local magazines.

Table 72. Activity June 2014–May 2015

Time frame	Specific activity
Participation and membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mentoring and induction pack developed</li> <li>• Set-up of Facebook page</li> <li>• Have a Go Days preceded by significant promotion through local community publications, flyers, email list</li> <li>• Support for new bowlers</li> <li>• Investigation into closer ties with a local community club began</li> <li>• New website</li> </ul>
Financial and club facilities	
Ongoing	Sponsorship and grant applications
Ongoing	Corporate functions and encouragement of use of facilities by community groups
Ongoing	Club refurbishment. For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New carpet</li> <li>• Kitchen refurbishment</li> <li>• Electronic honours board and placing other historic information in electronic format</li> </ul>
Ongoing	List of sponsors on whiteboard List of members on whiteboard
Governance	<p>Constitution: to bring in line with Bowls New Zealand, simplify membership, clarify voting and speaking at AGM</p> <p>Attendance at local Bowls centre Club Officer forum</p> <p>Bowls New Zealand interest in being a partner club</p> <p>Mission statement, code of ethics and conflict of interest policy</p>
Overall club atmosphere	<p>Reversal of 10% bar price increase due to member dissension</p> <p>Review of bar operations and importance of not serving non-members</p> <p>Gaming license not renewed and gambling machines removed from club</p> <p>Hosting of major tournament</p> <p>Clean-up day by volunteers</p> <p>Cheers for Volunteers recognition</p>
Member communications	
August 2014	New slogan adopted
Once a year	Annual President's Day for members
Weekly	Weekly club nights

Adapted from Appendix 5.

### 8.1.1 Total annual membership

Membership data were reconciled from audited financial statements, figures from club membership records, board minutes and the club handbook. Club membership and fees

revenue from 2009–2015 are presented in Table 73. In 2015, the club had 239 playing members and 128 social members. Compared with the previous year, social and playing membership increased by 21% and 9% respectively. This increase took the playing membership to its highest level in at least five years, following decline in three of the four years from 2010–2013. Over the same time frame social membership fluctuated considerably. The implementation of new categories of social membership resulted in substantial increases in 2010 and 2011.

Income from fees declined in 2015. This decline is difficult to understand based on the available membership data. As the club actively sought other sources of income, fees as a percentage of income declined from 22% to 10% (Table 73).

Table 73. Membership data 2009–2015

Year ended May	Playing members ( <i>n</i> )	% change	Social members ( <i>n</i> )	% change	Fees	% change	As % of income
2009	222		30		\$38,440		27%
2010	217	-2.3	99	230.0	\$39,489	2.7	23%
2011	197	-9.2	167	68.7	\$35,335	-10.5	19%
2012	209	6.1	109	-34.7	\$37,433	5.9	19%
2013	199	-4.8	153	40.4	\$38,246	2.2	20%
2014	198	-0.5	117	-23.5	\$38,523	0.7	22%
2015	239	20.7	128	9.4	\$35,889	-6.8	10%

Source: Club Documents.

### 8.1.2 Membership categories 2014/2015

In 2014/2015, the club offered three playing membership options for players: full membership, associate membership and first year player. Associate members are members of other clubs for whom this is a second club and accounted for between five to eight members annually. First year players pay a reduced fee.

Table 74. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B

Year ended May	First year ( <i>n</i> )	Full and associate ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )
2009	8	214	222
2010	19	198	217
2011	6	191	197
2012	17	192	209
2013	4	195	199
2014	23	175	198
2015	27	212	239

Source: Club Documents.

Retention of new players was also strong. Membership records show that 75% of 2014's first year players continued club membership in 2015 (BP1). This is reflected in the increase in full members that year.

### 8.1.3 Membership turnover in 2014/2015

The board minuted every new member, resigning member and change of membership category. During the 2014/15 season the board approved 29 first year players, 18 other new playing members and 31 new social members. Eighteen resignations were noted comprising 12 playing members and six social members. In addition, six members changed membership comprising five from playing to social membership and one from social to playing membership (Table 75). Other new playing members were mostly from other clubs (BP1).

The total number of playing members noted in the minutes is within 5% or 10 members of the number in the financial report. However, for social members, approximately 18 members seem to have given up membership without notification to the board.

Table 75. Change in membership during 2014/2015

	2014/2015	
	Playing	Social
Beginning of season	198	117
New members	18	31
New first year	29	0
Changed category	-4	4
Resigned	-12	-6
Calculated end of season	229	146
Actual reported	239	128
Not noted in minutes	10	-18

Adapted from Appendix 5.

The impact of the Have a Go Days was reflected by 12 new first year memberships in the month of September (Appendix 5). Minutes note the Have a Go Days as being the best supported for several years, with 51 registering one week and over 40 the following week (Appendix 5, September 2014).

### 8.1.4 Document analysis

The issue identification stage of this study incorporated evaluation of activity over the membership year up to May 2015. Positive comments were made in four reports in the June 2015 minutes about the progress made during 2014/2015 (Appendix 5). Issue identification focused on the level and pace of activity, the impact on volunteers, and response of club members to volunteering, high points and tension in the club, inclusiveness and club philosophy.

The level of activity at the club during the 18 months from June 2014 to May 2015 was extremely high (Table 72). The board discussed every aspect of club life. Every meeting included the following matters: facilities (either refurbishment, maintenance or repair), grants and sponsorships, and planning for the hosting of a major tournament and participation by club members in bowling competitions. At most meetings the following were discussed: allocation of responsibilities within the club, health or wellbeing of individual club members, health and safety issues, the liquor license and related issues and the lease of club facilities. Each board meeting covered an average of 18 matters arising from the previous minutes and nine actions arising from reports. Each of the first three meetings of the new board covered 20 to 25 items of general business. For the rest of the year, general business items numbered between two and eight. Some items were easily actioned (e.g., communication with a specific club member) whereas other items involved major review (e.g., tournaments or major refurbishment) (Appendix 5).

The speed of activity is also noteworthy. The time frame from first mention of an issue to its implementation was often one or two months. These issues included replacement of noticeboards (July 2014), removal of gaming machines (October 2014), new carpet (May/June 2015) and the development of governance documents (constitution in September 2014 and other documents approved in January 2015). Even major refurbishment of the kitchen was undertaken quickly (investigation commenced June 2014, completed in November 2014). Within five months of being elected, the new board had also secured \$100,000 of sponsorship.

The overall philosophy of the club was player-focused. A new slogan was added to all communications “*to reflect the club’s aim to be constantly striving to be better*” (Appendix 5, August 2014). The club was not afraid to try new initiatives such as Barefoot Bowls and a new format of the game. On the whole, a player-focus was evident, with a few exceptions such as a comment about “*pushing*” members to visit other clubs.

The inclusiveness of the club received a positive profile in local media when a club member won a National Attitude Award. The bowler commented favourably about the support from the club in overcoming difficulties with his wheelchair. Support for blind bowlers was a regular part of club life.

A significant initiative was the support of new players which commenced in August 2014, with three members noted as:

*...doing a great job getting an induction pack together for all our new members to make sure they are properly integrated into the club when they join up. Too*

*many clubs, and ours is no exception, leave new members to their own devices and don't have proper support systems in place to make them feel really welcome and integrate into the club. (Appendix 5, August 2014)*

The actions demonstrating this philosophy included the development of an induction pack (August 2014), new processes of making contact with new members (September 2014), meeting with new bowlers to identify their needs and then implementing a plan based on this discussion, organisation of coaching and mentorship for new bowlers and fortnightly meeting with new bowlers. In December 2014, a decision was made to split the new bowler development activity into two streams to cater for the more advanced people no longer at the introductory stage. New bowler development stopped over summer and recommenced in March 2015 with an intention to assist new bowlers to prepare for a tournament later in the month.

The voice of new bowlers was reflected in a formally reported meeting between ten new bowlers and four club members to discuss ideal club support (Appendix 5, July 2014). Items of interest to the new bowlers were: 1) explanation of tournaments suitable for new bowlers, 2) how competitions worked, 3) correct etiquette, 4) understanding the noticeboards, 5) access to coaching, 6) drills to improve skills, 7) introduction and explanation of the welcome pack by a mentor, 9) explanation of the scoreboard, 10) how a bowler knows what bowls is right for them, and 11) the responsibility of each team member. New bowlers suggested holding mini tournaments on a regular basis and having a mentor for all first year bowlers. It is interesting that only a few of these items relate to the technique of playing bowls. Most items related to behaviour and etiquette, many of which had been covered with new bowlers and a session on a bowling green that attracted 20 new bowlers (Appendix 5, October 2014).

The emphasis on volunteerism was strong. “*We are a volunteer club*” is a typical example of a number of comments about the voluntary nature of the club in the chair’s reports (e.g., Appendix 5, May 2015). In 2014/2015, members were asked how they would like to contribute to the club (rather than the prior approach of identifying people to undertake pre-identified tasks). As a result of this approach a new website was implemented by a member with expertise in that area.

The minutes refer both to appreciation of volunteers coming forward and concern about the need for more volunteers. Sixteen volunteers (9% of playing membership) responded to the request for mentors of new bowlers (Appendix 5, August 2014). In January 2015, 60 people attended the aptly named appreciation of volunteers, “Cheers for

Volunteers” afternoon. The chair’s board report each month began with “bouquets” in which the work of specific volunteers was acknowledged (Appendix 5). Volunteer help with activities such as corporate functions was frequently sought and mostly received (July and August 2014). However, one chair’s report commented that “*if all our members [playing and social] each gave us the equivalent of 1 full day a year.....only 2 hours every month and pales into insignificance given the amount of time some of our volunteers put in*” (Appendix 5, May 2015).

The level and pace of activity placed a strain on some volunteers. There was concern about the imbalance between members who contributed a great deal and those who did not:

*I know how hard the board has worked over the past year and at times, it has stretched many of us to the limit. However, the changes around the club and the current financial position is testament to the huge effort that has been put in. We have been supported by a great team of volunteers ... For those who have sat back and watched, I think it is now time we asked them to stand up and be counted.*  
(Appendix 5, May 2015, Chair’s Report)

High points and low energy were recorded with similar emphasis. The president made positive comments about the general atmosphere such as “*the club is in good heart*” (Appendix 5, October 2014). Celebrations included successful hosting of a major tournament (December/January 2014), recognition of a club member winning a national award (January 2015) and club bowlers being selected to play in an important competition (July 2014) (Appendix 5). After five months of focused planning, a major tournament was hosted by the club. Praise for the tournament organisation was recorded in three reports at the subsequent meeting. The most specific comment by the chair was:

*Every area – greens, surrounds, car parking, clubrooms, raffles, kitchen, BBQ, bar and cleaning – operated like clockwork and showcased our club and volunteers as being second to none. The comradeship and spirit displayed by our volunteers is the true fabric of what makes us such a great club.* (Appendix 5, January 2015, Chair’s Report)

Immediately following the hosting of the major tournament, energy in the club was reported to be low. In addition, concern was expressed about players from other clubs not visiting. The president noted in July 2014 the need for club members to visit other clubs to facilitate return visits. This sentiment was repeated more strongly the following month

with the suggestion “*to push our players to support other clubs*”. A lack of support from a neighbouring club was noted three months later. Club members not travelling to other clubs was raised again in January 2015 (Appendix 5).

The minutes document tension in the club. Examples are controversy over some aspect of club nights (August 2014), concerns expressed by a Roll Up player (August 2014), playing arrangements (November 2014), comments about dress and language in club room (January 2015) and bar prices. For each issue, a brief indication of the concern was explained, along with the nature of the investigation and resolution. An attempt was made to address each matter. Nothing was left to linger (Appendix 5).

Activities such as Roll Up Bowls were well attended. However, the lack of quorum for a general meeting and subsequent rescheduling of the meeting (January 2014) was concerning, as was the lack of support for tournaments (June 2015). The board noted that “*the tournament and match programme needs a complete review. Members are not supporting the current open tournaments and championships and we need to understand why*” (Appendix 5, June 2015).

## **8.2 Action – 2015/2016**

The formal study commenced at the end of 2015; nevertheless, activity from June 2015 was reviewed to align with the membership year. As a consequence, early activity planned by the club board and the issue identification were in progress at the same time. The actions related to recruitment and retention are identified in Table 76.

The support for new bowlers was extended based on their appreciation of the prior activity. Regular induction meetings were held to identify the needs of new bowlers. Community partnerships were evident when the indoor bowling section of a local community club closed and was invited to join the bowling club. Membership of Clubs New Zealand gave each club member access to 80 RSAs, 200 working clubs and discounts for services such as eye, hearing and vehicle tests. The club also gained access to services such as club insurance.

The indoor bowling section of the local community club joining in March was well-timed. Five months earlier, the longstanding indoor bowls group at the bowling club had ceased to operate due to falling numbers. This enabled re-instatement of indoor bowling while the indoor resources were still held within the club.

A small concise cycle of activity related to Barefoot Bowls. The first series of events was held at the end of 2015, reviewed by the club and researcher together before

holding a second series in February 2016. These events were compared with Have a Go Days held in September 2015 (Table 76).

Table 76. Description and development of action 2015/2016

Description of action	How the action was developed
Have a Go Day (September 2015)	Repeated from previous year.
Barefoot Bowls (November 2015)	Idea from overseas discussed at board meeting.
Barefoot Bowls (February 2016)	Evaluation following November sessions.
New website – November 2015	Club member survey about content of website.
Support for new bowlers:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction sessions</li> <li>• Support for new members prior to club nights (September 2015)</li> <li>• Availability of a range of bowls for trial before purchasing own equipment (enabled new players to begin with top equipment) (June 2015)</li> <li>• Guidelines for use of club bowls by new players (March 2016)</li> <li>• Encouragement of interclub teams to include new bowlers</li> </ul>	<p>Extension of the strategy commenced the previous year. Actions were based on meetings with new bowlers to identify their needs.</p> <p>Consistent with qualitative findings (Chapter 6).</p>
Community partnerships:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indoor bowls section of a closing community club invited to join (January 2016) and started in March 2016</li> <li>• Clubs New Zealand membership taken up (initiated August 2015)</li> </ul>	<p>Responsiveness to opportunity in local community.</p> <p>To add value to the club membership.</p>
Increase in membership fees by \$5	Financial decision based on prior year's performance.
Future development:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for review of tournaments identified</li> <li>• Need for coaching identified (June 2015)</li> <li>• Bowls New Zealand coaching course completed by six members (May 2016)</li> </ul>	<p>Concern about attendance at club tournaments</p> <p>To enable additional coaching the following season.</p>

Other activity continued, with emphasis on relationships with sponsors, applications for grants and the hiring of club facilities for corporate functions. Discussion about governance and strategic issues continued with the drafting of a strategic plan (July 2016), operations plan (July 2016) and high-level discussions with a local sports association about facilities. Discussion about the format of traditional tournaments was also held during this time.

### 8.3 Evaluation – 2015/2016

#### 8.3.1 Total annual membership 2016

The 2015 increase in playing membership was not sustained in 2016 despite similar initiatives being undertaken and playing membership returned to its 2014 level. Social

membership increased by 12%, some of which was anecdotally attributed to the increase in corporate functions and sponsorship (BP1). The new indoor bowling club brought 20 members (Table 77).

Table 77. Membership data 2012–2016

Year ended May	Playing	% change	Social	% change	Fees	% change	Fees as % of income
2012	209	6.1	109	-34.7	\$37,433	5.9	
2013	199	-4.8	153	40.4	\$38,246	2.2	
2014	198	-0.5	117	-23.5	\$38,523	0.7	22
2015	239	20.7	128	9.4	\$35,889	-6.8	10
2016	198	-8.8	143	11.7	\$38,201	6.4	16

Plus 20 indoor players

Adapted from Club Documents.

### 8.3.2 Membership categories 2015/2016

A comparison of 207 full members in 2016 with total membership of 239 in 2015 shows that full membership declined by 14% in 2016. At first glance the decline in full and associate membership appears small (2%). However, first year players from 2015 became full members automatically if they renewed membership.

This decline was not due to an inability to retain new players. New player retention appeared strong, with 25 second year members and 11 third year players listed in the club handbook for 2016 (Club Documents). Nearly all the 2015 new players continued into a second year of membership and half the new players from 2014 were retained.

Table 78. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B

Year ended May	First year ( <i>n</i> )	Full and associate ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )
2012	17	192	209
2013	4	195	199
2014	23	175	198
2015	27	212	239
2016	11	207	218

Adapted from Club Documents.

### 8.3.3 Membership turnover in 2015/2016

During the 2015/6 season the board were more aware of new members than discontinued members. The minutes record 37 new members (10 first year players, 7 other playing members and 20 social members). These new members exceeded the 24 recorded resignations (17 playing members and seven social members). In addition, 13 members changed membership, comprising 12 from playing to social members and one from social

to playing membership (Table 79). However, 30 playing and 9 social members gave up membership without notifying the board.

Five prominent members of the club passed away during four months over summer (BP1). In addition, members moved to a retirement village, only some of whom maintained contact with the club (BP1). Other reasons for non-renewal of membership were not known.

Table 79. Change in membership during 2015/2016

	Playing	Social
Beginning of season	239	128
New members	7	20
New first year	10	
Change status	-11	11
Resigned	-17	-7
Calculated end of season	228	152
Actual reported in AGM report	198	143
Not noted in the minutes	-30	-9

Adapted from Appendix 5.

### 8.3.4 Evaluation of actions

The evaluation of actions focused on the position of the club in the bowls community and recruitment and retention of new players. By the end of the 2015/2016 financial year, the club was being regarded as an exemplar in the bowling community. The chief executive officer of Bowls New Zealand complimented the club on being “at the forefront of doing things differently with a clear customer focus as well as providing for the ‘traditional’ bowls member” (Appendix 5, March 2016).

Barefoot Bowls was less effective than Have a Go Days at recruiting new members. Half of the first-year players in 2015/16 joined during September and October following the Have a Go promotional events. Twenty-two people attended the two Have a Go Days in September, five of whom joined the club immediately (Appendix 5). In comparison, attendance at Barefoot Bowls was comparable, possibly slightly higher, but no one joined the club as a result. The first series of Barefoot Bowls attracted 10 people to the first session, 16 people to the second session and minimal numbers to the third session (BP1). Initially the concept was not considered to be at fault. Further sessions were planned for February, to be more strongly promoted through the network of sponsors and attendees of corporate events. These sessions were more poorly attended (with five people at the first session and seven at the second session). At the time of the second series, Business House Bowls had started attracting 80 people weekly.

At this point the Barefoot Bowls concept was reviewed against marketing theory of segmentation evident in the Bowls New Zealand approach to participation. The evaluation focused on the benefit of Barefoot Bowls compared with Have a Go Days and Business House Bowls. The delivery of Barefoot Bowls at this club was similar to Have a Go Days. It differed from the experience described in Chapter 6 of an event run by young people with a DJ. The aim had been to attract younger people and in the opinion of BP1, delivery of the initiative by young people was important. The need was possibly already being met by the vibrant environment of Business House Bowls. In summary, the concept as delivered at this club was already covered by other products.

Support for new bowlers was considered successful. The membership analysis showed strong retention of new players and some drop-off in the second year of membership. Positive comments and good attendance were recorded at most induction sessions, and all induction attendees were playing in Roll Ups and some in tournaments (Appendix 5, March 2016). It is impossible to identify whether the activity to support new players was more effective than previous efforts to do so.

Roll Up bowling in general seemed to be doing very well. A Winter Trophy enabled everyone a chance to win (including good or mediocre players). *“The ‘single entry’ of Roll Up days allows members to socialise and play with different teams each day and this makes for a friendly happy environment”* (Appendix 5, September). Roll Ups comprise new bowlers (who are encouraged to receive coaching), experienced bowlers looking for less stressful competitive games and/or finding bowling all day too much. Over 20 bowlers attended Roll Ups in the winter and 30 in the summer (Appendix 5, July 2016).

