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## Article

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## Article

# The Radicalness of Innovation in Nonprofit Community Sport Organizations

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**Abstract:** Our study examined and compared the type, process, conditions, and consequences of radical and incremental innovations in community sport organizations (CSOs), which are a type of nonprofit membership association. Interviews were conducted with the president (or representative) of 14 CSOs engaged with both radical and incremental innovations. Radical innovations were reported to be mostly technical (but also administrative), undertaken with the goal of club growth and enhancing club management, adopted and further adapted from outside the organization, influenced by the culture and expertise of the board and the culture and capacity of the CSO at large, and informed by market opportunity and best practices. The radical innovations were reported to be successful in reaching their intended goals, and a wide variety of unanticipated (positive) consequences was also realized. The findings have implications for the management of radical (and incremental) innovation in the focal nonprofit context and contribute to theorizing about the radicalness of organizational innovation.

**Keywords:** organizational innovation; radical innovation; incremental innovation; nonprofit membership association



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## 1. Introduction

Community sport organizations (CSOs), also referred to as voluntary sport clubs, are grassroots membership associations that represent a unique subset of nonprofit organizations (Doherty et al., 2014). They tend to have a heavy reliance on member volunteers, a community focus, relatively informal structure, and modest budgets drawn primarily from membership fees (cf. Smith, 2000; Tschirhart, 2006, 2020). CSOs offer recreational and competitive sport programs that serve children, youth, adult, and/or senior participants. These local sport clubs can also be important mechanisms for civic activism, social capital, and community development (Doherty & Cuskelly, 2020; Feiler & Breuer, 2020; Misener & Trussell, 2020), similar to other nonprofits (Toepler & Anheier, 2020). They are common in Western countries (cf. Breuer et al., 2015; Nichols et al., 2015; Noble-Campbell et al., 2019; Scheerder et al., 2015) as the foundation of a nation's sport system (Hallman & Petry, 2013). CSOs are also innovating (see Corthouts et al., 2020, 2023; Delshab et al., 2022; Hoeber et al., 2015; Hoeber & Hoeber, 2012; Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2016) to meet member and community demands and to compete and survive in an ever-changing environment

(cf. [Crossan & Apaydin, 2010](#)). However, the “radicalness” of these innovations is not clear, specifically whether they constitute greater or lesser degrees of departure from existing practice and organizational impact ([Damanpour, 2020](#)). Understanding this distinction is important because it has implications for whether such nonprofit membership associations are likely to take up more radical innovations, which can add new value to members but may be viewed as risky, more unpredictable, and require an investment in new knowledge ([Sharma et al., 2017](#)), or they are limited to more incremental changes that are seen as safer and require less new knowledge ([McDermott & O'Connor, 2002](#)).

Given this potential range of innovations, as well as the associated conditions and implications for their uptake (e.g., [Dewar & Dutton, 1986](#); [Engen & Holen, 2014](#); [Forés & Camisón, 2016](#); [Koberg et al., 2003](#); [Weerawardena & Mort, 2012](#)), it is important to distinguish the nature of radical innovation in a particular context and the factors that shape its consideration, adoption, and further consequences. Incremental innovation provides a natural comparator that helps to enhance our understanding through contrast. Insight into these innovation attributes can contribute to a better understanding of how CSOs may respond to expectations and pressures, with implications for the effective delivery and impact of community sport (cf. [Toepler & Anheier, 2020](#)). To extend the literature and the understanding of innovation and specifically radicalness in these grassroots nonprofits, the purpose of this study was to explore the type, select aspects of the process, and the consequences of radical innovation in CSOs in comparison to incremental innovation. We begin with a review of the conceptual framework of innovation that guided the study and an overview of the related research literature on radical vs. incremental innovation, as well as innovation in community sport clubs. This is followed by a description of our qualitative methodology and then a presentation of findings and their discussion. Concluding comments highlight implications for theory and practice, as well as limitations of the study with directions for future research.

## 2. Conceptual Framework

Innovation represents, in its broadest form, “newness or novelty” ([Damanpour, 2020](#), p. 5). However, its conceptualization becomes increasingly nuanced beyond that. An economic-based view of innovation tends to focus on newness in terms of a product or market—something that is new to a field—and is associated with a “competition-wealth” approach, where the primary concern is the competitiveness and superior performance that is intended with the innovation ([Damanpour, 2020](#)). This view aligns with organizations that are primarily economic or commercial entities, and related research tends to focus on the generation of new technology, products, and manufacturing. The economic-based view may be less relevant in the nonprofit context, which is traditionally more focused on creating social value than developing competitive advantage and maximizing profits ([Svensson et al., 2020](#)), although socially entrepreneurial nonprofits may be an exception ([Weerawardena & Mort, 2012](#)). A social-based view of innovation, on the other hand, focuses on the diffusion and adoption of products and practices by an organization and its members, and it is associated with an “adaptation-progression” approach for operational efficiency and survival ([Damanpour, 2020](#)). This view aligns with organizations addressing social needs and doing so efficiently and effectively, with related research focused largely on the innovation capability of the organization.