Optimism in the club was evident at club nights with approximately 100 club members in attendance each week (BP1). The re-commencement of indoor bowls was seen as a positive sign (Appendix 5), as was the work on the strategic plan. No dissatisfaction was recorded in the minutes about the \$5 increase in fees (Appendix 5) nor was any dissatisfaction mentioned to board members (BP1).

The main concern was attendance at the traditional club tournaments (Tuesday and Thursday tournaments). In comparison, a one-off tournament and President’s Day had excellent attendance, with 42 teams and 192 people respectively, compared with 10 to 14 teams at the more traditional tournaments (Appendix 5, November & December 2015; January and February 2016). The possibility of allowing any combination (any mix of genders to play) caused debate, as did the sufficiency of the level of prize money. *“The board should consider for next season what the appropriate tournament structure should*

be”. (Appendix 5, November 2015). The tournament programme listed a considerable number of events with over 40 championships for men and a similar number for women, in addition to mixed tournaments, club championships and special days (Club Documents) .

#### 8.4 Action – 2016/2017

The club was recognised by Bowls New Zealand as a Partner Club based on its sound strategic and operational plans and use of Bowls New Zealand brands such as Business House Bowls and Have a Go Days. The strategic plan (Club Document) circulated for review contained four key areas: governance; financial management; improving the image of the sport; and increased participation at all levels. The only comment about membership mooted that “*the traditional model is no longer relevant with traditional membership falling and casual participation increasing*” (Club Document). Increased participation was the focus. The specific actions for 2016/17 were predominantly repeated from the previous year (Table 80).

Table 80. Description and development of action 2016/2017

Description of action	How the action was developed and relationship with review phase
Have a Go Days (September 2016)	Repeat from previous years.
Business House Bowls – January–March	Repeat from previous years – included in the research study for 2016/2017.
Support for new bowlers:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction course – four consecutive Thursday evenings and a follow-up meeting</li> <li>• Twilight Draws Tournament for a new and experienced bowler to give match experience (November 2016)</li> <li>• Bowls etiquette sheet compiled (November 2016)</li> <li>• New bowler information on the club website</li> <li>• Session with the president</li> </ul>	Extension of the strategy from previous years. Continuation appropriate given the retention of new players.
Coaching:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Six members completed coaching course</li> <li>• Programme of coaching prepared</li> <li>• Monday night coaching programme arranged</li> <li>• A second programme later in the season</li> </ul>	Implementation of a strategy commenced the previous year. Consultation with an expert from Bowls New Zealand.
Roll Ups:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion Day (March 2017)</li> <li>• Agreement that new players at Roll Ups should have coaching before taking part in Wednesday or Saturday tournaments</li> </ul>	Ongoing internal club review.
Advertising – Local Business Association Magazine February/March	

An operations plan identified key targets for the activities in Table 100 and a three-monthly assessment of progress against this plan. Of note, despite a focus on casual and social participation, a membership target of 30 new members was set.

In addition, two major special projects commenced. In part the philosophy was based on the premise that *“it is tough to be solely a bowling club. We need to do other things as well or we will die”* (BP1).

## 8.5 Evaluation – 2016/2017

The evaluation was based on a review of membership data, document analysis of minutes, and primary research comprising interviews and a focus group. The interviews provided an additional perspective, in particular an exploratory view of the engagement of Business House Bowls and social members and key issues facing the club. The primary research consisted of an interview with a social member (BP2), a focus group with Business House Bowls players (BHG) and an interview with a board member (BP1). All interviews were held in 2017 at the bowling club. The methods for undertaking and analysing the interviews and focus groups were as in previous studies. The participants of the focus group had played Business House Bowls for a few seasons. The focus group was 25 minutes in duration and was facilitated by the researcher in the clubroom. Focus group participants were introduced to the researcher by the Business House Bowls co-ordinator.

### 8.5.1 Total annual membership 2016/2017

In the 2016/2017 year, both playing and social membership declined as did income from fees. With a reduction in income from both sponsorship and grants, membership fees returned to being 20% of the club’s income (Table 81).

Table 81. Membership data 2012–2017

Year ended May	Playing	% change	Social	% change	Fees	% change	Fees as % of income
2012	209	6.1	109	-34.7	\$37 433	5.9	
2013	199	-4.8	153	40.4	\$38 246	2.2	
2014	198	-0.5	117	-23.5	\$38 523	0.7	22%
2015	239	20.7	128	9.4	\$35 889	-6.8	10%
2016	198	-10.5	143	11.7	\$38 201	6.4	16%
	Plus 20 indoor players						
2017	173	-11.3	113	-21.0	\$35 201	-7.9	20%
	Plus 22 indoor players						

Source: Club Documents.

The total membership of the indoor bowling group remained stable. The turnover of membership of this group was believed to be relatively low (BP1).

### 8.5.2 Membership categories for 2016/2017

The number of full and associate members dropped dramatically in 2017 to the lowest level in almost 10 years. The number of first year players fell well short of replacing the lost members (Table 82). The full membership of 2017 was only 75% of the total membership of 2016.

Table 82. Breakdown of playing membership in Club B

Year ended May	First year ( <i>n</i> )	Full and associate ( <i>n</i> )	Total ( <i>n</i> )
2009	8	214	222
2010	19	198	217
2011	6	191	197
2012	17	192	209
2013	4	195	199
2014	23	175	198
2015	27	212	239
2016	11	207	218
2017	9	164	173

### 8.5.3 Membership turnover in 2016/2017

During the 2016/7 season the target of 30 new members was exceeded. The minutes acknowledged 38 new members (12 playing members, 8 first year players and 16 social members). Only 14 resignations were noted, comprising 10 playing members and four social members. In addition, 11 members changed category, with all changing from playing to social members (Appendix 5). These reported monthly memberships left the board with an impression of a net gain in membership. It was not until the end of the financial year that the membership loss became apparent.

Again, discrepancies between the minuted information and the membership figures suggests that 77 members (both social and playing) allowed membership to discontinue without notification to the board (Table 83).

Table 83. Change in membership during 2016–2017

	Playing	Social
Beginning of season	198	143
New members	12	16
New first year	8	
Change of status	-11	11
Resigned	-10	-4
Calculated end of season	197	166
Actual reported in AGM report	173	113
Not noted in the minutes	-24	-53

Five second year players were recorded in the club handbook for 2018, indicating that just over half the new players from 2017 were still with the club one year later. A similar pattern of 50% retention was evident for the new players from the two previous years, with five 5 year players and 11 fourth year players among the membership (Club Document) .

#### 8.5.4 Document analysis

The documents included the operations plan and meeting minutes. In these documents, the board praised most alternative forms of the game, while being concerned about traditional bowls.

Members reported key points from a bowls conference including the following comments: a) *“We need to put the participant at the heart of everything we do – change focus away from the competitive side to the informal and recreational side. Look to what the community wants not what we want to deliver”*, b) *“A participant focus is not a membership focus. Members are a subset of participants”* and c) *“Develop sustainable programmes – take a systems approach and results will take care of themselves”* (Appendix 5, November 2016).

The Have a Go Day caused concern this year. It was less successful than previous years with only five attendees. Consequently, the number of first year players was low, most of whom joined between January and May (probably from other initiatives) rather than at the beginning of the season.

The success of Business House Bowls resulted in the decision to expand the event for the following year. The tournament was again fully subscribed. In the future, the board agreed to move the event from the back rink to the two front rinks. This move also increased the visibility of Business House Bowls from the street. The number of returning teams showed loyalty, but also created an imbalance in experience between newer and

experienced teams. One team had played for more than 10 years and a couple of others had played for more than five years (Appendix 5, March 2017).

Coaching for all levels, along with support for new bowlers, was a highlight of the year. Six members completed a coaching course and over 40 members attended the first two sessions run by the newly trained coaches (Appendix 5, June 2016 and October 2016). The Roll Up organisers perceived improvement in all players and praised the Monday night coaches for giving new members the confidence to enter competitions (Appendix 5, November 2016). Further coaching was held later in the season (Appendix 5, March 2017).

The strength of Roll Up Bowls was noted with the improvement arising from coaching. About 30 players attended Roll Up sessions, which was described on the club website as the “heart of the club” (Appendix 5, November 2016). A two-day promotion with 50 to 60 attendees was “*very competitive but enjoyed the relaxed friendly atmosphere*”. Three people from a neighbouring club expressed disappointment at the absence of Roll Ups at their club. Competitions and cups introduced new members to competitive play, happy with “*the friendly rivalry playing Roll Up. We [the organisers] feel very satisfied with the enjoyment this section of the club, new and not so new members, are getting*” (Appendix 5, March 2017).

Traditional tournaments were again the main problem area for the club, but this year, not only club championships, also pennant selection. Entries in traditional tournaments were declining similar to other clubs. The board and the match committees (after talking to a large range of playing members) discussed a fairer process for the final championship draw (Appendix 5, October 2016). In the same month, dissatisfaction from some players about pennant selection was noted and was repeated in January 2017 and May 2017. Advice was sought and received from Bowls New Zealand; however, the issue remained unresolved and was referred to the board meeting after the AGM in June.

Traditional bowling clearly remained a key, and possibly still the major, area in club life (Appendix 5). Board discussions placed more emphasis on less traditional forms of bowls. In contrast, traditional club competitions and interclub pennants dominated the club website and Facebook page. This apparent inconsistency arose from the differing management of the bowling formats. Match and tournament committees managed traditional tournaments and only notified the board about problems. The more modern forms of the game were managed by members who regularly reported directly to the board.

Concern about club member engagement was strongly expressed almost every month in the later part of 2016. Complacency amongst members seemed evident amongst members who perceived the club to be doing well so they could “*sit back*” (November 2016). Non-contributing complainers had a demoralising effect on other volunteers.

### **8.5.5 Primary research**

Primary research gave insight into the perspective of six social and Business House Bowls members. An interview with the board member gave further detail about issues raised in the document analysis.

The social member demonstrated movement from one form of engagement to membership. She initially came to the club as a non-member to watch sport on television and was invited to bowl. She encouraged her workplace to play Business House Bowls and joined the club as a social member. After playing Business House Bowls through two workplaces, she took a break but was available to make up numbers if a team needed an extra player. She attended club nights fairly regularly, and envisaged playing bowls more seriously when retired (BP2).

The attraction of Business House Bowls is the “*fun*” (BP2 & BHG), with a short evening “*all over by 8pm*”, good for team building and for entertaining suppliers. The workplace enters a team of four people who can differ each week reducing the pressure on any one person to play. The provision of equipment, guidance, a barbecue and “*a great atmosphere*” provide “*a really great night*” (BHG). The group clearly felt connected to the club and described themselves proudly as “*Business House members*” and spontaneously described their contribution to the club. This group were relatively unaware of the other aspects of club life, but knew that further involvement would be welcomed, although were unclear about how they gained this impression. They were clear about their preference to play bowls for only a few months of the year (BHG).

The club board regarded the expansion of Business House Bowls as preferable to a “*hard sell of other aspects of bowling*” (BP1). The board believed the lack of commitment to be part of the attraction and were hesitant to pressure Business House Bowls attendees to increase their involvement. However, several Business House Bowls teams were sponsors and/or held corporate functions at the club (BP1).

Key highlights of the previous years were considered to be the coaching and growth in Roll Up Bowls. The coaching, both the interest in being a coach and in receiving coaching, greatly surpassed expectations and was hugely beneficial to the club (BBP1). Roll Ups worked well for both new bowlers and experienced bowlers looking

for less stressful, shorter competitive games, and “*to start the season with 30 bowlers at Roll Ups is a good strong start to the season*” (BP1).

Maintenance of energy levels and complacency are challenges for volunteer clubs, as “*complacency complicated the difficulties in maintaining energy levels. When a club is doing well, complacency can set in and make it harder to get volunteers to undertake work*” (BP1).

A new issue rarely mentioned in the minutes was the challenge created by retirement villages. Most members lost touch with the club when they moved to a retirement village. With no villages were in the immediate locality, members had to move to a different suburb. The most northerly bowling club is reputed to be growing, being situated in a suburb with several retirement villages (BP1).

Diversity in a club highlights that bowls is for all age groups not just older people. Bowls is best regarded as a “*young people’s sport that old people play really well*” (BP1).

## **8.6 Overall evaluation and future actions**

By 2017, the club had established a reputation as a strong bowling club, having won several awards from Bowls New Zealand and other organisations in the three preceding years (Club Documents). The overall evaluation followed the same approach as for Club A, and used Coghlan and Brannick’s (2014) application of Mezirow’s (1998) content, process and premise reflection. Content covers what happened in the study. Process is concerned with procedures including issue identification, action development and evaluation tools. Premise relates to assumptions governing attitudes and behaviour.

### **8.6.1 Content**

Review of membership results precedes identification of what was learnt from those results and key legacies. In summary, a significant increase in membership prior to the study was not sustained. The increase followed considerable effort from volunteers (members as well as the board). Although the strategy and level of energy continued for another year and a half, membership dropped back to the 2014 level and then declined further.

Analysis of the number of new and discontinued memberships enabled a more precise identification of issues than simple comparisons of total annual memberships. Membership increase occurred when new members were attracted with few discontinued memberships. In most years, Have a Go Days were successful in generating over half the new playing members for that season. However, the events had a diminishing impact for

each successive year after 2015. The trial of the relatively unknown overseas concept of Barefoot Bowls attracted little interest.

New player support was a positive outcome from which good retention seemed to have emanated. However, without comparison with previous years or other clubs, it is difficult to form a firm conclusion. Without this new player retention, greater decrease in membership would have occurred.

While membership was not maintained, the board achieved its objectives, with key legacies of a strengthened financial position, the clubhouse modernisation and strong sponsorship relationships. In the final year of the study a new member target was exceeded. The board remained proactive and predominantly optimistic, although signs of strain were evident, especially towards the end of the study. The board made a strategic decision to undertake a special project as a future-looking activity towards the end of the study.

### **8.6.2 Process**

Key process considerations are the extent to which this study is action research, the impact of the club's focus on participation (rather than membership), and the utility of research methods, gaps and strengths in the study. In summary, the study included features of action research, but the research and action were not well-connected. The reliance on document analysis was both a strength and a drawback, as was the participation approach. The time frame of the study was also important.

This study contains many elements of action research: cycles of action and reflection (e.g., Coghlan & Brannick, 2014), research and action (e.g., Greenwood & Levin, 2007), collaboration between stakeholders and a researcher (Greenwood & Levin, 2007), integration of theory and action (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014) and an emergent process (Shani & Pasmore, 2010). At the heart of this study was a desire to improve the participants' situation (Coghlan & Brannick, 2014). However, the cycles of research and action were more loosely connected than ideally found in action research. The activities were derived predominantly from the reflective process institutionalised at board meetings. Member input was sought on specific issues such as the tournament programme, website and new player support. Some investigations used anecdotal feedback while others were more evidence-based. Research undertaken by the researcher in consultation with board members tended to be evaluative. This focus on evaluation (rather than input into activity) may have arisen from the different, but not incompatible, membership focus of the researcher compared with the participation focus of the club

board. Such a difference would not normally occur in action research as research objectives would be determined collaboratively. This study meets a criterion of Coghlan and Brannick (2014) in providing “a good story” which enhances understanding of a phenomenon. It is an understandable story for a volunteer-run sport club. Of note, membership success occurred when a more traditional action research style was used—a reported investigative meeting with new players activity based on this research and followed by evaluation.

Advantages and disadvantages arose from the participation focus, which has currency in national sport organisations. The advantage was the consideration of member-related activity in the context of club life. The disadvantage was the reduced emphasis on membership data in the resultant research. During the course of the study there was no record of any board discussion about membership numbers. Informally, board members were happy to discuss membership trends with the researcher.

Research methods used secondary data to a greater extent than usually found in an action research study. The significant use of the board minutes was only possible due to the thoroughness of these documents. The availability of the minutes on the club website provided transparency. The merits of these documents differed between the investigation stage and later stages in the study. Early in the process, study of minutes gave a clearer sense of the sequence and magnitude of activity than discussions with board members. However, at later stages of the study minutes alone were not sufficient. As detailed as they were, by their very nature, such documents reflected the interpretation of the board.

The study would have benefitted from a greater range of primary data. The continuous improvement process did not have major review discussion points that occur when primary research is undertaken. Primary research with non-board members may have helped identify priority areas once the early objectives had been met. Focus groups would have given a more direct voice to less engaged members, including reaction to requests for volunteers. However, these groups would have been instigated by the researcher rather than in the collaborative spirit of action research and may have placed a strain on the club. Member feedback was already frequently sought by the board and through two major future-oriented investigations.

Gaps in the study arose from unavailable information. Information about the number of members joining and discontinuing was pieced together like a jigsaw at the end of the financial year, rather than being part of ongoing club processes. A formal profile of the membership in terms of the type of bowler (traditional and other forms of

bowls) was not available, nor was the extent of overlap between differing styles of the sport (e.g., numbers playing both Roll Ups and traditional tournaments). While club documents emphasised newer forms of participation, the website and Facebook page emphasised the traditional tournaments, which still appeared to deliver bowls to a majority, but probably declining number of members. Concern emanated from the declining number of people entering tournaments, rather the number of members playing differing bowling formats.

A systematic follow-up of discontinued members would provide a clearer indication about the extent of uncontrollable membership loss. Nearly all resignations submitted to the board showed reasons beyond the control of the club (health, moving to retirement home or away from the area). In addition, the club board was aware of deaths and illness of other playing members. However, approximately 20 members (10% of the playing membership) discontinued membership without resignation. The reasons for this loss need to be known. A systematic approach to recording reasons for membership turnover could make the current anecdotal approach more reliable.

A key strength in the club's membership data was the identification of first, second, and third year players and attendance at Have a Go Days in the club records. This proved invaluable in assessing recruitment success and retention of new players. The study suggests a good conversion from Have a Go Day participation to membership and good new player retention. However, the drivers of Have a Go Day participation and existing player recruitment were not fully understood.

This study highlights the importance of continuing the analysis beyond a period of action to understand longer-term effect. The study began at the end of 2015 when membership was buoyant. The annual membership figures six to nine months later showed membership loss, not apparent until the AGM reporting. Investigation of this loss took another six months. It was only after a second consecutive annual loss that it was clear that the 2014 membership gain was short-lived. The temporary nature of the gain was perplexing to the club when the strategy and energy level continued in subsequent years. Had this study been conducted a few years earlier and completed immediately after the year of increased membership, different conclusions may have been drawn—a celebration of membership increase.

### **8.6.3 Premise**

Unstated assumptions about action research are as important as those governing attitudes and behaviour. Action research is premised on the beginning of the study being the start

of a process. By the start of the study, a structured strategy and process had been in place for a year and a half. For an ongoing issue such as membership, that scenario may be common. This study is an example of a membership project fitting into an existing club cycle—hence issues with process.

The club philosophy assumes that strong membership flows from good club management (encompassing a marketing orientation) and a focus on participation. This assumption was not correct in this case. Formalising the link between participation, a well-run club and membership may help to ascertain how such factors increase the number of members. A further unstated assumption implies that a participation focus precludes a membership strategy. The two are not incompatible. Despite the participation focus beyond the corporate events, most club activity was in fact geared towards members. In the early stages of the study an unwritten but implied expectation of increased membership was evident in club documents. In the final year of the study a target of 30 new members was set.

The assumption of the uncontrollable nature of membership loss was inherent in many discussions. This assumption is understandable based on the resignations to the board that demonstrated loss beyond the club's control. Given the age of the membership, membership loss may be predominantly uncontrollable. However, with the magnitude of membership discontinuation, it is likely that some loss is within the control of the club. Areas of dissatisfaction by sectors of membership were noted from time to time in board documents. Other clubs in close proximity make alternative membership readily available. Apart from members moving to a neighbouring retirement suburb, no discussion occurred about the possibility of members switching to other bowling clubs. Whether the controllable loss was significant enough to warrant a specific strategy needed investigation.