Although economic-based and social-based views are distinct theoretical approaches, they are not mutually exclusive ([Damanpour, 2020](#)), and organizational innovation may be considered from both perspectives. Our study does so as both club growth in terms of market share of members and the revenues they bring in, as well as effective operations and impactful programs, are the focus of CSO innovations in previous research,

as reviewed below. Our exploratory approach allows for the consideration of a range of innovations, generated or adopted by CSOs, for competitiveness and performance and/or efficiency and survival. It also addresses the call to bridge the fragmentation of the economic- and social-based views (Damanpour, 2020), as well as the possibility of an innovative product or practice generated by a CSO for itself and perhaps for the field (cf. Crossan & Apaydin, 2010).

Within these broader layers, Damanpour (2020) outlines elements that are foundational to understanding and supporting organizational innovation, including in nonprofit organizations. He conceptualizes a model that aligns innovation *type* (e.g., technical and non-technical), *process* (opportunity, generation or adoption, and implementation), and *radicalness* (novelty or newness, departure from existing practice, and impact on the organization) as a guide and a call for research that generates rich and more complex insights to better capture the phenomenon of innovation.

Typologies of innovation have been of interest to many scholars (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010; Damanpour, 2020), enabling researchers to theorize about some of the nuances of innovation. Innovations can be framed as a product or process, distinguishing a new product to address clients' needs and a new internal process for producing products or rendering services. This typology has received the most research attention, with a focus on products (or services) that are new to a market and new ways of manufacturing existing (or new) products that is consistent with the popular economic-based view of innovation (Damanpour, 2020). Another typology, and the focus of this study, is the technical and non-technical innovation dichotomy, with the latter also labeled more indicatively as administrative or managerial innovation. Technical innovations constitute new products, services, and the processes to provide them, and they are "directly related to the primary work activity of the organization" (Damanpour & Evan, 1984, p. 394). In contrast, non-technical administrative innovations are characterized by changes pertaining to strategy, structure, and control "that occur in the social system of an organization" (Damanpour & Evan, 1984, p. 394). The technical-administrative typology aligns with a social-based approach to innovation with its focus on the adopter's perspective of change for operational efficiency and survival through "adaptation-progression".

The process element of organizational innovation comprises its initiation (awareness, and intent or objective, of the innovation), the adoption decision (whom, and sources or driving conditions), and the effectiveness of its implementation (consequences) (Damanpour, 2020). The conditions potentially impacting the adoption decision are multidimensional: individual (leadership) factors refer to people, as well as particularly managers or strategic leaders, who may influence innovation adoption and implementation; organizational (internal) factors that may come into play include available resources, structure, climate, and culture; and environmental (external) factors that can drive innovation may be proximal or distal to the organization and are expected to vary by industry or sector (Damanpour, 2020). Together the elements of organizational innovation type and process frame our exploration of the radicalness of innovation in CSOs as a type of nonprofit grassroots membership association.

Radicalness—a third organizational innovation element—has received limited empirical attention in any industry context, particularly in combination with innovation type and process (Damanpour, 2020). The limited attention may be a reflection of the lack of clarity regarding what constitutes radical innovations (Sharma et al., 2017), or that they are less common in contrast to incremental innovations (Damanpour, 1996; cf. Hoerber et al., 2015; Koberg et al., 2003). Damanpour and Wischnevsky (2006) note that researchers have tended to label the radicalness of innovations themselves, selecting innovations and organizations to study with the presumption that they will be capturing radical innovation. However, it can and should be more accurately distinguished from incremental innovation by the

adopting organizations (cf. [Sharma et al., 2017](#); [Svensson et al., 2020](#)), consistent with a social-based view of innovation ([Damanpour, 2020](#)). As [Sharma et al. \(2017, p. 18\)](#) note, “radicalness depends on prior experiences and competences of individuals, groups, and the adopting organization”. The typical singular reflection on the degree of novelty or newness, a departure from existing practice, and/or the organizational impact of radical innovation may have merit; however, a richer and more meaningful understanding demands consideration of the types of innovations that are radical from the adopters’ perspective, the conditions for their consideration and adoption, and ultimately, the consequences—positive or negative—for engaging in what is considered more radical than incremental innovation (cf. [Damanpour, 2020](#)). Our study is focused on this more holistic view of radicalness in the context of nonprofit grassroots CSOs.

### 3. Review of the Literature

#### 3.1. *Radical vs. Incremental Innovation*

Several studies have examined and contrasted the adoption of radical and incremental innovation (e.g., [Dewar & Dutton, 1986](#); [Engen & Holen, 2014](#); [Forés & Camisón, 2016](#); [Koberg et al., 2003](#); [Weerawardena & Mort, 2012](#)), with a particular focus on conditions of that adoption. In an early study, Dewar and Dutton examined the adoption of radical (high degree of new knowledge) versus incremental (low degree of new knowledge) technical innovations by footwear manufacturing organizations and found that the availability of technical specialists was most critical to the successful adoption of more radical practices. Managerial attitudes and practices were no more important to the uptake of radical than incremental innovations. [Koberg et al. \(2003\)](#) found some variation in organizational and environmental factors that influenced the adoption of incremental and radical innovations in firms across a mix of industries. Incremental innovations were reported to a significantly greater extent, as the authors expected, and were uniquely (and positively) predicted by the age and size of the firm. These organizational factors had no bearing on radical innovations; however, the firms’ support for experimentation was a unique predictor of these more novel changes. Notably, structural linkages within the firms that support the exchange of and collaboration around new ideas, as well as the amount and complexity of information available to the firms (environmental dynamism), were significant conditions for the adoption of both incremental and radical innovations.