A marketing orientation is evident in the product range targeting several consumer segments: Roll Up Bowls for both competitive and social bowlers at the heart of the club, traditional competitions for the serious bowler, Blind Bowls, indoor bowls, Business House Bowls and social membership. A segmentation approach assumes a club of sufficient size to support several products. To offer six playing/membership options in a 300-member club increases the likelihood of low support for some events.

The weighting in the club strategy on newer, less formal bowling formats can imply greater importance for these forms of the sport. While new formats are important for the long-term viability of a club, the traditional form of the game may still be the main

form of participation. A difficult scenario occurs when the traditional tournaments decline more rapidly than the newer forms develop, as appears to be occurring in this club.

An interesting assumption emerged regarding the possibility of greater club involvement for Business House Bowls participants. In both club documents and primary research, concern was raised that pressuring further involvement might be off-putting to participants. Therefore, the club preferred to accept that the participants would be solely Business House Bowls participants. This implied the availability of two options, namely “hard sell” or laissez-faire, clearly premised on a selling rather than marketing orientation. Some Business House Bowls players certainly valued their short-term but annual relationship with the club. Further investigation into the needs of these participants would be worth undertaking. The relationship between these participants and the club may not be as uncommitted as it seems. Options other than hard sell or laissez-faire might exist.

An unstated assumption places social membership as a ‘bonus’ for the club. Prior to 2009, social membership at the club was negligible. Over six years, with considerable fluctuation, it peaked in 2013 and 2016 at 44% and 42% of the membership respectively. Social membership was rarely discussed strategically by the board. Little is known about the motivations of social members or the potential for this category to contribute to the club. From the movement between member categories, one motive for social membership is clearly to retain contact with the club when no longer playing bowls. While the club’s prime focus is playing bowls, a strategy for this group is worth investigating.

#### **8.6.4 Future research**

Future research could be based on the premise and process reflection, such as more complete membership data to identify the extent to which discontinued membership is controllable and more broadly focused primary research. Three specific topics are identified in the reflection: 1) the issues of pennants/traditional players, 2) encouraging trial of bowls from the wider community and 3) the nature of social and Business House Bowls membership.

### **8.7 Conclusions**

A well-regarded, strategic club worked hard and yet experienced membership decline. Well thought-out, forward-thinking strategies produced several success stories, particularly with regard to new players, coaching, Roll Up bowling, Business House Bowls and a welcoming clubhouse. The club demonstrated a marketing orientation (Peterson, 1989) by working in a cohesive way towards meeting player needs. The board

attempted to respond to feedback from members, both sought and unsought. Club activity was aimed at an inclusive approach and community focus. The board showed a philosophy of proactivity and continuous improvement. Against this backdrop, membership decline seems surprising and cannot be understood by simply looking at annual total membership numbers. It appears that the newer formats of the game are developing well, but the decline in the number of traditional bowlers is more rapid. However, without firmer data, this conclusion is conjecture.

Data related to recruitment and discontinued membership provided membership turnover and demonstrates the difficult situation that many bowling clubs may face. A key lesson is the number of new members needed at this club to maintain playing membership. The club loses approximately 20–30 playing members each year through resignations and transfer to social membership. In addition, about 25–30 discontinued members do not formally notify the board. Therefore, if unable to stem discontinued membership, the club needs to attract at least 45 new members each year to maintain playing membership, over twice the number achieved in the past two years and over 20% of existing playing membership. This is a high percentage to gain and assimilate. Such a number is unlikely to be achieved through referrals from the existing membership so prevalent amongst bowlers in Chapter 6. This relatively large club has shown a consistently strong outward focus. However, even this club did not attract sufficient new people to replace retiring members.

The impression from board documents and interviews is that the discontinuation of members is solely outside the control of the club. However, the extent to which membership loss is controllable was not quantified. For a portion of membership, their reason for leaving the club is not known. With new bowler and Roll Up activity apparently buoyant, indications point to the main loss being traditional bowlers, amongst whom dissatisfaction has been noted. This raises the question about whether dissatisfaction is causing controllable loss. With other clubs within a close proximity, alternative bowling options are readily available.

The emphasis on encouraging participation gives an ambiguous message about membership. It does not mean that membership is unimportant. Members are also participants in bowling. An increase in membership was clearly an implied objective in this club. A clear explanation of ‘participation focus’ would be helpful. One such definition was discussed at a board meeting, when it was noted to “*put the participant at the heart of everything we do – Look to what the community wants, not what we want to*

*deliver*” (Appendix 5, November 2016). A membership strategy can sit alongside this philosophy.

The study was based on principles of action research but without full integration of action, research and reflection. It is debatable whether more integrated action research would have made a difference to the outcome of this study. The collaborative spirit of action research may have resulted in the research input into decision-making being similar to the informal process already be undertaken.

A volunteer club managing facilities has a broad span of activity to manage. The objectives and legacies over the period were the segmented approach to participation, new player support, modernisation of the club facilities and financial improvements through to sponsorship and corporate functions. The new player support and retention provide a great example, an area that seems lacking from the experience of many new players in other clubs and sports.

## **8.8 Chapter summary**

This study was a two-cycle project based on action research principles. Membership was studied in a club focused on increasing participation rather than a specific membership strategy. A membership increase was achieved prior to this study but was not sustained during the two cycles. A strong marketing focus was evident with the board taking a holistic approach to the management of the club. A highlight from this study is the emphasis on support for new players, which is demonstrated in Chapter 6 as lacking in many new player experiences. This support is important to a club heavily dependent on new players.

## **CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

A perplexing question of concern to the sports community and academics was investigated in this thesis: How can a member-owned, non-equity golf or lawn bowls club increase adult membership in New Zealand? The two sub-questions were: (a) How can a club retain existing adult members? and (b) How can a club attract new adult members? Club membership occurs in an embedded system, whereby a local problem is heavily influenced by larger systems that a local group may believe are beyond its ability to manage. Therefore, as suggested by Waddell et al. (2015), a multi-level research process comprised studies of specific clubs and their wider environments. The wider environment was studied through context analysis of both sports using secondary sources (Chapter 4), statistical analysis of golf club memberships (Chapter 5) and qualitative investigation of golf and bowls playing behaviours (Chapter 6). Action research studies with two case clubs examined membership issues within specific contexts (Chapters 7 and 8).

A pragmatist philosophy underpins this thesis and emphasises the importance of both a theoretical contribution and workable solutions. While a pragmatist approach is not constrained to one paradigmatic epistemology, the dominant approach in this thesis is interpretative with examination of issues from several perspectives. Given the power imbalances demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, a critical epistemology is also evident. The evidence-based membership analysis brought a positivist element to this thesis.

In this chapter, key outcomes from the five studies are synthesised into a concept map representing factors influencing club membership. This framework has practical and theoretical implications for managing retention and recruitment in clubs. Limitations and delimitations of this thesis lead to recommendations for further research. As in previous chapters, Paul's critical thinking approach (Moseley et al., 2005) is evident in the examination of similarities and differences between the studies, comparison of theory with practice and the exploration of contradictions and implications.

### **9.1 Connecting the studies**

#### **9.1.1 Comparison of club membership studies**

The two case clubs provide an interesting comparison (Table 84). The cases differ by sport (one golf and one bowls), club size, management of activity, nature of the research and types of action. Both clubs achieved an increase in membership. In the golf club, the increase occurred within the action research process and was sustained for at least one season. In the bowling club, rapid growth occurred immediately prior to the study but was

short-lived. The golf club addressed ‘irritations’ within the club and altered membership categories. As a larger golf club, the club manager had oversight of the activity. The bowling club implemented an intense programme of regeneration. As is typical for bowling clubs, the board made decisions and implemented the activity.

Waddell et al. (2015) identified three types of change in action research: a) incremental change to improve performance, b) reform to understand and change the system and c) transformation to innovate and create previously unimagined possibilities. Incremental change maintains existing power structures and relationships, whereas transformation examines deep structures that sustain a system with consideration of new processes. The changes in the golf club sat between incremental change and reform. At the start of the study, the bowling club was in a phase of transformation and then settled into incremental change.

Table 84. Comparison of membership studies

	Club A	Club B
Type of club	Golf club	Bowls club
Size of club	Approximately 800 members (second largest in its area of Auckland)	Approximately 200 members (second largest in its area of Auckland)
Number of clubs in the area	Six golf clubs, nearest club eight kilometres away	15 bowling clubs. Nearest club five kilometres away. Three other clubs within 20 kilometres
Management of club activity	Club manager and two–three other employed staff plus volunteers	Board and other volunteers. Part-time paid greenkeeper and bar
Organisation of play	By gender and type of membership	By style and motivation for bowls Club night for all members
Research	Traditional action research	Action research principles. Limited link from research to action
Focus of study	Study focused on membership	Membership studied in a participation focused club
Membership data	From national membership system. Data enabled development of member profiles	From club spreadsheet. Limited formally recorded data about members
Data about events to trial the sport	Limited data from trial programmes	Attendance data from trial programmes, plus number and retention of new playing members
Type of actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New membership categories</li> <li>• Removal of discounts</li> <li>• Modification of benefits for some membership categories</li> <li>• Addressing irritations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New player attraction and support</li> <li>• Strong Business House Bowls and alternative forms of game</li> <li>• Improvement of clubhouse</li> </ul>
Implementation of actions	Predominantly by club management	Board with high level of input from by club members
Membership change	Membership increase of 8% maintained the following season	Playing membership increase of 21% followed by decline of 11% for each of the next two years

	Club A	Club B
Type of club	Golf club	Bowls club
New members	Predominantly existing players	Both new and existing players
Retention	Member loss both controllable and uncontrollable. Uncontrollable loss reduced	Known member loss uncontrollable Level of controllable loss unknown Membership loss increased
Next steps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cross club focus groups</li> <li>• Addressing club culture such as cross group (including gender) equity and integration</li> <li>• Attracting and supporting new players</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand retention/membership loss</li> <li>• Research with less engaged members</li> <li>• Better understanding of social and Business House Bowls</li> <li>• Collaborative projects with other organisations</li> </ul>

Comparison of the two cases identified criteria for future consideration: the potential of action research, key strengths of each study, differences between membership and participation focus, level of effort by club members and impact of the local environment. The club-specific nature of membership was strongly reinforced in the two cases. The issues in each club reflect *some* of those in the context and qualitative studies (Chapters 4 and 6). However, neither club faced *all* issues raised in these chapters.

The sustained membership increase in the golf club may demonstrate the potential for action research to address membership decline. However, a firm conclusion cannot be based on just one successful study. The traditional action research approach saw actions arise from a formal identification stage with direct input from club members. Of note, in the bowling club where a similar approach was used with new players, good retention in this group of members was achieved.

In the golf club case study, the research struck at the root cause of membership decline. However, if the action research does not uncover the root cause, it may not be as effective. The bowling case study was conducted with a club that took an approach advocated by many national associations, yet membership still declined.

The two clubs had different strengths in their research and activity. The membership data available to the golf club was a significant resource. In addition, the golf club sought to identify as conclusively as possible the extent to which discontinued membership was controllable. A key strength of the activity was the willingness to question previously held beliefs about the universally welcoming nature of the club, to acknowledge controllable membership loss and to take steps to increase member retention. The key strengths in the bowling club were the emphasis on moving outside the club to recruit new members, the development of new players and the long-term implementation of a seasonal participation programme. An additional strength lay in data

from participation programmes and the ability to track the retention of new playing members.

The multiple case study of two clubs allowed for a comparison between a membership focus and a participation focus. Sustained increase occurred when the club focused on membership in the action research. The focus on participation did not achieve the same result. Other differences between the two studies prevent any firm conclusions. The sustained increase in the golf club required limited effort by existing members. In contrast, the actions in the bowling club required significant effort from club volunteers. The bowling club also appeared to be more affected by community forces, with no local retirement village and three neighbouring clubs within close proximity. In contrast, the local environment had less impact on the golf club, which addressed only internal factors in the research study.

### **9.1.2 Wider environment**

This thesis supports the assertion that club membership can be a local problem influenced by larger systems. This portrayal differs from the emphasis on societal changes in literature and media. Emphasis on societal factors allows clubs to abdicate responsibility for membership decline.

It is important to identify the larger systems and their influence. The context chapter considered three levels: a) New Zealand society, b) sport participation in general and c) the national and regional environment for golf and lawn bowls. As shown in the context chapter, club membership trends were generally reported negatively in each of these systems (e.g., Bowls New Zealand, 2018; MacDonald, 2009; New Zealand Golf, 2018; Sport New Zealand, 2012). Explanations of declining membership invariably relate to societal changes beyond the control of an individual club (e.g., differing generational attitudes and declining relevance of the concept of membership). The support for such explanations is often tenuous. The percentage of the adult New Zealand population joining sport clubs has certainly declined slightly. With a trend apparently affecting many sports and clubs, societal changes are an easy explanation.

The three societal changes with most relevance to the membership of bowls and golf clubs are: a) the increasing number of sports and activities available in New Zealand, b) changes in employment legislation and c) the changing demography of New Zealand. Even with these three changes, cause-and-effect in relation to club membership cannot be demonstrated conclusively. These factors have now influenced New Zealand for some decades, and do not explain more recent membership decline. As well-established sports,

bowls and golf compete with an increasing number of other activities. The nature of weekend sport changed with modification of employment legislation in the early 1990s, the point at which membership of golf and bowls clubs began to decline. The player profile of these two sports no longer reflects New Zealand's current demography, which works both in favour, and against, golf and lawn bowls clubs. The ageing population of New Zealand would logically favour sports with older participation profiles. However, the dominance of European membership in bowls and golf is inconsistent with the increasingly multicultural trends in New Zealand.

Much has been written about the negative effect of societal forces on sport clubs. Clubs also need to consider external forces that artificially increase membership. Examples in Chapters 4 and 6 were problems at other clubs and licensing laws. Restrictive licensing laws limited availability of alcohol in some localities, resulting in the bowling clubs serving as member-only drinking establishments. Law changes resulted in declining membership unrelated to the sport as patrons could drink elsewhere. Problems at neighbouring clubs can create a temporary advantage for stronger clubs. If a neighbouring club solves its problems, a club with artificially high membership needs to prepare for changing circumstances.

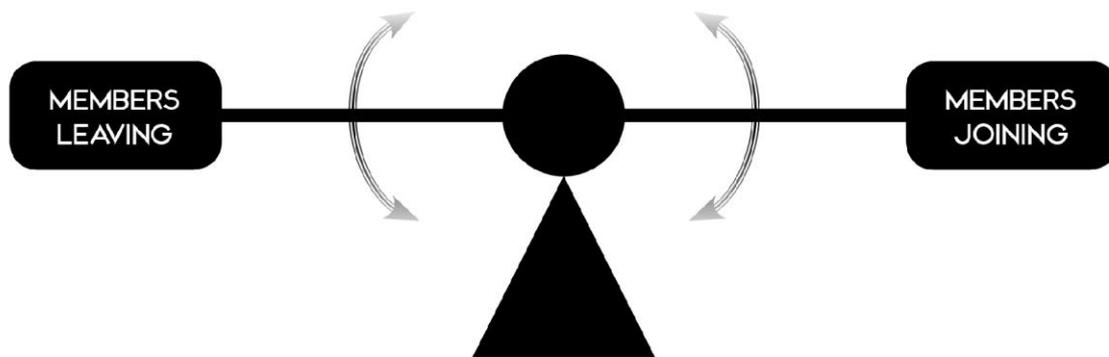
## **9.2 Diagnosing the health of club membership**

An analogy of a doctor and a patient parallels membership diagnosis of a club. A patient with chest pain would be concerned if a doctor based a diagnosis on a population study without first examining the patient. They would be even more concerned if the population study was based on media reports and anecdotal evidence. A population study might contain all possible reasons for a heart condition, only some of which will apply to any one patient. The remedy for each patient may be similar but needs to cater for individual circumstances. Factors of modern lifestyles may increase the risk of heart disease. Some people will be easier to treat than others. Ultimately, the individual takes responsibility for their own wellbeing.

### **9.2.1 The seesaw effect in club membership**

The first step in a club membership diagnosis is to compare the numbers of people joining and leaving the club. The metaphor of a balanced seesaw represents a club in equilibrium, with the same number of members joining and leaving (Figure 9). Growth or decline arises from an imbalance between the number of new members and the number of discontinued memberships. Growth occurs when new members outnumber discontinued

memberships. The reverse pattern results in declining membership. Therefore, the membership diagnosis for a club begins by comparing these numbers. It is insufficient to report only net change in the total number of members.



### Balance/Equilibrium

In balance: Number of new members joining = number of members leaving

Loss: Number leaving > number joining

Gain: Number leaving < number joining

Figure 9. The seesaw effect of club membership

The calculation of members leaving and joining was not as easy as expected in either case club, largely because data was retrieved retrospectively. Reconciliation of the membership analyses with the AGM total membership figures was challenging. Advanced planning would make the relevant data more accessible and reliable.

### 9.2.2 Understanding what is controllable

In addition to controllable and uncontrollable reasons (East et al., 2013), the qualitative study demonstrated a third category, especially in golf, of semi-controllable factors when nothing physically prevents people from joining a club, but higher priorities are so significant that the sport in its current form cannot compete. In golf, the semi-controllable factors were usually work and/or family and usually limited the playing of golf as well as membership. The semi-controllable factors mostly lead to temporary absence from golf, offer potential for re-recruitment and perhaps also the opportunity to investigate membership options tailored to people in these circumstances.

### 9.2.3 Balancing the seesaw

Visual representation of major influences on club membership provides a framework for balancing the membership seesaw (Figure 10). This explanatory framework synthesises factors influencing retention and recruitment as identified in the five studies of this thesis.

The framework provides a holistic view in the way advocated by Gummesson (2017) of searching for the core of the issue and focussing on decisions, actions and results. Taking a pragmatist approach, an explanatory framework is not necessarily proven but provides useful explanation to stakeholders. This framework has been discussed and makes sense to stakeholders from both case clubs, national associations and other participants.

Membership growth occurs with good retention and good recruitment (depicted by green arrows in Figure 10). Good retention reduces the number of discontinued memberships. Good recruitment increases the number of new members. The reverse of poor retention and poor recruitment (depicted by red arrows in Figure 10) results in membership decline. The aspects depicted in *bold italics* are factors over which the club has direct control. The other factors influence membership and need to be managed but are outside the control of a single club. No action occurs in isolation. A successful activity in one sector of the club might be offset by a problem elsewhere, especially within a club with segmented playing arrangements.

On the left of the diagram are factors working for and against retention. In the positive quadrant is effective engagement between members and the club. The bottom left quadrant are the factors that increase the number of discontinued members. Discontinued members can move to another club, play as non-members or leave the game. Poor retention and poor recruitment (bottom left and top right sections of Figure 10) may often reflect similar issues.

The right side of the diagram is recruitment. The top right are the factors negatively influencing new memberships such as negative factors in the club and negative factors in the sport. Positive forces (bottom right) enhance the prospect of new members, either new players, returning players, existing players from other clubs or non-member players. New members arise from introductions by current members, ongoing or one-off club initiatives, with good club management and the attraction of the sport as influencing factors.

The qualitative study identified four forces with a less direct but important influence on membership: “Inspiration”, “irritation”, national sport organisation initiatives and the club’s facilities and location. Inspiration and irritation are intangible forces in clubs. Irritation is negativity surrounding an issue or conflict between member groups. Alternatively, inspiration is a positive mood in the club. The initiatives of national and regional organisations most likely have a neutral effect, unless taken up and driven by clubs. Club facilities and location are fixed assets for a club, at least in the short-term.

Major modification may be impossible or may take time. The influence may be neutral, positive or negative, but is generally constant over time.