[Engen and Holen \(2014\)](#) examined service firm innovations along the “novelty spectrum” (p. 16) and found information from and cooperation with customers to be far more meaningful for engagement in radical than incremental innovation. This finding extends [Koberg et al.’s \(2003\)](#) observation with the notion that both forms of innovation may be prompted by a dynamic environment, but radical innovation relies particularly on a connection with customers in that environment, although this may be specific to the service firms that Engen and Holen studied. In contrast, employee collaboration on ideas was only impactful to incremental innovation, while the need for new knowledge around the innovation was important for both types of innovation. In a study comparing the performance of radical and incremental innovations in industrial firms, [Forés and Camisón \(2016\)](#) considered the impact of internal knowledge creation capacity (the ability to generate, transfer, and integrate new knowledge within the firm) and absorptive capacity (the ability to identify, acquire, transform, and apply new knowledge from outside the firm). Both forms of knowledge accumulation capacity had a direct positive effect on the performance of the industrial firms’ incremental innovations, while the ability to absorb external knowledge was the only significant direct determinant of radical innovation performance. The findings suggest that internal knowledge creation is sufficient for incremental innovation but not for radical innovation performance. To engage successfully with more novel changes,



organizations must rely on the ability to identify, acquire, transform, and apply new ideas from outside their boundaries (Forés & Camisón, 2016). Like Engen and Holen, Forés and Camisón found that radical innovations were more influenced by external knowledge.

In the context of nonprofits, Weerawardena and Mort (2012) examined the magnitude of innovations pursued by socially entrepreneurial service organizations and the environmental conditions for that effort. What were identified as incremental innovations included extending and changing the format of programming to serve new and different groups and building a computerized database, which had positive impacts for the targeted clients and for the organizations' financial capacity. Radical innovations included a program initiative that had not been tried in the industry before, and it was dependent on individuals' knowledge and networks, as well as several initiatives focused on system changes aimed at building sustainable capacity for financial survival, in response to the turbulent environment and beyond what incremental innovations could address (Weerawardena & Mort, 2012).

Each of these comparative studies was grounded in the same conceptualization and evidence of radical innovation as a clear departure from existing, fundamental practice, replacing what was present before, and incremental innovation as minor and more simple refinement changes were low in breadth of impact. Variations in select conditions driving the radicalness of innovation were reported, and this work contributes to theorizing about the radicalness with evidence of the conditions that limit or support more radical or more incremental changes but with a particular focus on for-profit organizations.

### 3.2. Innovation in Community Sport Clubs

Research on innovation in grassroots membership associations appears to be largely limited to a focus on CSOs, with little indication of the study of organizational innovation in other similar types of institutions. An exception is a case study of a specific innovation—membership structure—of a new political party (Gomez & Ramiro, 2019). Innovation research on membership associations more broadly (including commercial and industrial sectors) considered the establishment of a membership association as the innovation (Fiorito & Jarley, 1992), the role of professional and industry associations in diffusion within an innovation system (e.g., Koschatzky et al., 2014; Maennig & Ölschläger, 2011; Newell & Swan, 1995), and, relatedly, the impact of firm engagement in membership associations on the innovation performance of the firm (e.g., Guisado-González et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019). There appears to be a dearth of research examining innovation, and radicalness in particular, within membership associations, as well as grassroots types specifically. To provide a foundation for our study, we turn to a review of existing research on innovation in CSOs, since they are a type of nonprofit membership associations.

Together, CSO research has considered the types, determinants, and processes of innovations pertaining to local sport programs and services for participants across the age span, as well as the structure and delivery of those programs and services. Innovations have been aimed at, for example, easing the burden of volunteers, strengthening the quality of sport programs and their delivery, and growing the membership of the club in its community, reflecting both social and economic views of innovation in this context. These foci align with fundamental goals of CSOs, so it is important to better understand the nature and process of innovation in this context.

Addressing an identified gap in the literature, Hoeber et al. (2015) explored the extent and nature of innovation in CSOs, focusing on the Canadian context. Interviews with leaders of 42 clubs engaged with either a traditional or more contemporary sport revealed that these grassroots membership-based nonprofits are indeed innovative, identifying a total of 188 innovations they had taken up in the previous three years. The investigators

reported that the innovations were predominantly administrative and focused on systems changes regarding information technology, human resource management, and finances (in comparison to technical innovations, which focused on program delivery and equipment); and they were predominantly determined to be incremental (as opposed to radical), as characterized by what seemed to be lesser degrees of departure from existing practice. However, the authors acknowledged the challenge of interpreting the degree of radicalness themselves because what may be considered minor or major can vary from setting to setting. They nonetheless highlighted the variety of innovations being pursued by CSOs, and they noted that clubs “need access to existing knowledge, from internal and external sources, or the ability to create new knowledge in order to adopt and implement the innovations” (Hoerber et al., 2015, p. 518).

In an earlier case study of a nonprofit soccer club, Hoerber and Hoerber (2012) focused on its adoption of a technical innovation (electronic game sheets) and the innovation process that unfolded in doing so, including conditions at the managerial, organizational, and environmental levels. They found that leader commitment (managerial factor) and club capacity (organizational factor) were critical determinants of the innovation adoption. More recently, building on the earlier work of Hoerber and colleagues, Corthouts et al. (2020) conducted a survey study of the conditions or determinants of different types of innovation adopted in CSOs in Europe. The innovations, “special initiatives” that were introduced into the clubs for specific target groups (women and girls, children and adolescents, people with disabilities, migrants, and the elderly), were classified by the technical-administrative typology. Managerial (attitude to social inclusion, health, and transformation), organizational (size, age, and capacity), and environmental (urbanization and competition) conditions for innovation were also considered. The authors reported that managerial attitude, financial capacity, and the extent of competition from commercial or for-profit clubs were significant predictors of both technical and administrative innovation in the clubs. Human resource capacity (presence of paid staff) was a singular predictor of technical innovations.

In a survey study with Flemish nonprofit sport organizations, including CSOs, Corthouts et al. (2023) applied their three-dimensional model of innovation form (process and product), nature (administrative and technical), and goal (commercial success and social benefit) to describe the nuances of innovations in clubs. They found that CSOs were more likely to implement technical rather than administrative innovations, which is in contrast to Hoerber et al.’s (2015) findings about the prevalence of administrative over technical innovations. Corthouts et al. (2023) suggested that the contrast may be a function of the lesser constraints on technical innovations by Flemish law and perhaps a particular uptake of technology and social media in the support of program delivery and club growth by the clubs studied. They also reported a predominant focus on social (e.g., inclusion and health focus) as opposed to commercial goals associated with the clubs’ innovations. In their multi-layered study, the authors found very little impact of managerial (attitude towards change) or environmental factors (cooperation, competition) on innovation adoption. The most consistent organizational conditions for innovation were organization age and a focus on general health and healthy exercise. The authors suggest that nuances of innovation may not be captured in surface level survey research like theirs. Neither Hoerber and Hoerber (2012) nor Corthouts et al. (2020, 2023) considered the magnitude or radicalness of the innovation(s) they examined.

In a shift in focus, Wemmer and Koenigstorfer (2016) and Wemmer et al. (2016) examined open innovation in CSOs. Open innovation is “the purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate internal innovation, and expand the markets for external use of innovation, respectively” (Chesbrough, 2006, p. 1). Based on interviews with leaders of 11 nonprofit sport clubs in Germany, Wemmer and Koenigstorfer found that

“coopetition”, both competition *and* cooperation with other clubs, drives success in adopting and implementing outside knowledge in their innovating practices. Having members that are engaged and committed to contributing their human capital to the venture is also important. Subsequently, [Wemmer et al. \(2016\)](#) examined the impact of coopetition on open innovation and performance in German nonprofit sport clubs. The survey of club board members revealed that collaboration with competitors, and particularly the use of the outside knowledge aspect of open innovation, was a significant factor for innovations that supported the financial stability and membership development of the clubs. Building on that work and unpacking the knowledge aspects of innovation further, [Delshab et al. \(2022\)](#) conducted a survey study of CSOs in Iran and found that knowledge management processes (e.g., knowledge creation, knowledge sharing) led to a positive attitude toward newness among members, as well as openness to ideas. In turn, these attitudes supported open innovation and, ultimately, organizational performance. In these works, too, the radicalness of the innovations was not considered.

With some attention to more radical innovation, [Chard et al. \(2020\)](#) identified a deleterious phenomenon of ice hockey tournament scheduling that was causing elite adolescent players to miss a large number of school days, and they proposed what they believe to be a “disruptive strategic innovation” (p. 5) that would be expected to require a “shift in the mindset” (p. 10). However, they too wondered “what constitutes a relatively small change?” (p. 11). Their proposed innovation calls for research to better understand what clubs perceive to be more radical or more incremental changes and the conditions (and consequences) for each. We address this call and the need for greater insight to radicalness in CSOs in the current study.

Our exploration of the nature, adoption, and consequences of radical innovation, as well as its complement incremental innovation, builds on and extends what is known about innovation in the grassroots nonprofit context of CSOs. It also further supports theorizing about the radicalness of innovation by examining the “chain of innovation” more thoroughly (cf. [Damanpour, 2020](#)). To do this, our investigation was guided by several research questions:

- (1) Do CSOs engage in what they perceive to be radical innovation?
- (2) What type(s) of innovations (technical and/or administrative) are radical and incremental in CSOs?
- (3) Does the adoption process and consequences of radical and incremental innovation differ for CSOs?