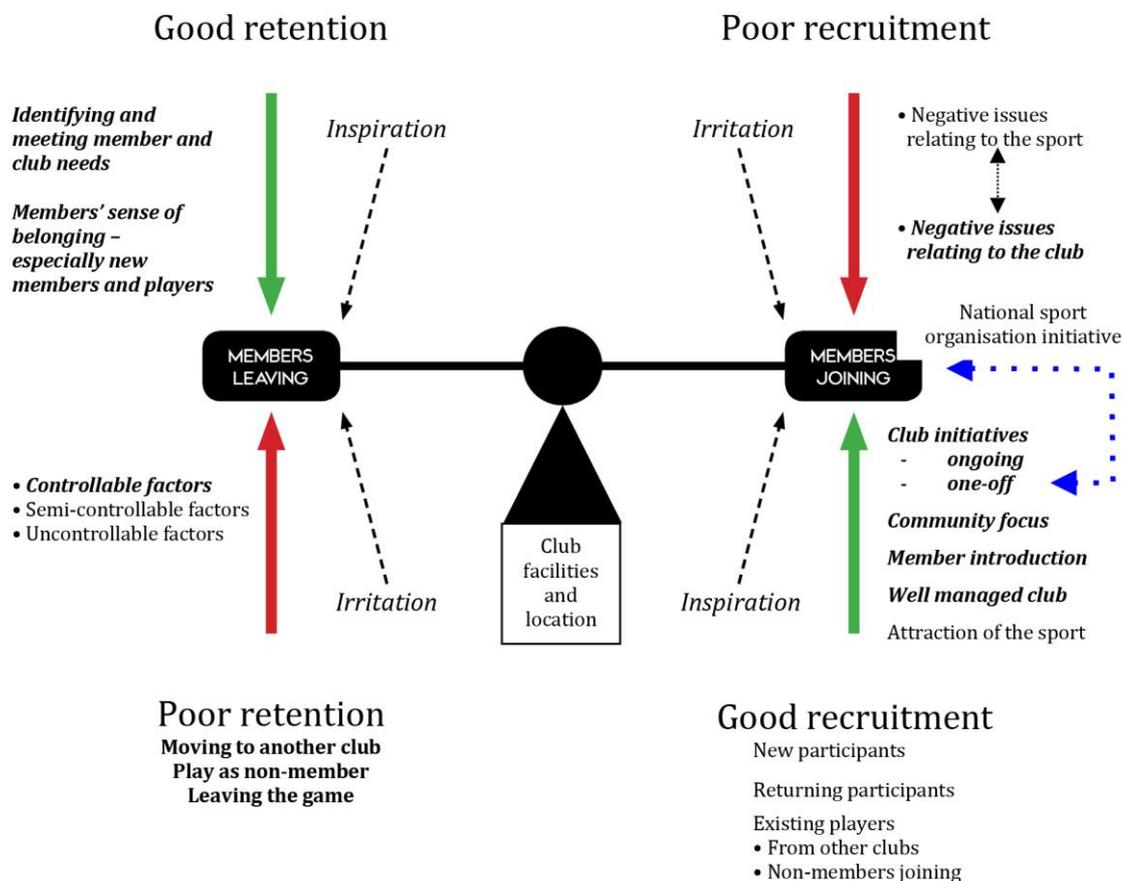


Figure 10. Framework for balancing the club membership seesaw

Each aspect of the figure is now discussed in relation to relevant literature and the results of the preceding chapters.

#### 9.2.4 Retention (Members continue membership)

Retention in this framework is based on East et al.'s (2013) concept of considering whether loss of members is controllable or uncontrollable. Good retention arises when discontinued memberships occur for only uncontrollable causes (i.e., reasons outside the control of the club). From the qualitative interviews, this is more likely when members' needs are met, and they feel a connection with the club, which is more likely to occur in an organisation embracing a marketing orientation (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002). Without an objective assessment, it is tempting to consider that most discontinued membership cannot be controlled. Uncontrollable causes were the focus of the club managers in qualitative interviews and initially in both case clubs. This expectation is understandable when the majority of formal resignations reflect illness, incapacity, moving to a different area or changing work, as was the case for both clubs.

In both case clubs a significant number of members discontinued membership without notifying the club, similar to the options of exit without voice and neglect in the framework of Dowding et al. (2000) and Hirschman (1970). Follow-up of discontinued members led to a surprise for the decision-makers about the level of irritation in the focal golf club. In the qualitative study, several participants expressed concerns not communicated to their club, but sufficient for the member to transfer to another club. In a large club, a discontinued member survey is possible as in the golf club. In a smaller club, it may be more appropriate to identify more personally why people have discontinued membership and record in a systematic way to move beyond anecdotal assumptions.

As shown in Chapters 4 and 6, media generally emphasise the negative aspects of golf and bowls and this can influence players' expectations. Critical incidents were also prevalent in the qualitative interviews and showed the power of one person to upset the experience of other players. Some incidents also showed the power of a counteraction, whereby other players redressed the negative experience.

### **9.2.5 Recruitment (New members)**

After identifying the typical annual uncontrollable loss, a club can ascertain the number of new members it needs each year to maintain membership. The importance of friends is evident in all studies in this thesis. Friends play a role in introducing new players to a sport, introducing new members to a club and creating bonding capital within a club. The larger a club, the greater the potential for member introduction. However, the club demographic profile is likely to remain unchanged. The need to broaden the demographic profile of both sports is evident. Jackson et al. (2015) note the importance of assessing the demographic profile of the local community and developing strategies to leverage those demographics. This was only mentioned by one golf club manager in the qualitative study, but will be increasingly important as the demographic profile of New Zealand changes, especially for sports with a strong New Zealand European profile.

Numerous club initiatives (both one-off and ongoing) are reported in the context chapter, qualitative chapter and the two cases. Success of an activity at one club does not guarantee success elsewhere, nor does success in one year ensure the same effect in other years (as shown in the bowling club). Attendees, regardless of whether they continue with the club, can provide important insights into the perception of the sport or club from an outsider's point of view. The community focus shown by the bowling club will need to

become more prevalent, especially for a club needing a high number of new members in comparison to the size of the club.

Golf and bowls provide an antithesis with regard to recruitment of new players. Bowling clubs readily provide supported opportunities to trialists such as provision of equipment and a safe environment to ‘have a go’. Few bowlers in the qualitative study reported difficulties in learning the game. Golfers on the other hand mostly reported anxiety or extreme difficulty with getting started. However, where golfers attended Ambrose tournaments and ladies’ clinics as examples, a transition to membership occurred. This effect was not so evident from most bowls participation programmes.

Good club management featured in many stories in the qualitative study. On its own it was insufficient to attract players, but it was an essential attribute for some participants. In addition, both sports had an allure that participants found hard to articulate but was evident when they told their stories about the game.

Hindering sport club recruitment is negative imagery. The image of golf and bowls is built from current and historic experiences at individual clubs, as well as from media activity. Thus, the negative image of a club impacts on the sport and vice versa. Image change is difficult for a sport when so many organisations impact on the image and extreme stereotypes are evident in the media portrayal of the sport.

### **9.3 Complexity of club membership**

Collectively, the five studies demonstrate the complexity of club membership and provide guidance to reduce this complexity. Declining membership fits the description of a complex problem without a “definitive solution ... because different stakeholders bring different perspectives to the problem” (Waddock et al., 2015, p. 1000). Using the complex problem typology of Alford and Head (2017), membership issues in many clubs sit towards the most complex end of a continuum—a problem that is not well understood, with information fragmented and a power imbalance amongst stakeholders who have conflicting interests. Alford and Head’s (2017) typology is based on two dimensions: a) the nature of the problem and solution and b) the people involved in problem-solving. Club membership is at the very complex end of the first dimension with both the cause of the problem and the solution unknown. Three factors influence the ability of key people to address problems: a) the extent to which relevant knowledge is fragmented amongst stakeholders or located with one person or group of people, b) whether the stakeholders have conflicting or similar interests and c) whether uniformity or an imbalance of power exists between stakeholders.

Fragmentation of information at both case clubs and in the qualitative interviews was evident from the number of perspectives within the sports and the number of sources required to obtain relevant data. The more participation formats offered in a club, the more fragmented the data. The golf study and the qualitative chapter demonstrated power imbalances and conflicting interests in golf clubs. For Club B, power imbalance and conflicting interests were less evident, possibly due the absence of focus groups as a research method.

An improvement in any of the above conditions reduces complexity. The processes in this thesis can enable a club to at least clarify the nature and cause of membership issues, as shown by the golf club. Advanced identification of diagnostic information may reduce the fragmentation of data. Complexity from power imbalances and the differing needs of stakeholder groups can possibly be understood, if not reduced, through the use of action research and open discussion about conflicting needs. This follows the relationship marketing approach advocated by Gummesson (2017) of addressing rather than fearing complexity.

Membership may be amongst the most complex issues facing clubs, especially when managed by volunteers who also co-ordinate other aspects of club life. The action research process, especially as applied by the focal golf club, can be replicated by other clubs to increase understanding and reduce the complexity of the problem. The framework in Figure 10 can guide volunteers in their analysis of membership and help highlight the factors within the club's control.

#### **9.4 Participation and membership focus**

A vaguely defined participation focus creates ambiguity when managing membership and adds to the complexity of membership problems. Participation is currently portrayed by some national associations and Club B as an alternative to a focus on membership. Sole emphasis on participation implies that membership is unimportant, especially if the link between participation and membership is not clearly articulated. However, an increase in membership appears to be an unstated expected flow-on effect from increased participation. Without members, a volunteer club would struggle to offer participation opportunities. The meaning of a participation focus needs to be clear.

Two intentions seem evident in a participation focus: a) increasing the number of players in a club or sport and/or b) emphasising the needs of players. A key rationale is to welcome rather than discourage players who do not belong to a club. For Sport New Zealand and national sport organisations, participation focus usually refers to increasing

the number of participants and/or frequency of participation. The alternative explanation (discussed at a board meeting in Club B) is more compatible with the constitutional member-focused objectives of clubs as “*Put[ting] the participant at the heart of everything we do – Look to what the community wants, not what we want to deliver*” (Appendix 5, November 2016).

The current participation focus is based on assumptions that non-member players are resistant to membership. This assumption does not acknowledge the range of non-member needs found in the qualitative study. It also does not acknowledge that the bowls participation programmes have created a new category for short-term members, described in the Bowls New Zealand annual reports as casual participants, yet received little recognition in Club B formal reports. It would seem that these participants are not regarded as members, even though constitutionally they have short-term member status and in Club B some proudly described themselves as Business House Bowls members.

Terminology used by players differs from that in the documents of sports organisations. No player in the qualitative or club studies used the expression “casual participant” to describe themselves or anyone else. The term “pay-for-play” was also rarely used, except by golf club managers. This also raises the question as to whether a *participation* focus would be better expressed as a *participant* focus. A similar differentiation can be made between *membership* focus and *member* focus. Constitutionally, some member focus is required in a member-owned club. Failure to acknowledge members ignores one of the vital special characteristics of a member-owned club. However, this does not mean that the club needs to push the concept of membership to the exclusion of other options.

## **9.5 Marketing for member-owned sport clubs**

Gallagher et al. (2012) note the importance of adapting marketing theory to specific contexts. A key adaptation for member-owned clubs arises from the difference between members and customers, in particular the role of members in providing the product and implementing the club strategy. An underlying assumption of marketing theory is that marketers and customers are different people. The involvement of members in delivering of the experience goes beyond the concept of co-creation which still implies different people in each role. Even when focusing on small sport clubs, Gallagher et al. (2012) discuss volunteer management as if someone other than a volunteer undertakes this role. With the overlapping roles of marketers and members, marketing theory needs to be

readily understood by volunteers and preferably all members, especially as the marketing orientation requires integration of an organisation toward goals.

The strategic marketing process reflects the processes advocated by national sport organisations and Sotiriadou's (2013) sport development planning model. The action research cycles of identification, action and evaluation follow a similar pattern and express this strategic process in a manner readily understood by both clubs. Club B showed with its new player programme, that a club can successfully implement small scale action research without an external researcher, although the inclusion of an external person may be beneficial with complex issues such as membership. In the identification stage, the framework for balancing the membership seesaw can be used to address Sotiriadou's question, "What are our sport development processes?". The framework incorporates the attraction and retention processes of Sotiriadou's (2013) model. The third process of nurturing athletes to achieve excellence will also be addressed, if a club has players in this category and is focused on the needs of all player groups.

### **9.5.1 Marketing orientation**

The theory of marketing orientation is not well-operationalised even in the parent discipline of marketing, especially for not-for-profit organisations (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002). A marketing orientation focuses on achieving goals through long-term identification and meeting of customer needs and integrating all functions in the organisation to meet those needs (Peterson, 1989; Shank & Lyberger, 2015). The first issue is to restate the concept in language that reflects the special character of a member-owned club such as in Figure 11. Three aspects of this restatement are particularly noteworthy: a) the nature of the goals, b) inclusion of potential members and c) the nature of integration in a club.

Figure 11. Restatement of the marketing orientation for a member-owned club

The needs of members and potential members are at the heart of club activity, with all sectors of the club focused on identifying and meeting these needs in a sustainable way and also achieving any other short-term or long-term goal/s of the club.

For a member-owned club, meeting members' needs is not only a means of achieving goals but will invariably be a goal (and possibly the foremost goal). In a commercial organisation, the goals will be financial. In a club, the goals are more complex. They may be stated in the club constitution or derived from planning. Inclusion of all players can be

an additional goal of the club, as can game development, community development or elite performance.

The inclusion of potential members encourages a club to look beyond existing membership. This restatement encourages a club to consider the relationship, if any, between a participant and member focus. Participants can be potential members. The club can place members alongside or ahead of participants. Alternatively, participation can be the primary focus, in which case the term potential member in the restatement would be replaced with participant. Whatever the approach, a member-owned club needs to articulate any unspoken, inherent goals and cannot ignore members.

Integration is an issue in a club where playing arrangements create groups of members that are sufficiently autonomous to create several “clubs within a club”, each with its own cohesive culture. It may be unrealistic to expect these groups to co-operate in the integrated way of a commercial organisation. However, it is more realistic to expect each sector of the club to focus on club needs as well as their own needs.

### **9.5.2 Segmentation**

To meet the needs of members it is important to understand the range of differing needs. This is the purpose of segmentation. Segments of golfers and bowlers were readily observable in the qualitative studies and in both clubs. Each club used the concept of segmentation in different ways, although neither club actually used the term “segmentation”. In the golf club, the type of membership (9 vs 18-hole and gender) guided playing times and organisation. In the bowling club, recognition of differing playing needs was inherent in the delivery of several bowling formats. Empirically derived segmentation studies are available in both golf and bowls that can potentially guide club activity. These studies identify segments similar to those of the Australian Sport Commission: loyalists, socially engaged, sport-driven, apathetic clubbers (Australian Sport Commission, 2013). Use of a segmentation approach assumes a club is large enough to cater for different membership groups. Segmentation may be difficult to manage in a small club.

Segmentation of non-members is equally important, especially in a club with a participation focus. A true participant focus within a marketing orientation would aim to understand the needs of non-member participants who have a wide range of reasons for their preferred playing option. From the qualitative and golf club studies, many players moved in and out of membership in golf, with non-membership time prevalent in the early stages of learning the game, mid-life when playing infrequently and later in life when

playing less frequently or less competitively. These players demonstrate characteristics of the non-member segments receptive to membership from the study of the Australian Sport Commission (2013). Membership opportunities may exist within this group. The golf club in this thesis converted less frequent players to membership by introducing 9-hole membership for men.

### **9.5.3 Customer loss theory**

The concept of controllable and uncontrollable loss (East et al., 2012) proved the most useful aspect of customer retention theory. It was readily understood by members of both clubs and reminded club management of their potential role in membership management. A key issue in operationalising the theory is the extent to which member loss is controlled by the board or the club as a whole. In the qualitative study, critical incidents between members resulted in people leaving a club, often without the knowledge of the board who may have limited ability to control the behaviour of members. Much of the enjoyment of a sport arises from the company of people with whom a member plays. As identified in the case clubs and qualitative study, many strong relationships were between members, rather than between members and the club management. The club as an entity needs to have a process for reducing controllable member loss. While a club committee may not be able to control the behaviour of members, it can implement processes to mitigate critical incidents.

## **9.6 Contributions of this thesis**

As action research, this thesis was designed to contribute to knowledge and to offer workable, practical solutions.

### **9.6.1 Contributions to knowledge**

The contribution to knowledge is four-fold as shown in Table 85. The process for two of these contributions was abductive (developed and evaluated in this thesis). The concept of the seesaw effect in club membership (Figure 9) was developed with the golf club and proved useful for the bowling club in identifying key dynamics in club membership. Similarly, the identification of controllable and uncontrollable reasons for discontinued membership developed from literature proved helpful to the golf club.

Table 85. Contribution to knowledge from this thesis

Contribution	Nature of contribution
a) Application of the concept of controllable and uncontrollable factors to discontinued golf and bowls club membership, with the identification of a third category of semi-controllable factors (Section 9.2.2)	Application and extension of theory to member-owned clubs  Concept of temporary absence from a sport and the need to include re-engagement, in addition to recruitment and retention
b) The seesaw effect in club membership (Section 9.2.1)	New articulation of an overlooked key principle (Figure 9)
c) The framework for balancing the membership seesaw framework (Section 9.2.3)	New framework (Figure 10)
d) Restatement of the marketing orientation for a member-owned sport club (Section 9.5.1)	Adaption of theory to member-owned sport clubs (Figure 11)

Two contributions (Items b and c in Table 86) have been developed over the course of this thesis but need further research. The framework for balancing the membership seesaw (Figure 10) currently has value as an explanatory framework, however, its use as a diagnostic tool has not yet been trialled. Similarly, the restatement of the marketing orientation for a member-owned club was not evident until the end of the research process. Its value in guiding discussion at the beginning of a process needs evaluation. Such a discussion may potentially enhance understanding within a club of a marketing, rather than selling orientation, and clarify the meaning of a participation/participant focus.

In addition, the qualitative study provides an increased understanding of player behaviour within golf and bowls. It demonstrates the limited application of a theoretical cognitive decision-making process to venue/club selection. The study emphasises the importance of friends, the wide-ranging experiences of players, passion for these sports, difficulties experienced in playing golf and bowls, and the potentially conflicting needs of player segments. For golf, a lifecycle has been identified, along with understanding of the impact of age on first experience of playing golf.

These contributions to knowledge have been framed from and for club members. It is important that these concepts and frameworks are part of the mindset of club members. When club members embraced the mindset of a marketing orientation for a member-owned club, they were more likely to embrace practical outcomes to improve the membership of their club.

### 9.6.2 Practical outcomes

This thesis demonstrates the complexity of membership and helps to explain why such issues have plagued sport decision-makers for so long. The qualitative study provides a resource for national associations and clubs. A summary of the study and/or sections of

the study can be used by national associations and clubs in presentations to highlight positive and challenging experiences that players can face. The passion for these sports is easily summarised, whereas discussion about challenges is more time-consuming. Key issues relate to equity, inclusiveness and the difficulty for players starting the sport alone.

The workable solutions from this thesis take two forms: a) a process for future use by clubs and b) specific initiatives relevant to clubs in similar circumstances to the case clubs. The process used in the two case clubs not only provided practical solutions, but enhanced understanding of the membership issues in each club. A synthesis of the strengths in the information process from both clubs is shown in Table 86 as a suggested starting point for the investigation stage of a future study with other clubs.

Table 86 also provides a basis for club membership action. Even if the actions are not completely successful, improved understanding of membership is likely and may reduce the complexity of issues in that club. A club will be able to identify which of the many possible issues are relevant to that club. Focus on the local situation reduces the distraction from extraneous national information.

Table 86. Potential identification stage for future studies within a club

Source & purpose of information	Specific information to be gained
Membership data analysis: Overall and club retention and recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Total membership numbers for as many years as available</li> <li>• Analysis of categories of membership</li> <li>• Number of new members and discontinued members each year</li> <li>• If possible, profile of discontinued and new members</li> </ul>
Existing member feedback: Focus groups within the club using questions similar to Club A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best aspects and concerns about the club</li> <li>• How the club can and does recruit and retain members</li> <li>• Suggestions for the club</li> </ul>
Exit feedback from discontinued members: Online survey of discontinued members (in a small club consider gaining information more personally and systematically record)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons no longer a member</li> <li>• Best aspects of the club</li> <li>• Suggestions for improvement</li> <li>• Whether these suggestions would have encouraged the player to stay with the club</li> </ul>
<u>New member options:</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
New member feedback: Online survey of new members (in a small club consider gaining information more personally and systematically record)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reasons for joining</li> <li>• How the player came to the club</li> <li>• Best aspects of the club</li> <li>• Suggestions for improvement</li> </ul>
New players meeting similar to Club B: Identify ideal club support for new players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What could the club do to assist new players to settle in and make the most of what the club offered.</li> </ul>
Membership data analysis: Retention of new players/members specifically (and any other category of player that the board may be concerned about)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of new players/members still with the club after two–three years</li> </ul>
Progress from participation to membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of people at participation events</li> <li>• How many become regular players and/or members</li> </ul>

Information in Table 86 requires a concerted effort to obtain from multiple sources. The information addresses both statistical and qualitative information about membership from existing members, discontinued members and new members. A club committee can look through this list and identify how easily the information in this table can be gathered and which aspects of greatest interest.

The first item goes beyond the norm of reporting the total number of members. It is vitally important to understand the number of new members joining and the number of members leaving. A club with apparently stable membership may in fact be losing a considerable number of members each year, which may go unnoticed if new members are joining to take their place.

Having established the level of membership discontinuation, a club needs to understand the extent to which this discontinuation is controllable. Depending on the

information in the membership database, indications may be gained from a profile of lost and new members. In particular the information most useful to Club A and B were category of membership and length of membership. Without a full understanding of the members being lost, it is hard to identify the cause of the loss, which aspects of the club are working well and where the most at-risk members might be. A certain level of discontinuation is inevitable for uncontrollable reasons such as people moving away from the area.

Focus groups with existing members give a sense of ownership of membership issues. As in Club A, the groups can be organised in conjunction with playing times and so not require a special visit to the club and can be kept short and focussed on a few questions about the best aspects of the club, concerns, perception of recruitment and retention and suggestions.

An online survey of discontinued members is vital to understand fully whether any of the discontinued membership is controllable. Data collected when people formally resign is helpful but in all likelihood will reflect the people leaving because of mobility or health. An anonymous discontinued member survey is more likely to show any key issues. If the club is small, it may be possible to consider a more personal data collection method. However it is important to ensure that discontinued members can be honest.

Three options for new member data can assist in retention of new members: a) new member survey or meeting, b) statistics about the number of new people still with the club two or three years after joining and c) statistics about the number of people who attend participation events and continue onto membership. A new member survey has two purposes: to improve recruitment processes and to ensure that once recruited, new members receive support they need, based on *their own perspective* of needs rather than solely on *what experienced players may think the new player needs*. Statistical information about progression into the second or third year and progression from participation events can indicate how well the club is catering to new players. A club does need to bear in mind that low progression from participation to membership may be a function of a person identifying that a sport is not for them, sport sampling or a desire to play as non-member maybe infrequently. Nevertheless in these circumstances it would be helpful to know more about low transition. Such a mechanism was not evident in either of the case club studies.

The successful initiatives in this thesis were development of new membership categories, modification of benefits for membership categories, removal of discounting, addressing specific irritations amongst members, attraction and support of new players

and promotion of alternative forms of the sport. The short-term membership concept already developed by Bowls New Zealand was also shown to be highly successful in terms of the increasing the number of bowls players and connecting players to a club.

## 9.7 Quality in the action research process

The overall quality of this research project can be assessed against Bradbury's (2015) criteria, the first four of which are specific to action research (Table 87) and the good story criterion of Coghlan and Brannick (2014).

Table 87. Quality criteria as applied in this thesis

Criteria	Description
Partnership and participation	Participative values with two clubs Participative values with two national organisations provided additional discussion and introductions which enabled the broader studies
Contribution to action research theory and practice	Sport management knowledge – frameworks for understanding membership, application of marketing principles to membership issues and processes for further club research Action research practice – the process of large-scale action research – studies of context plus club studies
Actionability	Strong throughout study with the golf club, with actions leading to increased membership Future actions evident in the bowling club study Future actions for other clubs arose from thesis
Reflexivity	Structured process for reflexivity based on established models Position of the researcher identified at the start and conclusion of thesis
Significance	Relevance beyond the immediate context – improved processes for clubs and contribution to theory
Articulation of objectives	Objectives stated in Chapter 1 and restated at later stages of thesis
Appropriate methods and process	Methods clearly articulated in each study

Adapted from Bradbury (2015, p. 8).

A good story is an undefined quality criterion of Coghlan and Brannick (2014) for action research. This criterion is hard to apply rigorously. Given the participatory nature of action research, it is unlikely that a researcher alone, can judge whether the story is good. With academic and participant audiences, the story needs to be relevant to both communities. In this thesis, stories were told at academic conferences, within participant groups and to other people from outside the thesis process. On every occasion, engaging and often extended dialogue ensued. The story certainly created interest.

## **9.8 Limitations and delimitations of thesis**

Key delimitations from the outset were coverage from the club perspective within the two sports. Outsider perspectives were only obtained from media and pre-membership experiences of club members. In addition to the delimitations, important limitations arose from size and location of the two case clubs.

Both clubs are larger than others in their sporting code. As a consequence, both clubs could use a segmentation approach that may not be viable for a smaller club. Both cases are urban clubs in Auckland. The immediate suburb surrounding the focal golf club has a population that is 87% New Zealand European, a profile now rare in New Zealand. However, neighbouring suburbs are similar to the surrounding suburb of the bowling club which is more diverse but still predominantly New Zealand European (76% New Zealand European and 21% Asian). Neither club explored in this thesis seemed to focus on the demography of their local community. Demographic profiles are not uniform across communities, therefore each club needs to identify the relevance of its changing community.

The statistical analysis of national golf membership found an absence of handicap, being younger and limited friends in the handicap system as predictors of discontinued membership. These predictors were supported by results from other studies in the thesis, in particular the difficulties for new golf players and the lifecycle of players. This raises the question about why this result was so difficult to use in a club strategy. A limitation of the logistic regression study was the absence of membership length as a variable. Based on literature and the first analyses of the golf club, this limitation was certainly significant. The principle of pre-identifying potential discontinuing members is sound. The attempt to predict from a national sample to a club may have reduced the usefulness of this study, and it may be more useful to limit the sample to new members from a particular year or to a more discrete geographic area.

## **9.9 Future research**

The thesis question “How can a member-owned, non-equity golf or lawn bowls club increase adult membership?” was investigated. For future research, a marketing orientation would rephrase the question in a manner such as “How can *this* club identify and meet the needs of members and potential members in a sustainable way and achieve other long-term goal/s of the club?”. If the process begins with a discussion about the restated marketing orientation and the framework for balancing the seesaw, the research

question can be tailored to the individual club and incorporate a clearly defined participant focus if required.

Given the club-specific nature of the issue, the possibilities for further research are endless. Future action research is planned with the case or neighbouring clubs and additional clubs. Further studies may start to build a pattern of action appropriate to a range of situations, such as smaller clubs with fewer resources and other geographic areas districts with different ethnic profiles or smaller communities. Where multiple bowling clubs exist in neighbouring suburbs, a collaboration between clubs may result in a co-operative, rather than competitive approach to membership.

Research outside the club structure is important to investigate fully the connection between participation and membership, recruitment of people with no prior club experience or recruitment of interested people deterred from the sport for some reason. Broader issues also need investigation such as the welcome of new players and lack of demographic diversity in bowls and golf. The attraction of new players is particularly relevant to golf. However, even in bowls, a degree of resilience is needed if the initial social environment is not comfortable for a new player, especially if attempting the sport on their own. Both sports have an ethnic profile that differs from the increasingly multicultural New Zealand population. Golf also has the additional challenge of a gender imbalance. It is not clear whether this lack of diversity in golf is one issue or two separate issues (gender and ethnicity). Both issues need further investigation, especially with potential players outside the golf and lawn bowls communities.

### **9.10 Position of the researcher at conclusion of thesis**

At the conclusion of this thesis, my commitment to research about club membership has not diminished, and if anything, has strengthened. At the outset in the pre-assumptions interview, I expected to identify some form of solution and I did not expect the issue to be straightforward. However, I did not envisage the problem would be so complex and perceived in so many different ways or as club specific. In Chapter 1, I commented from a theoretical perspective about the benefits and sense of community emanating from clubs. Throughout my contact with participants in the studies, I saw rewarding club experiences first-hand. The passion of the participants in my studies was strong. I also saw the negative effects that stress and critical incidents have on club and board members, in particular. The positive club experiences mostly outweigh the negative ones, and thus clubs form amazing communities.

As a pragmatist, my interest in the interrelationship of theory and practice is strong. Currently, marketing theory seems inadequate to assist not-for-profit, member-owned organisations. Not-for-profit accounting principles differ from the profit counterpart. Yet in marketing we seem to be adapting commercial marketing to member-owned clubs. Perhaps the marketing theory for such organisations needs to be more clearly differentiated, as in accounting. I raised the issue about the overlap between member and marketer in the literature review but did not expect the implications of this overlap to be so wide-ranging theoretically or in practice.

From this thesis I have learnt powerful lessons about generalisations and assumptions, which can have a dangerous effect in creating a mindset of an insoluble problem. I will have no hesitation in taking this message into future discussions about club membership. I believe that the process and framework, formed from the collective wisdom of many people, can reduce complexity and counter unfounded assumptions. This process and framework were created “by clubs for clubs” and is manageable for clubs, who choose to use it (with those last five words being crucial).

## **9.11 Conclusion**

Achieving growth in club membership is complex, but given this action research study, insights into mitigating the ongoing problem of retention and acquisition of new members have been identified. Club membership is a local issue influenced by factors in the wider environment, with the effect of the environment varying considerably from one club to another. Each golf and lawn bowls club needs to take responsibility for the health of its membership. It is important to recognise the overlooked truism that membership increases when the number of new members is higher than the number of members leaving the club. To diagnose the health of their membership, every club needs to understand its retention and recruitment. Key considerations are the extent to which member loss is controllable and how welcoming the club is to new players (as well as new members).

This thesis showed how the use of an action research process enabled sustained membership increase in one club. It required honesty in addressing issues raised by club members. Even though the study with a second club did not result in a sustained membership increase, an understanding of factors affecting membership was greatly enhanced. A framework for balancing the membership seesaw can help clubs understand their membership and guide development of member initiatives. In this thesis, the successful initiatives were development of new membership categories, removal of discounting, modification of benefits for membership categories, addressing specific

irritations amongst members, attraction and support of new players and promotion of alternative forms of the sport. This thesis also demonstrates the importance of understanding and articulating the role of participant focus in a club and how this relates to membership.

Declining club membership is a complex problem with no magic solution. In many clubs, the membership drivers are not well understood, with information fragmented and a power imbalance amongst stakeholders with conflicting interests. The wider environment for a club can be challenging. The internal environment can provide just as great a challenge, a challenge that may be tempered if all sectors of the club keep the needs of members and potential members at the heart of club activity. The passion of golfers and bowlers is capable of embracing this challenge.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix 1: Ethics approval**

#### Interviews:

Ethics approval was received on 9 December 2013. An amendment to increase the number of interviews was approved on 5 January 2015.

#### Focus Groups:

Ethics approval to conduct focus groups in bowling clubs was received in March 2014. An amendment was approved to undertake focus groups in golf clubs in January 2015.

On the following pages are:

#### Interviews:

- The letter approving the amended method (Page 294)
- The Information Sheet for participants (Page 295)

#### Focus Groups:

- The letter approving the amended method (Page 297)
- The Information Sheet for participants (Page 298)



A U T E C  
S E C R E T A R I A T

5 January 2015

Geoff Dickson  
Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Geoff

Ethics Application: **13/357 Understanding sport membership and participation - where and how people play.**

Thank you for your request for approval of an amendment to your ethics application.

I have approved the minor amendment to your ethics application allowing further interviews up to a maximum of 45.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC):

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 18 December 2016;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 18 December 2016 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor  
Executive Secretary

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: [katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz](mailto:katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz), Michael Naylor

# Participant Information Sheet



## Date Information Sheet Produced:

1<sup>st</sup> December 2013

## Project Title

Understanding sport membership and participation – where and how people play

## An Invitation

Hello, my name is Katharine Hoskyn. I am a PhD student in Sport and Recreation at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), with a long-term interest in participation in sport.

I am inviting you to participate in a research project on where and how people play sport, in particular golf and lawn bowls with a focus on the following:

- How you play sport (for example, how many sports, which sports, where, when, how often, how long you have been playing, who you play with, payment arrangements for playing, whether you belong to a club)
- How people decide where and how to play a sport initially and after playing the sport for a while
- Factors relating to participation such as what influences decision-making and membership
- Suggestions for sports clubs

Participation in the project will involve a 30 - 60 minute interview with me. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time.

## What is the purpose of this research?

This research is for my doctoral studies with School of Sport and Recreation at Auckland University of Technology and I hope to publish the findings at conferences and in academic and professional journals.

The research will enable Golf New Zealand and Lawn Bowls New Zealand to understand the needs of players better in order to provide playing and membership arrangements and options.

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

You have been invited to participate in this research as you play either golf or lawn bowls. You have either been given an invitation when visiting sports facilities, or your name came from another participant, or from a player or membership list from golf or lawn bowls organisations.

## What will happen in this research?

If you agree to take part, please contact Katharine Hoskyn to make arrangements for the interview. You will be asked to sign a participation consent form and take part in an interview at a time and place that is convenient to you. The questions will focus on the topics described above. The interview will be recorded via audiotape and note-taking. This will be analysed by common themes. Nothing will be linked or related to a specific sport facility, club or organisation.

This version was last edited on 23 April 2013

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

No discomfort or risk is expected. However participants may feel uncomfortable discussing some aspects of their sporting activity or sport organisations.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

You don't need to answer any questions or take part in any discussion that you don't wish to and are free to withdraw at any time. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript of discussions so that you can clarify, amend or withdraw comments within two weeks of receiving the transcript.

### **What are the benefits?**

This research improves the state of knowledge which benefits participants, researchers, sports organisations and the wider sporting community by providing an improved understanding of the needs of sports players. More specifically the findings will be discussed with golf and lawn bowls organisations.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

No data will be used in the write-up of the results that identifies any person, club, organisation or sport. Your privacy will be fully protected. The final published proceedings will identify participants only by a two-letter code. Similarly no identifying data will be stored with the transcripts of interviews, which are kept for six years.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There are no monetary costs involved in participating in this research.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You are requested to consider and respond to this invitation within the next two weeks.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree to participate please return the attached consent form. Please also advise me of the times that you are available for an interview and the place that you would prefer the interview to take place.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

It is anticipated that a summary of the findings will be available within 12 months of completion of the project and copies of this will be made available if requested.

### **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, Geoff Dickson, [geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz) 921-9999 ext 7851.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

#### ***Researcher Contact Details:***

Katharine Hoskyn [katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz](mailto:katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz) 921-9999 ext 5349

#### ***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Geoff Dickson, [geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz) 921-9999 ext 7851

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2013, AUTEK Reference number 13/357.



A U T E C  
S E C R E T A R I A T

5 January 2015

Geoff Dickson

Faculty of Health and Environmental Sciences

Dear Geoff

Re: Ethics Application: **14/84 Understanding sport participation and membership - focus groups in lawn bowls.**

Thank you for your request for approval of an amendment to your ethics application.

I have approved the minor amendment to your ethics application allowing expansion of the inclusion criteria which will now include two golf clubs.

I remind you that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC):

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 24 September 2017;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 24 September 2017 or on completion of the project.

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to obtain this.

To enable us to provide you with efficient service, please use the application number and study title in all correspondence with us. If you have any enquiries about this application, or anything else, please do contact us at [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz).

All the very best with your research,

Kate O'Connor

Executive Secretary

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee**

Cc: [katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz](mailto:katharine.hoskyn@aut.ac.nz)

# Participant Information Sheet



## Date Information Sheet Produced:

24<sup>th</sup> March 2014

## Project Title

Understanding sport membership and participation – focus groups with lawn bowls and golf clubs

## An Invitation

Hello, my name is Katharine Hoskyn. I am a PhD student in Sport and Recreation at Auckland University of Technology (AUT), with a long-term interest in participation in sport.

I am inviting you to participate in a research project on playing lawn bowls or golf at your club, with a focus on the following:

- The best thing about playing golf or bowls at your club
- How your club currently attracts new players and members
- How your club encourages players to continue their membership
- Other suggestions/changes could benefit the club and its members, if you could change one thing about the club, what would it be? what is it about the club that you would most want to keep as it is?

Participation in the project will involve attending a focus group discussion at the club of approximately 30 minutes. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time.

## What is the purpose of this research?

This research for my doctoral studies with School of Sport and Recreation at Auckland University of Technology and I hope to publish the findings at conferences and in academic and professional journals.

The research will enable your club, Bowls New Zealand or New Zealand Golf to understand the needs of players better in order to provide playing and membership arrangements and options.

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

You have been invited to participate in this research because you play golf or lawn bowls at an Auckland club that is working with Katharine to try to identify ways of attracting and keeping club members.

## What will happen in this research?

If you agree to take part, please contact Katharine Hoskyn. She will give you the details of the time and place for the focus groups being held at your club. You will be asked to sign a participation consent form. The questions will focus on the topics described above. The discussion will be recorded via audiotape and note-taking. This will be analysed by common themes. Nothing will be linked or related to you, a specific sport facility, club or organisation.

### **What are the discomforts and risks?**

No discomfort or risk is expected. However participants may feel uncomfortable discussing some aspects of their club activity or organisations. Other participants may have different views.

### **How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?**

You don't need to answer any questions or take part in any discussion that you don't wish to and are free to withdraw at any time. You will have the opportunity to review the summary of discussions so that you can clarify, amend or withdraw comments within two weeks of receiving the summary.

### **What are the benefits?**

This research improves the state of knowledge which benefits participants, researchers, sports organisations and the wider sporting community by providing an improved understanding of the needs of sports players. More specifically the findings will be discussed with your club and national organisations.

### **How will my privacy be protected?**

No identifying data will be used in the write-up of the results and your privacy will be fully protected. The final published proceedings will identify clubs and participants only by a two-letter code. Similarly no identifying data will be stored with the transcripts of discussion, which are kept for six years.

### **What are the costs of participating in this research?**

There are no monetary costs involved in participating in this research.

### **What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?**

You are requested to consider and respond to this invitation within the next two weeks.

### **How do I agree to participate in this research?**

If you agree to participate please return the attached consent form.

### **Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?**

It is anticipated that a summary of the findings will be available within 12 months of completion of the project and copies of this will be made available if requested.

### **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, Geoff Dickson, [geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz) 921-9999 ext 7851.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, [ethics@aut.ac.nz](mailto:ethics@aut.ac.nz), 921 9999 ext 6038.

#### ***Researcher Contact Details:***

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#### ***Project Supervisor Contact Details:***

Geoff Dickson, [geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz](mailto:geoff.dickson@aut.ac.nz) 921-9999 ext 7851

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 5 January 2015, AUTEK Reference number 14/84.

## **Appendix 2: Media log**

The comments about media portrayal of golf and bowls in Section 4.5 are based on the information in this appendix. It gives examples of coverage about golf and bowls in:

General literature and popular press:

- a) Membership-specific articles and books (about the general state of membership)
- b) Popular books about golf

Articles about membership in magazines for golf

Newspaper articles

Television, movies and associated publications

Online resources for clubs

## General literature and popular press

### Membership specific articles and books

The following articles had high profile in not-for-profit communications during the time of this thesis. Sladek's (2011) book was cited by Moore (2013) who gave a number of seminars for not-for-profit organisations, including Bowls New Zealand. Moore was then cited by Hayes Knight(2014).