## 4. Method

We adopted a comparative case study design informed by a post-positivist interpretivist paradigm ([Denzin & Lincoln, 2000](#)) to examine innovation in CSOs that perceived that they engaged in both radical and incremental innovation. Approval from the REBs of the lead authors’ institutions was obtained prior to contact with participants.

### 4.1. Participants

We engaged in purposive sampling of CSOs that had considered or adopted both radical and incremental innovations in the previous three years. Waves of samples of CSOs across a variety of sports and small/medium (popn. less than 100,000) and large-metro (100,000+) communities in Ontario, Canada, were contacted based on email addresses available in the public domain. The president of each CSO was invited via email to participate in the study if their club met the stated inclusion criteria. Radical and incremental innovations were distinguished for prospective participants as that which “involves a significant departure from existing practice” and “involves less of a departure from how things are



done”, respectively. Ensuring participants were able to compare between the two types of innovations increased their ability to distinguish respective attributes, conditions, and consequences. We conducted telephone interviews with the president (or representative) of 14 CSOs from 11 different sports in 4 small–medium and 5 large-metro communities across the province. Sampling continued until data saturation was reached. Club leaders we spoke with were in their role between 1 and 12 years (average 4.25 years), and all were or had been involved in their club in other ways between 2 and 31 years (average 13 years).

#### 4.2. Data Collection and Analysis

In line with [Damanpour \(2020\)](#), a semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit descriptions of the attributes of what the participants considered to, first, be a radical innovation in their club, aspects of the innovation adoption process (awareness and intent, conditions, and decision), and the impact or consequences of that innovation to date. The series of questions was then repeated for what the participants considered to be an incremental innovation in their club. Given our focus on innovation within CSOs and their experiences, we explored innovation from ‘the eye of the beholder’ perspective, which is consistent with the social view and contrasts the economic view of what the broader market considers to be innovative ([Damanpour, 2020](#)). This approach also helps to counter a possible ‘pro-innovation’ bias ([Rogers, 2003](#)), where innovation is presumed to be only positive for organizations, by uncovering clubs’ actual experiences. The interviews were conducted at the convenience of participants, and all participants were audio recorded with their verbal consent. The interviews, which averaged 40 min, were transcribed verbatim and returned to participants for verification, with very few adjustments made.

The data were subject to thematic analysis ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)) involving both deductive and inductive coding. As a team, we developed open coding frameworks for what the participants indicated as radical and incremental innovations, based on the conceptual framework, prior research, and interview questions. The data were deductively coded as a first step according to the (1) meaning of radical/incremental innovation, (2) type (administrative, technical), (3) intent of the innovation, (4) awareness of the innovation, (5) managerial, organizational and environmental conditions, (6) decision process, and (7) consequences. Further inductive coding was undertaken by all team members independently and then collaboratively based on patterns of themes across the data within these open codes, where relevant.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Type and Radicalness of Innovations

The participants described innovations they deemed radical for their club as “huge” and “significant”, and that they “affected everybody across the board”. One club president noted that “nobody really has done anything like this at all in [the city]”, while the leader of another club shared that “what we offer... has really changed the concept of [the sport for youth]”. The radical innovations were also described as “foreign” and taking “a big step forward by doing that”. Specific innovations that were described as radical included introducing events and programs for new members (eight clubs), hiring athletes to coach (one club), and introducing sport officials development (one club), which we interpreted to constitute technical innovations as new products, services, or ways to deliver those. Employing new interactive media platforms (three clubs), instituting a new organizational structure (two clubs), and partnering with a facility owner (one club) were determined to represent administrative innovations as changes to the social system of the organization. Radical administrative innovations were less common than technical ones (See Table 1).

**Table 1.** Radical and incremental innovations in CSOs.

| Radical Innovations  | Incremental Innovations  |
|--|--|
| <i>Technical innovations</i><br>Introduction of events and programs for new members (8 clubs)<br>Hiring athletes to coach (1 club)<br>Introduction of sport officials development (1 club) | <i>Technical innovations</i><br>Adaptation to existing event program (4 clubs)<br>Acquisition of new training equipment and instructional tools (2 clubs)  |
| <i>Administrative innovations</i><br>Introduction of interactive media platform (3 clubs)<br>New organizational structure (2 clubs)<br>Partnership with facility owner (1 club)            | <i>Administrative innovations</i><br>Adjustment to organizational structure and culture (4 clubs)<br>Additional media platform (2 clubs)<br>Development of strategic plan (1 club)<br>Image rebranding (1 club)<br>Collaboration with other clubs (1 club) |

In comparison, incremental innovations considered or implemented by the clubs were described as “a no brainer” and “basic, mundane”. These innovations were generally seen as an add-on to or adaption of existing practice, albeit new to their club that “didn’t even register on the Richter scale” and were described as a “normal process” of club and sport evolution. The incremental innovations included adaptations to existing club events and programs (four clubs) and the acquisition of new training equipment and instructional tools (two clubs), which were technical in nature and less common. Administrative incremental innovations included adjustments to organizational structure and culture (four clubs), the addition of a media platform (two clubs), the development of a strategic plan (one club), image rebranding (one club), and a collaboration with other clubs (one club), and they were more common across the sample.

## 5.2. Innovation Adoption

### 5.2.1. Awareness and Intent

Most of the radical innovations were adopted from existing practices outside the club and were adapted to the club’s particular needs and environment. As one club president described, “[the innovation] is not unique. There are other clubs that have youth programs. [However], this approach, maybe, was unique with mountain biking and road biking alternatively”. The club did not previously offer any youth programming but knew of successful programs in other clubs and decided to introduce their own. Only two CSOs generated their ideas internally, and these pertained to introducing or substantially redesigning programs for greater fun and participation. The external sources of radical innovations were sport models (following recommended best practices), other clubs, the general environment, and a club member’s previous experience. The incremental innovations were also predominantly adopted from outside the club but were taken up directly or adapted to the club’s context in equal measure. When asked how the incremental innovation was first introduced, a club president explained that (similar to radical innovations) they “[were] just bringing best practices from another club I had belonged to when I lived in [another province]. It was just taking the best parts of all these different clubs and bringing it back to [the current club]”. Both types of innovations were predominantly brought to the club, and specifically the board, by board/executive members; however, radical innovations were also notably introduced by club members and coaches outside the board. As one club president described, “We get [radical] innovation from everybody!”

The intent of the radical innovations were club growth and club management, with specific objectives of building membership and program offerings, introducing new pro-

gram design, enhanced human resources capacity, and improved operations. For example, one club implemented a more formal structure in order to expand their target market and, ultimately, increase their membership:

What we wanted to do was. . . open [the club] up to children and youth to develop the sport in our area and in order to do that, anytime you work with children, you have to do what's more organized. So basically, it was out of necessity that drove [this]. . . radical change. (club president)

Another club, focused on improving their operations, took up the radical innovation as “hopefully it will allow us to get volunteers that we haven’t had before” (club president). In contrast, the intent of incremental innovations was participant development along with club management, with specific objectives of member development and satisfaction, and improved club operations. A club president described the goal as follows:

professionalization of the board, bringing best practices in how the board functions within the club. . . the incremental change was more in reflection with how the club operates, and how the board operates, and the confidence that everybody had. And the stability that, I think, having an active, strategic president.

### 5.2.2. Innovation Conditions and Decisions

**Board-level factors.** The conditions for the decision to adopt (and further adapt) the radical innovations included what was determined to be board-level factors given that the strategic leadership of the club is the board, as well as organizational and environmental factors (see Table 2). Board culture was consistently described as a key factor in the consideration and uptake of radical innovations, specifically an openness to innovation, willingness to take risks, and commitment to the survival/success of the sport and the club. A club president described the board’s support of a new children’s program:

One thing I’m lucky enough to have is my board. My whole board is pretty open to the betterment of the program, so whatever we can do to make the program better, they’re open to it.

In addition to a culture of openness and risk taking, another club president described the informality and trust that allows their board to move on radical ideas:

We’re a pretty laid back kind of group; not very formal. [A member] sent me an email and said ‘how about this idea?’ . . . and I said I’d poll the other members of the Executive. . . We don’t usually hold. . . face to face meetings. We have email meetings simply because people work different shifts. Consequently, we asked them through emails and so on, the do’s and don’ts and what-ifs.

Another key, and common, aspect of board support of radical innovation was an idea champion within the board who promoted the idea:

I put [the idea] out as an email, saying this is the idea I want to propose at our next meeting. . . A few of our board members came back with a couple of concerns they had with it. When we had our next meeting, I already had prepared what we could do to rectify those issues. . . Once it was brought up, it was pretty much left to me. They said that everybody would support me whenever they can. (club president).

The impact of an idea champion was enhanced if that person was believed to be an expert on the topic. Indeed, board members’ human capital was another factor identified as important to a positive decision to innovate. Their expertise and experience instilled confidence within the board when members shared their opinion about the potential change: “We kind of instill trust in each other. . . [if] someone is a financial expert, and they

bring up a financial issue, we... trust their judgement because it's their expertise" (club president). Board members' connections outside the club were also noted as valuable to the adoption of radical innovations. For example, a club president explained that "I looked and contacted some of my family members in [another country] who are playing, who played professional or semi-professional, and asked them what they do for that age group".