This sequence of publication showed how an idea that membership is dead increased in currency. The president of the Manakau Golf Club stated in an article about the sale of golf club land "The traditional membership model is broken" (Gibson, 2013).

MacDonald (2018) focussed on a range of clubs that are closing, including bowling clubs closing at a rate of approximately 10 per year. She cites specific bowling clubs. The article includes a positive response from the CEO of Bowls New Zealand about the importance of bowling clubs to the community. The rest of the article includes information about the difficulties for clubs.

During the thesis the Amateur Sport Association was formed and undertook its first survey of sport clubs, which highlighted difficulties faced by clubs (Tunncliffe, 2018).

Hayes Knight. (2014, 13 October). *Is membership dead or dying?* Retrieved from <https://www.hayesknight.co.nz/is-membership-dead-or-dying/>

Moore, B. (2013). Membership is dead. Retrieved from [www.smsonline.net.au/pages/membership-is-dead.html](http://www.smsonline.net.au/pages/membership-is-dead.html)

Sladek, S. (2011). *The end of membership as we know it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Gibson, Anne. (2013, Jan 24). Homes to spring up on golf course when members leave. Three-sixty Capital Partners. Retrieved from <https://www.360capital.co.nz/homes-to-spring-up-on-golf-course-when-members-leave/>

MacDonald, N. (2018). Is the internet killing community clubs? Retrieved from <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/109146425/is-the-internet-killing-community-clubs>

Tunncliffe, B. (2018). *Survey shows sports clubs in fight for survival*. Retrieved from <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/sport/377882/survey-shows-sports-clubs-in-fight-for-survival>

## **Golf**

As can be seen from the titles of the following selection of books, popular authors have a tendency to mock golf. Only the life stories told by Kidd (2016) talk about the inspiration found from golf.

Alliss, P. (2008). *Golf: The cure for the grumpy old man*. London, England: Hodder and Stoughton

Hardwick, C. (2017). *Golf....The cruellest of games*. Gloucester, England: The Choir Press

Kidd, H. (2016). *My life in golf: Inspiring Kiwi stories*. Auckland, New Zealand: David Bateman Ltd.

Wodehouse, P.G. (1973). *The golf omnibus*. London, England: Barrie and Jenkins Ltd.

Tremain, G. (2011). *The trouble with golf*. Auckland, New Zealand: David Bateman Ltd.

## Articles about membership in magazines for golf

Magazines such as New Zealand Golf Magazine place a strong emphasis on providing information for the serious golfer. The magazines also include articles about the state of golf clubs and golf experience providers.

The following are examples of articles in golf magazines which show the progression from discussion about golf in boom time to concern about membership. However even in 1979, the occasional article questioned the traditions of club golf in changing times.

Between 2015 and 2018, 16 articles have appeared in New Zealand Golf Magazine alone, expressing concern about membership and the need for golf clubs to change. The articles appeared in 2015 (February, March, May, August, September, December); 2016 (February, April); 2017 (March, May, December); 2018 (March & April).

### Examples of articles about thriving golf industry

Where is club golf going? Comment from the editor. (1979). *New Zealand Golf Magazine*, 2

“There is a general feeling around golf these days that comes close to arrogance, a sense that business is so good, it could not turn bad.....business is so good. So good it is scary. What is more, it should get even better. Almost everyone at the meeting simply assumes that golf as a game and as an industry will double in the next decade. Golf construction is not keeping pace with growth.” Gary Stevenson, Vice-President of PGA Tour in *Golf Digest*, March 1989

Tee-time – Golf industry in New Zealand examined – growth of driving ranges as golf clubs close membership lists. (1994, November). *Southern Skies*.

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### Examples of articles about issues in the golf industry mostly since the turn of the century:

Antonini, J. (2011, 22 August). Grassroots golf: Tee it forward initiative gets off to a bumpy start. *Golf World*, 65(8), 11.

Richens, M. (2015, December 2015). Stuck in the dark ages. *New Zealand Golf Magazine*, 4.

Richens, M. (2017, April 2017). Golf, but not as we know it. *New Zealand Golf Magazine*, 26-28

Stuller, J., & Young, S. (2007). Until Golf Do Us Part. *NCGA Golf*, 27(4), 24–27.

## **Newspaper articles**

This section includes:

- A selection of articles for which key points have been itemised
- A further selection of newspaper articles for which the title gives a clear indication of the issues

Generally the articles focus on the negative aspects of golf or bowls, with positive content being a rare exception. Key issues during the time of this thesis were the closing of three bowls clubs in Auckland, the merging or relocation of golf clubs, declining membership and financial difficulties for clubs in both sport. Inherent in several articles was a suggestion of exclusivity of golf clubs and an unwillingness to change in both sport. High profile overseas clubs were in the media over the issue of admission of women to previously male-only golf clubs.

The most high-profile issue in Auckland were Auckland local body plans to reduce a public 18-hole golf facility to a 9-hole course, with the rest of the land used for housing.

The items in this appendix are examples only. A comprehensive media search was not undertaken.

Key points	Reference
Comparison of cricket in New Zealand and golf in United Kingdom and the snobbery in both.	Turner, B. (1994, 24 June). Upper-crust attitudes still rule UK's golf course. <i>The Independent</i> , p. 12.
Growth of gold club due to development at Wanaka – at a time when “golf membership across the country is at best static” <a href="https://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&amp;objectid=10362767">https://www.nzherald.co.nz/opinion/news/article.cfm?c_id=466&amp;objectid=10362767</a>	Williams, P. (2006, 8 January). Scene is set for Southern Lakes bonanza. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> .
Court action over the non-payment of golf club fees by a landowner of covenanted land. The covenant required the owner of land in a development to join the golf club. The judge upheld the right of the club to collect outstanding fees.	Fletcher, H. (2014, 23 July). Golf club cleared to collect fees. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , p. B3.
Membership decline and financial difficulties at The Grange. The club was looking for proposals to develop some land into housing and for upgrade of its facilities.	Gibson, A. (2014, 2 Sept). Fletcher among those vying for Grange land. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , p. B11.
A proposed merger of two Auckland golf clubs, The Grange and the Royal Auckland, with discussion about the way in which each club benefitted from the merger.	Gibson, A. (2014, 23 September). Two top golf clubs in merger deal. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , p. A16.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Golf is struggling in America, Europe, Australia, Britain but thriving in parts of Asia (with statistics for several countries)</li> <li>• History of golf</li> <li>• Too many courses in America</li> <li>• Golf does not suit pace of life today – 18-hole game takes too long</li> <li>• Game is getting hard to play with innovations in equipment</li> <li>• Impact of the economy on the sport</li> <li>• Game does not suit millennials</li> <li>• Golf is an old-fashioned game</li> </ul>	The Economist, 20 December 2014 <b>The future of golf – handicapped</b>
The opening of Tara Iti, an exclusive golf course that will be one of the best in the world. Membership will be by invitation only.	Gibson, A. (2015, 29 August). Million-dollar views for beachfront links. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , p. A7.
Profile of two local ambassadors for She Loves Golf. Nine (holes) and Wine Session at the local course for women Importance of changing perception about golf and making the game fun	Timaru Herald, 29 November 2016, Esther Ashby-Coventry. <b>Encouraging young women to play golf</b>
Comment about the land used by Pupuke Golf Course and how it could be a wonderful asset for the whole community rather than a small golfing community	The New Zealand Herald, 22 December 2016, Letter to the editor by Vince West
The proposal to divide Chamberlain Park, a course owned by Auckland Council is flawed. As one of Auckland's busiest courses with 50,00 rounds a year it attracts an ethnic diversity of people who enjoy that there is no dress code. The author was a public relations consultant who learnt to play at the course. The article was contributed to Dialogue, a section of the paper welcoming opinion pieces.	Senescall, G. (2016, 7 December). Chamberlain Park facing the cut. <i>New Zealand Herald</i> , p. A30.

Key points	Reference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The reporter espoused a theory that large chunks of vacant land used for golf courses could be used to remedy Auckland's housing crisis. An economist agreed that the Auckland Council should not own the current 14 publicly-owned golf courses which were a privilege for the rich. Counter arguments were put by an Auckland councillor and representative of New Zealand Golf. The accompanying article citing declining participation in golf from Sport New Zealand surveys.</li> </ul>	<p>Donnell, H. (2018, 22 June). Why Auckland needs to accept the objective truth, and ban all golf. <i>The Spin-Off TV</i>. Retrieved from <a href="https://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland/22-06-2018/why-auckland-needs-to-accept-the-objective-truth-and-ban-all-golf/">https://thespinoff.co.nz/auckland/22-06-2018/why-auckland-needs-to-accept-the-objective-truth-and-ban-all-golf/</a></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selling golf courses: Concern that golf courses eyed "for homes are the lungs of the city" and future generations will not understand the concept of open space. Concern about whether rugby fields will also be at risk.</li> <li>Heart of the community: Importance of Clarks Beach golf course and club to the local community. Concern that the council wants to "rip the heart out of the wonderful tight-know community" by using the land for housing</li> </ul>	<p>The New Zealand Herald, (2018,13 September). Two letters to the editor by Jan O Connor and Jenni Matthews. Page A24.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nine holes plenty: Even the golfing fraternity know there are too many golf courses. Club membership is declining because the game takes too long and club membership is expensive. All Auckland Council owned courses should be reconfigured to be 9-hole and people wanting 18 holes can go round the course twice.</li> </ul>	<p>Letter to the editor by Glen Stanton, G. (2018, 14 September). <i>The New Zealand Herald</i>, A28.</p>
<b>Examples of newspaper articles about bowling</b>	
<p>Facilities at a new retirement village, with the dominant photograph of a family in front of the bowling green</p>	<p>The Ultimate Retirement Lifestyle, (2015, November) <i>Elocal Papakura-Clevedon-Takanini-Karaka</i>, 2-3.</p>
<p>Criticism about the management of bowling handled</p>	<p>Boock, R. (2010, 31 January). Cracker-Jacks take wrong bias. <i>Sunday-Star Times</i>.</p>
<p>Response to the above criticism</p>	<p>Middleton, R. (2010, 7 February). Correcting bias. <i>Sunday-Star Times</i>.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rawhiti Bowling Club is closing due to falling membership</li> <li>Bowls New Zealand has reviewed the number of clubs and this review shows New Zealand has 100 clubs too many</li> <li>Carlton- Cornwall merger explained</li> <li>Initiative at Akoranga Golf Club to include bowls on their premises if funding obtained</li> </ul> <p><a href="https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/247935/bowls-nz-says-too-many-clubs">https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/247935/bowls-nz-says-too-many-clubs</a></p>	<p>Radio New Zealand. (2014). Bowls NZ says too many clubs. In M. Wilson (Ed.), <i>Checkpoint: Radio New Zealand</i>.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulties of sustaining club rooms</li> <li>Loss of identity in sport hubs</li> <li>Declining membership numbers and lack of volunteers</li> </ul>	<p>Simpson, H. (2016, 5 June). Last orders at the sports club, <i>Sunday-Star Times</i>,A5.</p>

Further media articles about bowling and golf with the same themes as above are:

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- Saulwick, J. (2016, 30 July ). Can the human and the golf course coexist? The debate rages. *Sydney Morning Herald*.
- Topping, A. (2017, March 14). Muirfield golf club to allow women for the first time. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2017/mar/14/muirfield-golf-club-to-allow-women-to-join-for-the-first-time>
- Whiley, A. (2016, July). Club boards must listen to their staff. *Pacific golfer*, 1.
- Wright, D. (2013, 30 July ). A day on the green. *Weekend Herald*, p. D4.

## Television and movies and associated publications

The following television programmes and movies were either repeated or played on New Zealand television during the undertaking of this thesis.

Golf clubs have been the setting for four highly-rated murder mysteries on television. In two programmes, extreme snobbery was displayed through the episode, of a kind that would have even been shown at only the most elite of golf clubs. Even though the New Zealand episode aimed to show golf as non-elite, it displayed the passion for golf and the protectiveness golf club personnel might show towards a golf club.

The movie Tommy's Honour, based on a book of that name, highlighted the prejudice against some sectors of the community held by the St Andrews Golf Club. The release of the movie was accompanied by articles such as Parker (2019).

Bowls was included in a comedy movie and comedy television programme, both of which mocked practices in bowling clubs.

Key points	Reference
On the Midsomer Golf Club, Whiteoaks, a member is killed with a golf club. During the investigation, hatred, gambling, violence, jealousy and extortion are discovered. Also revealed is a snobbish distinction between club members and villagers who use the course. Several very severe exclusionary practices are used by the golf club such as inviting prospective members to a formal dinner to make sure that they use the correct cutlery.	Midsommer Murders: DogLeg Murders (2009)
The tension is also paralleled between two detectives – one keen on golf and the other who definitely is not keen on the game.	
A 10-year-old boy is killed on a golf course. Twenty 20 years later, the team investigate but face obstruction from a snobbish golf club committee, who still ban women from their bar and attempt to protect the memory of a former member and army officer.	New Tricks, Good work rewarded, 2004
The golf course is merely the place where the body was discovered. No comments about golf club made.	Poirot, Murder on the Links (1996)
A morning round of golf for several members of the Brokenwood Golf Club is interrupted when a body is discovered in a bunker. The episode reveals tension in the golf club and the steps taken to protect the club – including murder.	Brokenwood Mysteries, Playing the Lie. (2014)
The Brokenwood episode creator was interviewed. "Starting from the basic terms in television, it's very scenic," he says. "They are beautiful places to shoot. People have a certain	Nealon, S. (2014, 10 October). Murder he wrote, <i>TV Guide</i> .

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passion for the game that a lot of people just don't understand and can't see the point of it. All sport when you look at it is kind of pointless but golf especially. Why do you try to hit a white ball 400 metres down a lawn into a small hole? It just makes no sense whatsoever but for many people it's an essential part of their life. In small communities the golf club is often a hub of social activity," says James.

"It throws up interesting people. It's a sport that you can portray easily because people spend a lot of time walking around and talking and sharing ideas....."

One of things with Brokenwood was that Prime really wanted it to be of everyday New Zealand and I think New Zealand is one of the only places on Earth where golf isn't an elitist sport. We have more golf courses per head of population than anywhere else in the world and you can play cheaply. It's a social experience so I think it has that kind of everyman factor."

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Movie depiction of the book with the prejudice demonstrated by the President of the club, played by Sam Neill.	Tommy's Honour (Movie, 2016))
Prejudice against some sectors of the community held by the St Andrews Golf Club.	Cook, K. (2007). <i>Tommy's honour: The extraordinary story of golf's founding father and son</i> . London, England: Harper Collins.
Inspired by the launch of the movie Tommy's Honour, history of golf as at the St Andrews Course	Parker, J. (2019, 19 January). Sultans of Swing. <i>The Listener</i> .
Episode mocking both golf and bowls: a snobbish golf club is situated beside a bowls clubs with elderly female players.	Topp Twins. (2003). <i>Episode 5 Bowls and Golf</i> . Auckland, New Zealand: Roadshow Entertainment.
Based on the television programme.	Topp, J., & Topp, L. (2003). <i>The Topp Twins book</i> . Auckland, New Zealand: Penguin.
A young man joins an Australian bowling club in order to use the carpark and is forced to play bowls with the older club members. The comedy movie covers in a humorous way the tension often found in a bowling club with older members unwilling to change.	Crackerjack (Movie, 2002)

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## **Podcasts, radio programmes and documentaries**

Two programmes discussing golf (Meadows, 2017; White 2000) both discuss the history of golf, the image of exclusivity, the traditional attitudes that are slow to change, with comments about many aspects of the game including dress code.

New concept of young people developing a faster more exciting version of the game. Key focus of the podcast is the innovation that is possible in bowls. Comment about the closing of clubs is addressed with an alternative such as the possibility of increasing membership (Radio New Zealand, 2019).

Meadows., D. (2017). Boosting golf club memberships. In D. Meadows (Ed.), *Fairway executive: Educating the golf industry with Jeff Harrison*. USA.

Radio New Zealand. (2019). Breathing new life into bowls *Sunday morning with Wallace Chapman*: Radio New Zealand.

White, L. (2000). *The story of golf*. USA: A&E Home Video.

## Online resources for clubs

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Resource	Reference
Club support including club plan:	<a href="https://bowlsnewzealand.co.nz/club/">https://bowlsnewzealand.co.nz/club/</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Model constitutions</li><li>• Club Plan (People, The Club, The Game, Club Performance Assessment, Other) with 3 – 6 items in each category including membership, which includes a number of ideas for attracting members.</li></ul> The assessment includes checklists	
Club Resources and case studies	<a href="https://www.golf.co.nz/About/ClubManual.aspx">https://www.golf.co.nz/About/ClubManual.aspx</a>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Leadership &amp; governance</li><li>• Finance and sustainability</li><li>• Membership and participation</li><li>• Delivering quality experiences</li> <li>• Documents include explanation, planning template, process and worksheets.</li><li>• Case Studies</li><li>• Resources to encourage participation by women</li><li>• Presentations from past conferences</li><li>• Golf club satisfaction survey results</li></ul>	

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### Appendix 3: Vignettes of lawn bowls and golf players

#### Vignettes of bowls participants in Chapter 6

1	Retired male, played 46 years, belonged to one club, active committee member Competitive sports player, having played many sports. From a bowling family. Immersed in and knowledgeable about the game, the club and the wider organisation.
2	Retired male, played 35 years at one club, committed contributor to club. Bowls is only sport played but is involved in a number of other community organisations. Supporter of disabled association. Travels to play bowls.
3	Retired male, played 40 years, at the same club. Belongs to second club. Used to play three days a week but now twice a month. Absence from bowls at times due to family commitments and another sport in which heavily committed. Belongs to a second smaller club closer to home. Enjoys belonging to a larger and a smaller club.
4	Retired female, played more than 30 years. Changed clubs several times. Injured playing other sport. A friend took her to bowls when visiting. Joined a club when returned home around the age of 50. Joins and plays with a friend. Competitive. Enjoys playing on grass. Also enjoys being part of a <i>membership-type club</i> with its own club house. Husband also bowls.
5	Retired female, played more than 20 years, at many clubs. Given up work and thought it would be good to start playing now older. Plays with a friend. Competitive. Enjoys playing on grass. Husband also bowls at a different club.
14	Male in his 30s. Played for about a year. Now plays golf. Plays sport with a group of friends who collectively decide what to play. Played Barefoot Bowls with a group of about 15 – 20 friends and the numbers dwindled to the three that he now play golf with. Was not contacted when membership of club needed renewing.
27	Female in her 20s. Also played golf. Played Business House Bowls with colleague from work. Gave name to the club at the end of the season and was not contacted. May play Business House again.
38	Females in her 80s. Played many years at the same local club. Most of the interview focussed on the recent decision to stop playing bowls. The club was closing and she felt she was getting “ <i>passed it</i> ”.
40	Male in his 40s. Played and joined for short period of time. Joined a local club with wife aware from media and a neighbour that club was in danger of closing. The neighbour was actively trying to save it. Attended a number of meetings at the club at which older members wanted to maintain the status quo and other people made suggestions. Did enjoy playing bowls, but membership lapsed before the club closed.
41	Retired male, played over 14 years. Belonged to one club. Described himself as a late starter. Persuaded to go to indoor bowls by family member. When son left school, played outdoor. Club merged with another. Plays social Roll Ups.
42	Retired male in his 60s, played over 20 years. Belonged to one club. Children had grown up. With wife, he was looking for a sport and took up bowls around age of 45. Stopped playing other sport due to knee injury. Tried several clubs. Joined one with a competitive and the social side. Gave up smoking when bowls started. Very active in club management. The club merged with another after a long process.
43	Young adult male, played less than 10 years In last year of school was approached by a club and given free membership if committed for a season. The club was supportive and every year he <i>went up a level</i> . Moved and then joined another club following introduction by family friend. Moved again to a bigger stronger club in another town.
44	Male in his 70s, played about 5 years. Stopped another sport and wanted social contact. Attended a Have a Go day and joined straight away and stayed at the club. A social player.
45	Retired female, played about 10 years Stopped playing another sport. Went to local club and then moved to a bigger club that offer wider range opportunities. Took some time to get the hang of the game.

## Vignettes of golf participants in Chapter 6

- 
- Male, 50+, Handicap 17  
 Played golf as teenager. Then played more active sports. Played golf with father-in-law occasionally. Played more frequently after giving up hockey and *my kids did not need me so much*. Joined a club with a friend, but it closed. Played on a workplace corporate membership, then at same club as individual member. Membership cost is about the same as green fees. With grand-children and a holiday home will look at membership options.
- 
- 9 Female, Retired, Handicap 39  
 Played tennis, gave up when had children. Started and stopped golf three times. Husband encouraged her to take up golf. Did some coaching. Found game difficult. Played about once every five years. Took six-week course. Did not progress. Retired and joined nine-hole ladies at local club and found them supportive. Husband joined a different club with friends. Used a GrabOne deal for reasonably priced holiday at an expensive course out of Auckland.
- 
- 10 Male, Mid 60s, Handicap 28  
 Started when son wanted to take up golf while overseas. Returned to New Zealand and joined local club, but could not take friends at weekends. Moved to current club on suggestion of an acquaintance. Now retired. Social player, who plays with four friends.
- 
- 11 Male, Retired, No handicap  
*Had a hit* as a child. Played a lot of sport and joined many clubs. Retired and returned to Auckland. Playing golf has always been at the back of mind. Drove past a club and went in. Unimpressed with the support for a new golfer.
- 
- 12 Male, Retired, Handicap 10  
 Joined a country club with friends as summer member and *"hacked"*. Played tennis until had injury. Now travels with a large group to play at a club. Always belong to a club.
- 
- 13 Male, in 30s, no handicap  
 Played a bit of golf at school. Played bowls much later. Attracted by the social nature of these sports and fitness is not needed. Went overseas and returned. Friends were playing golf. They played once a month at a different golf courses. Took up a trial membership. Able to play without commitment. Only played two games because of travelling distance. When membership renews, will discuss with the group. Speaks enthusiastically about golf.
- 
- 14 Male, in 40s, handicap 21  
 Played with father as child. During teens hardly played. Hacked for some years at public course. Joined on an introductory offer about a year ago. Now a full member. Views golf as hobby and challenge. Plays competitively on Saturday and with friends on Sunday.
- 
- 15 Male, Retired, handicap 17  
 A keen sportsman. Previously had low handicap. Played at school with family. Moved a lot due to work and played as non-member a few times a year. Joined an Auckland club but moved to current club after a critical incident. Taught wife to play. Competitive play and camaraderie are important.
- 
- 16 Male, in 50s, handicap 17  
*I hack*. Play golf with mates. Played as a non-member at public courses. Joined a club about five years ago and has since changed club. Golf wasn't a priority then. Played about 25 times a year. Was working 7 days a week. Play with same people pretty much. Lots of friends in the Dotgolf system. *"The only consistent thing about my golf is my inconsistency"*
- 
- 17 Male, in 70s, handicap 19  
 Played as a child in UK, then once or twice a year for 15 years due to work. Came to New Zealand and joined a club. Gave up golf with an injury. Later with work colleagues joined a club for about 10 years. Left following critical experience and joined current club.
- 
- 18 Female, in 50s, handicap 29  
 Attracted to golf as *I can play by myself*. Bored with tennis. With friend went to women's lessons. Tried four clubs before current one, paying green fees. Found clubs unaccommodating. Through another activity, met member of current club and went to twilight golf. Had difficulty fitting available golf times into own schedule. Friend has dropped out of golf.
- 
- 19 Male, in 50s, handicap 13  
 Began playing as a child, with father. Has been at the same club all the time. Has held a number of positions in the club, including managing a special project.
- 
- 20 Male, in 40s/50s, handicap pending  
 Played as a junior with parents. Recently returned to golf, nervous in spite of prior experience. Two absences from game from being overseas and having a family. Is getting to know people at the club. Comfortable finding a spare spot at club to play with anyone.
- 
- 21

22	Male, in 30s, handicap 14 Gave it a go as a child. Starting playing regularly as a young adult. Multiple changes of club. Now on club committee. Has a young son, who was given a mini-set of golf clubs by his grandfather, went to a club, had a hit and <i>absolutely loved it</i> .
23	Female, in 30s, discontinued playing Played many sports. Came across golf, had a natural co-ordination and loved it. Parents both played golf. Her father still does but her mother stopped with hip problem. Used to play as a keen golfer on handicap of 18. Rarely plays and gave up most sport when son was born.
24	Female, in 50s, handicap 19 Played tennis and got sick of it when wasn't as good as I had been. Took up golf as parents played. Did golf schools. Joined a club while on waiting list for another. Play business women's at weekends. Plays once a week all through year – definitely 18 hole. Go on golf holidays with husband. Passionate about the game.
25	Male, handicap 12 Joined country club as a teenager. Played a bit at school. Self taught. Joined a club as a young adult. Went overseas. Returned and joined a club with wife but busy with children and starting a business. Joined a series of clubs in quick succession.
26	Female, retired, handicap 29 Started playing when husband took up golf again. Played public courses nine holes a few times to get the hang of it. Played Business House at a club and left to go to current club which is more welcoming of female players. Joined as 18-hole player.
27	Female, in 20s, not playing Played with father as teenager and went to coaching at local club. Still keen on golf but has moved to a different town and doesn't have anyone to go along with.
28	Male, in 50s, currently not playing Encouraged by friend (a competitive golfer) when away from home at university. Joined on student membership. In second year played less but was joined. <i>For 10 years no golf due to having kids</i> . Played once a month for a while, then petered out. Now play once every few years. Would like <i>'some nice little nine-hole course. Golf is a social thing, I am not a competitive player. I learnt badly, I was outclassed by someone who is not in same league.</i>
29	Female, in 80s, handicap 25 Passionate about sport, inspired at school. Got into golf through husband and friend. Played public course to get comfortable, then joined same club as friend. Worked hard to get handicap. Applied for a local club. When accepted, belonged to both clubs for a while. <i>Used to play in the draw now just with girls I know. Rarely put a card in.</i> Passionate about golf.
30	Male, in 40s, handicap 10 Played Ambrose Christmas tournament. Gifted a club membership. Joining alone was hard. <i>Learnt golf from group of older men. Continued at the club and supports new players.</i>
31	Male, in 60s, high handicap Started as teenager at public golf course when a friend said come and play. Played for three years and then was off to university and stopped dead. Until aged about 40 years. When restarting joined the local club with the best course. Heavily involved organisationally.
32	Started playing as a child with father when living overseas. Joined a club in New Zealand early in adult life. Went overseas and joined a club. Heavily involved in golf industry. Passionate but concerned about issues facing the sport.
33	Male, in 20s, handicap not available Quick decision to play golf. Initial attraction was unclear. Joined a club based on young person's lower fee and changed club when moved into next age bracket. Now passionate about the game and a loyal member. Encouraged others to play and is concerned about the possibility of his father becoming a green fee player.
34	Male, in 20s, no handicap Encouraged by Participant 33 played golf, joined a club briefly. Now busy with other sport and work. <i>"Golf can wait."</i>
35	Male, handicap 14 Stopped tennis as needed a partner to play. Played golf at nearby club. After two years moved to current club. No coach. Learnt by himself. Encouraged friends to move from a neighbouring club. Plays with a group in their ethnic tournaments, each of which is played at a different course. Handicap has been as low as 5.
36	Female, retired, handicap 20+ Handicap previously 10. Joined and learnt at local club, taught by husband. Plays twice a week, including Pennants and ethnic competitions. Husband plays three times a week.

## **Appendix 4: Summary of survey results from golf club**

### **Membership Surveys with Club A**

Three membership surveys were conducted by Club A: discontinued members 2014/5; discontinued members 2015/6; new members 2015/6.

#### **Discontinued members 2014/5**

One hundred and twenty-five of the 129 discontinued adult members were sent an email from the Club Manager with a link to the survey for discontinued members. The other members had passed away or were known to be too ill to reply to a survey. Thirty-seven people replied to the survey, which is 29% of discontinued members. This was considered a reasonably high response by the club personnel, considering that the group were no longer members of the club. The results of the survey were shared and discussed with the researcher. The researcher compared the profile of people who responded to the survey with the profile of people who discontinued membership. The two profiles were similar on three available characteristics: type of membership, gender and length of membership. The club management and researcher concluded that the results should be acted upon, in order to reduce the controllable membership loss. There was sufficient indication that some membership loss could be avoided. A sufficient number of negative comments indicated that concerns from the focus groups were causing membership loss, in particular a third of the responses said that an improvement to the club could have encouraged them to continue membership. The summary of results showed that some membership loss was uncontrollable (people moving house and giving up golf due to health and fitness). It was decided that a survey of discontinued members should become a regular part of the club communication.

### **Discontinued members 2015/6**

Of 64 discontinued adult members, 60 were sent an email with a link to the survey for discontinued members. The other members had passed away or were known to be too ill to reply to a survey. Twenty-eight replied to the survey, which is 47% of discontinued members. This was considered a high response.

A summary of results is given on the following page. The key points from this summary are:

- The profile of people who responded to the survey was compared to the profile of people who discontinued membership. The two profiles were sufficiently similar on three available characteristics: type of membership, gender and length of membership.
- The discontinued members had a wide range of handicap. 16% were not linked to any friends the system. This is similar to the previous year.
- Five of the 28 would have remained at the club if some concern was remedied. This indicates that some of the membership loss was avoidable but not as much as the previous year,
- However a key difference from the previous year is that only two people had a ‘major grumble’ about the club. Last year nearly a quarter of discontinuing members complained about some aspect of the club with some comments quite strongly expressed.

Given the focus of women in the New Zealand Golf and club strategy, the sample of seven discontinued women members was analysed separately to identify the extent to which this member loss was avoidable. The analysis showed that loss of three of the eight was unavoidable as they moved or went overseas. For two it may have been preventable as they made both positive comments and criticisms of the club and were giving up golf, although one maintained that this was for health reasons. Two of the discontinued members had issues with the way women’s golf was organised and that resolution of this issue may have encouraged them to renew membership.

### **New members 2015/6**

Of 160 new adult members, all were sent an email with a link to the survey for new members. 31 replied to the survey, which is 19% of new members. This is a lower response than for the discontinued members.

The profile of people who responded to the survey was compared to the profile of new people. The two profiles were sufficiently similar on two available characteristics: type of membership and gender.

Eighty percent had belonged to the club for six months to a year. Few were very recently joined members.

The new members had a wide range of handicap, with only three having no handicap. 30% were not linked to any friends the system.

## **Appendix 5: Summary of online documents from bowling club**

The information in this appendix was obtained from minutes of meetings available on the website of the Bowling Club for the period June 2014 – June 2017. Minutes remain on the website for a period of two – four years.

This summary provides a permanent record of key information used in Chapter 8.

- a) Summary new and resigned members approved at the club Board Meetings
- b) Number of items raised at Board Meetings identified from the minutes
- c) Summary of minutes of the Board Meetings, along with selected club newsletters and other items from the website

### Membership records from Board Meetings

Meeting	New members			Resigned		To social	From social	Net change
	Play	Social	FY	Play	Social			
Jun-14	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
Jun-14	1	5	0	1	0	1	0	8
Jul-14	2	0	1	4	2	2	0	11
Aug-14	3	4	5	1	0	0	0	13
Sep-14	3	0	12	0	1	0	0	16
Oct-14	3	5	5	2	1	1	1	18
Nov-14	1	2	3	1	0	0	0	7
Jan-15	1	9	3	0	0	0	0	13
Mar-15	1	4	0	2	2	1	0	10
May-15	3	2	0	1	0	0	0	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>102</b>
Jun-15	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
Jul-15	0	5	0	5	1	2	0	13
Aug-15	1	1	1	2	2	0	0	7
31 Aug	1	2	1	4	2	8	0	18
Sep-15	3	4	3	0	0	1	0	11
Oct-15	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	6
Nov 15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Jan 16	0	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Mar-16	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4
29 Mar	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	3
May 16	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	2
30 May	0	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>74</b>
June 16	0	0	0	2	1	4	0	7
July 16	3	0	0	3	1	2	0	9
Aug 16	4	0	0	3	2	4	0	13
Sept16	1	2	2	1	0	1	0	7
Oct 16	1	3	0	1	0	0	0	5
Nov 16	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Jan 17	1	7	3	0	0	0	0	11
Mar 17	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	4
May 17		1	2					3
		1 other						
<b>Total</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>61</b>

### **Number of items raised at each meeting**

<u>Meeting date</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Matters arising</u>	<u>General Business</u>	<u>From reports</u>	<u>Correspondence</u>
June 16	2014	0	8	14	0
June	2014	9	20	12	4
July	2014	20	25	7	8
August	2014	27	25	14	1
September	2014	26	6	8	1
October	2014	39	3	14	2
November	2014	33	8	3	4
January	2015	4	4	11	6
March	2015	14	6	6	1
May	2015	7	2	2	3
June	2015	7	3	3	1
Total for year		186	110	94	31
Average per meeting		16.9	10.0	8.5	2.8

July	2015	8	9	0	4
August	2015	13	5	6	4
31-Aug	2015	14	7	6	1
September	2015	19	1	9	3
October	2015	19	2	5	0
30-Nov	2015	19	4	7	0
25-Jan	2016	12	0	18	0
1-Mar	2016	25	4	4	1
29-Mar	2016	14	6	16	4
2-May	2016	30	7	15	1
30-May	2016	19	3	0	1
Total for year		192	48	86	19
Average per meeting		17.5	4.4	7.8	1.7

Meeting date	Year	Matters arising	General Business	From reports	Correspondence
27-Jun	2016	7	1	9	0
18-Jul	2016	12	2	6	0
30-Aug	2016	11	7	6	0
26-Sep	2016	12	2	4	4
31-Oct	2016	12	1	12	4
28-Nov	2016	21	0	9	3
Jan	2017	16	3	16	5
28-Mar	2017	14	0	22	8
May	2017	31	1	4	8
Total for year		136	17	88	32

## Minutes of Board Meetings and Other documents June 2014 - June 2017: Key items

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Jun 16	2014	First meeting of new board
Board Meeting		Reinstatement of original bar prices Budgeted deficit discussed Different prices for ladies and men's tournaments questioned Formation of committee to organise a major tournament being hosted at the club.
Jun 30	2014	Approval of proposed modifications to club programme with recommendation for some new initiatives
Board Meeting		Concern expressed at lower numbers at tournaments compared with the past. Strong tournament conveners needed to ensure well attended tournaments Suggestions for promoting Have A Go Days were made Detailed information about arrangement for the major tournament Support for and contribution from roll-up players discussed. Budgeting on average 15 players per roll-up day.
July	2014	Another busy month
Board Meeting		Notice boards to be replaced with magnetic boards Honours board to be updated Need to for volunteers to help with Business House Bowls and Corporate functions Have a Go Sessions planned for September - one morning and one afternoon Comment about the need to support other clubs so that players from other clubs visit us Praise for club bowlers selected to play for important competitions Praise for club bowler nominated for an external award. His contribution to 'our bowling family ' was noted. Pool of 50 - 60 volunteers needed to help with corporate functions in lead up to Christmas (each volunteer helping with 1 - 2 functions per month). Detailed information about arrangement for the major tournament Two new tournament formats tried and discussed Planning for Have A Go days discussed

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July New Bowlers Meeting	2014	<p>Meeting held with 10 new bowlers and 4 club members. Two apologies. To discuss what the club could do to assist new bowlers to settle in and make the most of what the club offered.</p> <p>The feedback was as</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Explanation of which tournaments new bowlers could enter</li> <li>2. How competitions worked</li> <li>3. Correct Etiquette</li> <li>4. Understanding of the Notice Boards</li> <li>5. Access to Coaching</li> <li>6. Access to Drills to improve skills</li> <li>7. Introduction of a Welcome Pack when joining and a mentor to spend time going over the contents of the Welcome Pack</li> <li>8. Meeting for 1st year bowlers with a follow up meeting, say three months later, for assessment and where to from here</li> <li>9. How do you know what bowls are right for you</li> <li>10. How to work the score board</li> <li>11. What was the responsibility of each member in the team</li> <li>12. Suggestion that mini junior tournaments could be held on a regular basis</li> <li>13. Consideration of a Mentor for all 1st Year Bowlers</li> </ol> <p>Guest speakers for next meeting were noted.</p>
August Board Meeting	2014	<p>Request sent to members asking for volunteers to mentor new members - to show round the facilities, explain the coaching, entering tournaments, club night, have a practice session. Discussion took place for the best approach to ask for help with new bowlers from our existing club members. The end result is our Advisor Sheet which has been circulated to all club members. The response has been great and we already have 16 volunteers who have offered to assist and are happy to be approached by new members.</p> <p>The Welcome Pack has been devised and input has been added from the Board Members and is on the agenda for discussion.</p> <p>Have a Go Day posters to be put up</p> <p>Welcome/Induction pack for new members in preparation: Three members were noted as "doing a great job getting an induction pack together for new members to make sure they are properly integrated into the club. Too many clubs, and ours is no exception, leave new members to their own devices and don't have proper support systems to make them feel really welcome.</p> <p>As part of this initiative, they are also looking for club members to be "advisors" to new members for their first year. This will involve an existing member being allocated a new member so they can make contact and welcome them as soon as they join up, arrange to show them around the club and its facilities, explain about coaching, entering tournaments, social functions (club night etc.), and then in the early stages, drop in to see them play or even have a practice session with them. The "advisor" would also be available to talk to their allocated new members throughout their first season to answer any questions or queries they have.</p> <p>Combined with the junior development programme, this induction programme will make sure we not only retain new members, but also attract new ones. Well done team. You have 100% support from the board".</p>

Sponsors board completed for listing club sponsors

Business House Bowls explained - with sponsorship

Resolution of controversy about some aspect of club nights

Issues raised by Roll-Up bowlers addressed and confirmed as satisfactory

Comment from match committee about lengthy debate over handling of various matters

Compilation of list of groups using facilities. Use of facilities by the community contributes to community, brings new people to club and source of income

Cleaning of facilities - the need to balance cost with what can be expected of volunteers

President to "push our players supporting other clubs" so that players from other clubs visit

Need for more volunteers to help with corporate functions discussed

Decision to play ladies singles matches under the same condition as the men's - i.e. four games on the first day

Club decided to adopt the new slogan/expression to all communications

Acknowledgement of a tournament and bowler nominated for an award.

Substantial discussion about the hosting of a major tournament

Proposal to hold cheers for volunteers the day after the nationals have been completed.

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September

2014

Board Meeting

Have a Go Days - 51 registered, the following week another 40+ took part - the highest number at such an event from memory. Follow up letters to be sent.

Agreed that it is important to make contact with new members at the earliest possible time rather than wait until after membership approved at a Board meeting.

Draft constitution - to bring in line with Bowls NZ, simplifying membership to playing and non-playing, maximum of two non-playing on the board, non-playing members have right to speak at general meetings on matters relating to them but not to vote, no paid employees to be on the board, club regulations to dovetail with constitution

Attendance of officer bearers at local Bowls centre Club Officer Forum designed to raise level of governance in bowling clubs

Very fun one-off tournament - 60 attendees

Initial suggestion that gaming machine license is not renewed and that the machines are removed from the club. Report on this matter included.