**Table 2.** Summary of conditions for radical and incremental innovation in CSOs.

| Factor         |                 | Radical Innovation   | Incremental Innovation   |
|----------------|-----------------|--|--|
| Board-level    | Board Culture   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Openness to new ideas</li> <li>• Willingness to take risks</li> <li>• Commitment to sport/club success or survival</li> <li>• Informality</li> <li>• Trust</li> </ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Consensus</li> </ul>         |
|                | Idea Champion   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within the board</li> </ul>   |  |
|                | Human Capital   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise, experience</li> <li>• Connections</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expertise</li> <li>• Experience</li> </ul>          |
| Organizational | Club Culture    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cooperation</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Accountability</li> </ul>   |
|                | Capacity        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources (sufficient and skilled)</li> <li>• Financial resources (sufficient funds to implement)</li> <li>• Physical resources (available facilities and equipment)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human resources (sufficient and skilled)</li> </ul> |
| Environmental  | Market          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunity</li> <li>• Competition</li> </ul>       |
|                | Institutional   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice</li> <li>• Mandated</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Best practice</li> </ul>                            |
|                | Societal Trends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technology</li> </ul>   |  |

Board-level culture and human capital were also identified as factors for the adoption of incremental innovation but with far less emphasis on each, suggesting that they are less or perhaps of varying importance for the more evolutionary changes that characterize incremental innovation for the CSOs. A board culture that values cooperation for agreement and even consensus at this strategic level of the organizations was described as positive for incremental change. The expertise and experience of board members were highlighted as well, although, again, with far less emphasis than for radical innovations.

**Organizational factors.** These conditions also featured in the clubs' consideration and decision to adopt what they described as a radical innovation. The club culture, in general, was a common factor and specifically characterized as cooperative, with sharing and collaboration among members deemed an important condition for engaging in very new initiatives or practices. Club capacity was another common factor, with a particular focus on having sufficient and skilled human resources for the board to feel the club as a whole can take up the innovation and ensure its success. One club president described it as follows:

The only concern people had [about the innovation] was where are we going to get the manpower. You know, we're a non-profit organization. . . [and] the project is based on volunteerism, so we're already thin as it is. There's not many people banging down our door, so that was a concern that people had, you know, who's going to run this, how can we run it, are we going to have more manpower?

This condition was the only evidence of resistance to radical innovation, with another president describing that "they were being pretty vocal in saying that their time was limited to help out".

Financial resources was another key and common organizational factor in the decision to adopt a radical innovation in the club. A club president explained that

We had this business plan put together to [purchase necessary equipment to run a new program] through our annual revenue, but it would have taken eight years to get everything we wanted. With the [grant] award, we were able to purchase all [equipment] needed to start this. . . program.

Physical resources and particularly facilities and equipment to implement the idea were also noted as a key condition for the technical radical innovations of new programming. Notably, financial and physical resources were described as both driving and inhibiting conditions for radical innovation, in some cases prompting novel opportunities and in others being something to overcome in order to adopt a new practice.

For incremental innovations, club culture was also a factor in their adoption but with a focus on the importance of transparency and accountability in decision making across the club. As one club president noted, "[If] it's not transparent, it's not fair. We don't know, the general membership doesn't know what the criteria are and how the allocations have been made" in support of an innovation. Club capacity was also a key factor in incremental innovation adoption, and similar to radical innovation, the availability of skilled and reliable personnel was considered key. Sufficient financial resources, equipment, and space (physical resources) were rarely noted.

**Environmental factors.** The external environment was described as an important condition for the adoption of radical innovations, including market, institutional, and societal aspects. Perceived opportunities to draw in new members were a common driving force for big changes and align with the objective of club growth. A CSO president described the need and opportunity to do more:

The way [the club] tried to attract people in the past was that they would print off a bunch of flyers, go to the local [sport shops], put up a flyer and hope people came. The problem with that is that you're attracting the same people who would come anyways. You're not really attracting a new demographic. So we decided we needed to look beyond.

Institutional forces, and particularly perceived best practices, were as prominent as market potential for radical innovations. Best practices were evident and shared from the clubs' governing bodies and other clubs. A club president described that "The [provincial sport governing body] is promoting a new approach to organizing [the sport] for younger players. . . So we're looking at carrying along with that organization of the game". Another president explained that "there are other clubs that have done this. They actually have posted on their websites, and we take them and modify them". One example was given of a mandated change (by the sport's governing body) that was perceived as radical innovation by the club. Finally, societal trends were described to a lesser extent as a condition for radical change, and they were related primarily to the adoption of new technology available to any users; the uptake of such technology may not be new to the world but was considered a great departure from normal practice for the CSOs involved.



The impact of environmental factors on the adoption of incremental innovations was less emphatic. It included market opportunity to attract new members and competition in the market which prompted new practices (even though club growth was not a strategic intent of incremental innovation). Interestingly, competition was not observed for radical innovation. In only a few cases, best practices observed in other CSOs served as a prompt from the institutional environment to adopt initiatives that had been taken up by other clubs.

**Decision.** The decision to adopt a radical innovation was exclusively a formal process for the clubs, requiring approval by the board in most cases and at the club's annual general meeting in the other cases. For incremental innovation, the decisions were primarily formal and only involved the board, although some were informal and adopted through casual discussion. One president described how the incremental change to a program of the club unfolded:

I probably emailed the other executive members but there wasn't any real discussion about it. Most of our [programs] are set up that way. Somebody comes up and says "Well I'd like to start a [program] on Mondays and we would do this" and it's not too formal.