Bar operations review and need to update bar managers license and importance on not serving non-members

Committee set up to work through problems of last minute withdrawals from single-entry tournaments

Planning for a major tournament

Cheers for Volunteers tournament agreed for the day after the major tournament

Article on the club in local magazines

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October

2014

Board Meeting

Implementation of removal of gaming machines

Letter of thanks for organiser of Have a Go. High number of new members in the minutes - first year and social

Notice boards to be expanded

Grants raised

Kitchen refurbishments

Sponsorship reported

Organisation of corporate events

New bowlers to be allocated a coach as well as an adviser

Report on meeting with new bowlers - went over the Club Book, Bowls Etiquette, how to use the Score Board and some basic umpiring rules i.e. measuring etc. Everyone was very keen to get out on the green so arranged a session attended by over 20 juniors. This seemed to be a great help to our new comers and will look at another one in 2 weeks time.

Club in good heart and appreciate being kept informed

Clean up day with 30 volunteers

50 sets of bowls used by corporate bowlers being relocated

A complaint about a visiting player and behaviour of a club member in response

Presidents' Day - greens oversubscribed with teams from club and local area

Thanks from Chair for the amount achieved in four months

Becoming a Partner Club of Bowls New Zealand discussed.

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November	2014	Combined total of sponsorship of \$100,000 acknowledged which enabled refurbishment
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Board Meeting		Arrangement with local business - 15 bowling clubs members to receive 3 month free membership of the local business (Members selected by two board members).
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Very successful programme for our "new" junior bowlers. We have held practice sessions fortnightly which were basic rules including mat placement, rolling the jack, how to use the score board etc.

Gaming machines removed

New constitution adopted at an SGM

Club believe board is performing well (Feedback from President)

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In-depth comment about grumbles over some playing arrangements

January	2015	High praise for the running of the major tournament (recorded by Chair based on feedback from others plus two other reports). "Every area – greens, surrounds, car parking, clubrooms, raffles, kitchen, BBQ, bar, and cleaning - operated like clockwork and showcased our club and volunteers as being second to none. The comradeship and spirit displayed by our volunteers is the true fabric of what makes us such a great club."
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Board Meeting		Praise for club bowler on winning a national award
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Everything "a bit low key now the nationals are over"

New bowler development to recommence - with possibly splitting the group in two sections to aid the more advanced people no longer at the introductory stage

Lack of entries for tournaments - including those that had been sponsored

Concern about club men not travelling to other clubs for tournaments, which is annoying other clubs - a strong tournament committee is needed

Thanks to Chair for running on SGM and constitution

Mission Statement, Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy approved  
 Concern about dress and language in clubrooms - covered by new club regulations  
 Scanning all past president photos for continuous PowerPoint presentation in club rooms  
 Clean up day supported by over 30 volunteers, all offered a free drink and all forewent this in order to benefit club  
 Cheers for Volunteers afternoon attended by 60 or more volunteers

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January	2015	To investigate closer ties with a local not-for-profit organisation
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Club website

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March	2015	Hosting major tournament on behalf of local bowls association
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Board Meeting

Several funding applications  
 Sub-committee set up to review tournament and match programme as members are not supporting open tournaments. Survey of members to be undertaken

Six members prepared to phone around for entries to tournaments  
 Comment about very new members joining with volunteers for a number of club activities

Junior Development Programme recommenced, supported by only 5 people. The object of the meetings is to get as many new players ready for the 1st Year Junior Singles playing later this month

Positive report from Business House Bowls

Discussion about appropriate clothing for club championships - suggestion held over to next meeting pending feedback  
 Chairs Report contains concern about the amount of time spent and high expectations of club chair and the need to spread the load around the club.  
 Numbers dwindled for indoor bowls - to be promoted at club nights and with flyers

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May	2015	Committee for upgrade of website
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Board Meeting

Survey of club members completed. Review of tournament programme still in progress

Concern about lack of support from a neighbouring club  
 Little support identified for the idea of having one match committee (instead of a men and a women's match committee)

"As I see it the club has gone ahead in leaps and bounds and we have many satisfied members. I have personally enjoyed the friendliness and comradeship within the club as I staggered through my year as your president. "

Chair's report emphasised the importance of volunteers " we are a volunteer club" (p.5)

“With most of the board committing to another year (subject of course to being re-elected), we only have a few positions to fill on this front but we are going to need to get a lot of support in many areas from the overall membership if we are to maintain the great momentum we now have. I know how hard the board has worked over the past year and at times, it has stretched many of us to the limit. However, the amount of changes around the club and the current financial position is testament to the huge effort that has been put in. We have been supported by a great team of volunteers. For those who have sat back and watched, I think it is now time we asked them to stand up and be counted. We are still a volunteer club and by implication, we need all our members (volunteers) to do something if we are to survive. Imagine if all our members (playing and social) each gave us the equivalent of 1 full day a year. This works out at only 2 hours every month and pales into insignificance given the amount of time some of our volunteers put in. The old argument that “I have paid my subs so I shouldn’t have to do anything” just doesn’t wash in a club like ours. The subs, less capitation fees, account for about \$25,000 of our total income.

This only covers our light, power, heating and water bill and half of our annual insurance costs and leaves us with around \$100,000 to find elsewhere to cover all our other fixed costs before we even start thinking about regular maintenance and improvements. In reality, membership fees should be 4 times what they currently are but of course that would neither be practical or equitable for most of our members. Therefore, the only option is to raise money from other sources such as corporate events, tournaments, catering, and facility and green hire. And quite simply, that can’t be done without a big pool of willing volunteers. **So the message is quite simple.....we need to get every member engaged in the upcoming elections and putting their hands up to help in some way.** “  
**(Chair’s Report)**

June	2015	Membership fees increased
Board Meeting		Review of tournaments completed and updated programme sent to Bowls NZ for confirmation
		Compliment on the number of volunteers coming forward to assist New bowls available so that members can try different sizes before purchasing their own and to enable new bowlers to get started with top equipment
		First issues of newsletter edited by a social member available Need for coaching highlighted - coaching co-ordinator and outside resources
		Compliment from several sources on the progress made of the past year
July	2015	Have a Go Days - preparation begins
Board Meeting		Clubs New Zealand proposal discussed
		More new bowls arrived - purchased using grant money
		Compliment on the number of volunteers coming forward to assist Social Plus membership approved - to enable social players to play a few games of bowls
August	2015	Clubs New Zealand discussion and implementation
Board Meeting		Have a Go Days - further discussion
		Survey on members requests for information on website
		Have a go days
		Change to weekly draw based on members written suggestion and communication of this to members
		Allocation of responsibilities for Board members

Applications to Bowls New Zealand National Awards

Agreed to host series of tournaments

Meeting with blind bowlers about how to improve and training for blind bowlers. Management of noticeboard for blind bowlers.

30 - 40 people attend Roll-Ups most days

Indoor bowlers concerned about numbers.

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31-Aug	2015	Recommendation for proposed new website
Board Meeting		Modification to handling of weekly club draw Scheduling and organisation of Have A Go days - including potential article in local paper Discussion about Herald article on Golf Clubs and Bowling Clubs - and reassurance that club owns its own land. Research into Barefoot Bowling including a sausage sizzle and its popularity in Australia especially with the younger people. General opinion amongst some members that it was worth a try, perhaps on a Friday night
September	2015	Proposed redesign of website - waiting for new website from Sportsground (a provider of websites for sports groups)
Board Meeting		Have a Go days held. Twenty-two people came, along with club volunteers. One response to Have a Go day - follow up by phone Induction evenings - for all 1st and 2nd year bowlers 5.30pm to 6.30pm prior to club nights. Welcome Pack for new people, guest speakers, information on how club operates and also time on the green New TVs installed in lounge Email to members asking what skills they could offer to the club. Excel spreadsheet being developed. Suggestion to get everyone to put business card into lucky draw Indoor bowls held on Mondays since at least 1996 but falling numbers mean this is not longer viable. Last night to be in October. Contribution from indoor bowls (in new members and finance) acknowledged Poster for Barefoot Bowls to be created - in particular for corporate groups Roll-Up report explained a Winter Trophy that enabled everyone a chance to win (good and mediocre players). "The "single entry" of roll up days allows members to socialize and play with different teams each day and this makes for a friendly happy environment".
October	2015	Proposed redesign of website - ready to go live
Board Meeting		Barefoot Bowls - poster discussed Comment that due to heavy work commitments, the people attending Have A Go Days had not been contacted. Possibility of generic email raised. Small response to induction courses run: covered where to buy shoes, coaching, noticeboard etc.
Website	2015	Three longstanding members died within a few weeks New website and Clubs NZ cards
November	2015	Email to members asking what skills they could offer to the club. Now an on-going action - this action was then repeated in all minutes from this point on.
Board Meeting		Increase in bar prices One response to Have a Go Day. Two new members enrolled.

Three sessions of Barefoot Bowls held . First one attracted 10 people and the second 16 people. The weather was not good. More to be held next year.

48 teams for Presidents Day.

Number dwindling on Tuesdays

Instigation of student membership and collegiate membership

Adding games room at far end of lounge

Relationship with Bowls New Zealand discussed - keen to work more closely with the club and focussed on increasing participation. Proposal for capitation would work well on clubs focussed on increasing membership.

Photos of Presidents have been put into PowerPoint presentation. Honours Board to be the next project

Induction meetings usually have 4 - 6 people for the Q & A and then they go out onto the green.

January	2016	Barefoot Bowls - poster to be updated. All the contacts of the previous attendees retained. Hoping for better weather.
Board Meeting		<p>Suggestion from member for Barefoot Bowls and Facebook</p> <p>Despite the weather, there was sufficient interest in the Barefoot bowls to suggest this is well worth pursuing. However, we need some volunteers to take charge of this initiative and get a regular programme in place. The Sunday afternoons seemed to work well and being able to use either the carpet or grass should not disrupt our regular club programme.</p> <p>Members of the indoor bowls section of the closing local community club be invited to join the club as social members and retain their own structure, as an affiliated section of the club. Past indoor bowlers be encouraged to join them. Several meetings held to organise this action. They have 24 members. Full proposal developed.</p> <p>Coaching - lack of formal coaching structure at the club. As a premier club in Auckland, this is needed to attract new members and keep existing ones who wish to progress in the game. Four identified members to undertake a coaching course so that regular coaching can be set up the following season.</p> <p>Purchasing of equipment from club closing</p> <p>Struggling to get teams for Ladies weekday tournaments</p> <p>Impromptu fun tournament held with 42 teams taking part. Sausage/salad at the end.</p> <p>Prior to Christmas - seven corporate functions in 10 days.</p>
February	2016	Business House explained over 15 years
Newsletter		Sponsorship
1 March	2016	Barefoot Bowls - concept to be reviewed. Two sessions held with disappointing results
Board Meeting		<p>Tournament structure for the following season to be reviewed. One ladies tournament to be cancelled for rest of the season.</p> <p>The use of club bowls clarified as being for: all members for coaching or practice; first year bowlers, collegiate and student members can use for club tournaments; bowls not to be removed from the club. If bowls needed for external tournaments, committee member to be approached.</p> <p>Spreadsheet for management of events to be implemented - to obtain data about numbers attending, use of club etc.</p> <p>Major tournament showed club at its best - 48 teams, 3 days of top class bowls and a welcoming function</p>

Comments about volunteers - a base of 20 - 25 who are always available.  
Others ready to make themselves available up to a total of 70+

Indoor bowls due to start March 16 - to be on website

Four member will have stage 1 coaching qualification by May.

Barefoot Bowls - five people for first session and seven for the 2nd.

Roll Ups - have been 25 - 35 people playing most days.

March	2016	CEO of Bowls New Zealand compliments Club on being in the forefront of doing things differently with a clear customer focus as well as providing for the "traditional " bowls member (after two members had given a presentation to national conference) A new format was launched with 24 teams playing over two days.....One player reviewed the game on Facebook and found over 2000 hits
Newsletter		
29 March	2016	Request for demographic data to be collected for each member - to assist with grant and sponsorship applications - age and ethnicity. Membership form to be changed and email to members to be sent. All the new people attending induction evenings are now playing regularly in Roll-Ups. Well done to new members playing in club champs and Easter Tournament. Indoor bowlers to be added to the database Approaches from potential sponsors being received - some had to be turned down in fairness to existing sponsors Coaching course in progress Disappointing response to both Barefoot and Collegiate initiatives - to be re-evaluated All certificates and pennants now in PowerPoint. Club photos being added. Ladies Thursday tournaments struggling for numbers Indoor bowls started with 16 people turning up
Board Meeting		
2-May	2016	An article re whether a club chooses to be an innovator or a traditionalist discussed Enquiries from other local clubs following awards ceremony held at club Group of players moved from social play to more competitive play - confident this group will continue to play due to the friendships and enjoyment the club provides Encourage interclub teams to include new bowlers in their teams to gain experience Six people undertaking coaching course
Board Meeting		
30-May	2016	Changes to prize giving has resulted in an estimated 50% more members present Importance of Roll-Up bowlers discussed and agreed to continue with 1/3 of fee payment to club and the rest to prize money Hard work by board acknowledged significantly Six people completed the coaching course Club attended high level discussion organised by a local sports association re facilities Request to review policy on use of club equipment at other clubs Roll-ups going well and no problems with indoor bowls
Board Meeting		
June	2016	Sponsors on slideshow on TV in lounge Coaching programme for following season to be prepared
Board Meeting		

Sporting Hub umbrella organisation to be formed for needs assessment

July	2016	<p>Strategic Plan and Operations Plan circulated for review</p> <p>Agreement to sign Memorandum of Understanding in relation to sports hub</p> <p>Meeting with Blind Bowlers</p> <p>Rollups - comprise new bowlers (who are encouraged to get coaching), experienced bowlers looking for less stressful competitive games and find all day bowling too much. About 20+ in the winter and 30 in the summer</p> <p>Meeting to be arranged with an Auckland person who has experience in putting together coaching programmes</p>
August	2016	<p>List of members on wall not up to date - to be updated. Ongoing item.</p> <p>Board expectations - only need to be involved in portfolios if a departure from policy</p> <p>Coaching programme developed</p> <p>Special project discussed</p>
September	2016	<p>Members to be asked: how do we get membership more engaged with the club, what are we currently not doing well and how do we rectify it; what are we doing well and build on; current working relationship with local Bowls association; current workloads of board members; special project initiative and implications for club</p> <p>Congratulations to club member for Bowls New Zealand Award</p> <p>Have a Go Day - went well with 5 people turning up, keen to join, contact details taken and they will be invited to first induction course</p> <p>Induction course - slightly different this year - four Thursday evenings on the trot for new members</p> <p>Club handbook completed</p> <p>Newsletter suspended for past few months as editor unwell</p> <p>Website - would be good to get members feeding information and stories through</p> <p>Special project discussions continue</p> <p>Challenge identified for Board discussion: "Our main customers can be both exceptionally loyal and relentlessly demanding. Everyone has a view about how we could do it better. The feedback is instant and constant. But ask them to fix it, then they become conspicuously silent. So the challenge for every club and every sports administrator is to provide leadership to make sure that the conspicuously silent understand that there will come a day when the stalwarts and loyal volunteers have walked their last mile to make up for those who won't even put on their shoes."</p> <p>p7</p> <p>"Easier to engage people when there is a perception of a need to change..... For a club like ours, the challenge never ends and the job is never done because the moment we stand still, we start to go backwards."</p> <p>p7</p> <p>Business House starts January and three teams were already confirmed. Invitations being sent in October.</p>
October	2016	<p>The coaching on Monday evenings are working well.</p> <p>Coaching scheduled to start end of October</p> <p>Follow-up meeting for new bowlers to be arranged</p> <p>Informal presentation arranged for members to hear about special project</p> <p>Tournament committee requested to provide a tournament that would include a new and experienced bowler as there are a number of new bowlers and it would be good experience for them. Agreed.</p>

Dissatisfaction around Pennants selection

Thursday Ladies Tournaments on average getting 12 - 14 teams of triples

Induction - President spending some time with new bowlers

Contact with local Business Association re advertising the club.

Rollups started the season on a high note - 30 plus people each Saturday and Wednesday all keen for friendship and competition+C331

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November 2016  
Board Meeting

Monthly follow-up meeting for new bowlers - on going

Informal presentation held for members to hear about special project

Twilight drawn pairs tournament for an experienced bowler with a new bowler organised for January

Pennant selection suggestions sent by Bowls New Zealand

Suggestion of outsourcing corporate events with event organiser receiving a percentage of the income. More information to be brought back to board.

Suggestion of a youth board be put in place to report to main board.

Bowls etiquette sheet has been compiled and put in the filing cabinet in Match Room.

Welcome/Induction sheet for new members also updated

Comprehensive report given by two members about Bowls NZ Conference - with highlights including: .

- Participation trends are rapidly changing – the need for competitive sport is falling (supply driven) while the demand driven informal sport is growing exponentially.
- ***Traditional membership models are dying***
- ***We need to put the participant at the heart of everything we do – change focus away from the competitive side to the informal and recreational side. Look to what the community wants not what we want to deliver***
- Develop sustainable programmes – take a systems approach and results will take care of themselves
- Build for the long term while satisfying the short term. Create horizontal leadership.
- Attitudes need to change. We need to open up and be different and always challenge the status quo
- Face of volunteers is changing – teenage volunteers are increasing while traditional volunteerism is on the decline. Hard to attract sufficient and skilled volunteers
- Clubs need to understand clearly what the attraction is for participants to join
- Research shows that most club experiences are being driven by people who have been at the club 6 years and longer and this is at the expense of newer and younger members
- Membership options aren't changing to reflect the different participation trends
- ***A participant focus is not a membership focus. Members are a subset of participants***
- Need to change strategies and develop new plans and concentrate on the health of the grass roots participants. In everything you do ask: Does it grow the game of bowls and does it support the game of bowls. If answer is No, don't do it
- Bowlers get great value for their membership dollar ...average annual golf membership in Auckland is \$3,000, nationwide it is \$1,500. Embrace casualization
- Use technology where ever possible, particularly to enhance the game and experience

- Data and quality of interaction is king, it is the lever ☐ Not engaging young people in a meaningful way...do a very poor job of promoting the sport
- Clubs must be the change agents and replace the negativity and apathy with positivity and innovation

Operations Plan reviewed which includes Business House Bowls - maintain momentum from last year and look to expand participation by opening another green; communication - positive feedback; volunteer base still supportive although some complacency setting in among a few members who perceive the club is doing well so they can sit back. Christmas functions will test the volunteer base. Barefoot Bowls - on hold as did not prove successful last year - Under review; Indoor Bowls – local indoor bowls group joined and have had very successful winter season - circa 20 members attending Wednesday night; links with local council and community;

Advertising booked for local Business Association magazine in Feb/March issue. An article for the email magazine is being followed up. Roll-ups - all have improved and praise for the Monday night coaches which has given new members confidence to go into competitions. Continue to have about 30 players.

Business House starts January and four teams were confirmed. Registration by December needed.

January	2017	Monthly follow-up meeting for new bowlers to be arranged and to include etiquette, measuring etc.
Board Meeting		Dissatisfaction about selection for Pennants Updating of the website discussed Discussion about capturing more information about people attending corporate events
28-Mar	2017	Agreement with recommendation that Roll Up attendees should have some coaching if they are new players before they take part in Wednesday and Saturday tournaments
Board Meeting		Another round of coaching to be arranged before the end of the season Very heavy corporate bookings Another successful year for Business House - a couple of teams have been playing for five or more years and one team for 10 or more years and so are vastly more experienced than the new teams. Some ideas discussed but no solution. The business house competition runs every year from mid-January until mid-March and attracts a capacity 20 teams (80 players). Next year, depending on demand, the club is considering opening it up to more teams.
April	2017	Retirement villages have their own greens
Newsletter		
May	2017	
Board Meeting		Dissatisfaction about selection for Pennants Discussion about Facebook page and keeping it active Hosting a key tournament Another round of coaching to be offered before end of season Big fall in grants and sponsorship recently Comment about member not standing for re-election to the amount of time spent on the club and other aspects of life falling behind.

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June	2017	
Board Meeting		Outgoing chair comments about the need for bowls clubs to re-invent themselves and also comments about how hard the club as worked during his time as chair
Website		National and other awards for club and member listed on website

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