### 5.3. Consequences of Implementation

Two-thirds of the clubs had implemented their radical and incremental innovations at the time of the study, with the remainder still in the planning stages. For the radical innovations underway, the CSOs reported that objectives had been (or were being) met already, particularly around new programming and increased membership. A club president stated that "[the program] is doing things for us. . . and has helped us immensely in grooming young kids to get in the competitive field [of the sport]", while another shared that "we really widened our network" with the adoption of a new media platform.

Notably, the presidents or their representatives described a variety of unexpected, predominantly positive, outcomes of the radical innovations, including a stronger board culture because of the radical innovation experience; a greater sense of ownership, responsibility, and power on the part of the club within its domain; increased number of volunteers; existing member satisfaction; improved branding; new grants and partnerships; positive outcomes for the club's partner; and continued change within the club. A club president stated that

It actually helped out the program. . . in the fact that we now have some very good people involved with the [children's] program and I think once their kids graduate. . . into the competitive side, I think those parents will probably also follow their children and go into competitive side and help out with the competitive board, which is. . . a lot more work. . . As well as getting teams, we're also getting more people on board to help out, which is key.

The objectives of sport participant development and club improvement were met as a result of the incremental innovations as well. Unanticipated outcomes were far more limited than for radical innovations, which focused on an expanded market for the CSOs' programs and services; again, something that was not a goal of incremental innovation from the outset.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

The findings provide new and extended insights to radicalness in CSOs, addressing an apparent gap in the study of innovation in (grassroots, nonprofit) membership associations more broadly. Addressing the first research question, the presidents (or their representative) of the 14 CSOs we studied were clearly able to distinguish incremental versus more

radical innovations adopted by their club, in line with the characteristics of radicalness, namely the degree of originality or novelty, departure from existing practice, and impact (Damanpour, 2020). Radical innovations were identified as things that are brand new to the sport or to the community in which the club exists as a substantial change to existing practice and not just an adjustment or revision (incremental innovations were seen as more of an “add-on” to what the club was doing), as well as having a wide and deep impact that has “affected everybody” in the club by taking “a big step forward”. What may be perceived as radical in the nonprofit grassroots membership associations we studied may not be viewed as such in larger nonprofit or in for-profit organizations. Both radical and incremental innovations focused on improving club management; however, the former also focused on club growth (e.g., through a new registration system), while the latter addressed participant development (e.g., new equipment for quality participation). An interesting feature of the radicalness of the innovations in the CSOs is that most of the radical innovations were adapted to the context and capacity of the club (infrastructure, finances, and human resources), while the incremental innovations were equally adopted directly or adapted further. This aspect of radicalness does not appear to have been considered and may be a valuable direction for further research in terms of exploring the extent to which new knowledge is adapted, perhaps rendering it incremental in the end. The findings also suggest that the adaptation-progression approach that is consistent with a social view of innovation, operational efficiency, and survival (Damanpour, 2020) also reflects a continuum that appears to coincide with radicalness: radical innovation observed in our study was consistent with higher adaptation and progression in the CSOs, while incremental innovation was consistent with both adaptation and direct adoption (lesser adaptation) as well as lesser club progression.

In response to the second research question, the radical innovations were predominantly technical, associated with the CSOs’ basic work activity of providing sport programming (cf. Damanpour, 2020; Damanpour & Evan, 1984). New sport programs or events, for example, represent changes to the primary work activity of clubs, while expanding their potential membership market. The observation that incremental changes are more likely to be administrative in nature coincides with Hoeber et al.’s (2015) report that the CSOs in their study were more likely to engage in administrative (59%) compared to technical (41%) innovations, suggesting that these sets of attributes (radical, technical; incremental, administrative) align. However, radical innovations also included administrative changes, pertaining to clubs’ organizational structure, administrative processes, and human resources development (cf. Damanpour, 2020). Thus, as Damanpour (2020) explains, not all radical innovations are technical in nature. While Weerawardena and Mort (2012) did not specifically consider the types of innovation in their study of radical and incremental innovations in nonprofit organizations, they do report what appear to be both technical and administrative changes, reinforcing that radical innovations may be a variety of types. Non-technical, administrative innovations may be assumed to be incremental, but some organizations undertake substantial changes to their operations.

With respect to the third research question, the CSOs’ radical and incremental innovations were predominantly adopted from outside the organization. This reliance on knowledge and ideas for innovation from external sources is consistent with research on CSOs (Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2016; Wemmer et al., 2016), other non-sport industries, and the for-profit sector (Engen & Holen, 2014; Forés & Camisón, 2016; Koberg et al., 2003), and thus, this is not particular to the grassroots membership nonprofits in this study. Hoeber et al. (2015) contended that CSOs “need to access existing knowledge, or the ability to create new knowledge, in order to adopt and implement the innovations” (p. 531), and their heavy reliance on knowledge from outside the club is evident. There were a few examples of both radical and incremental

innovations generated within the CSOs, but that was certainly the exception. [Forés and Camisón \(2016\)](#) found that internal knowledge creation was sufficient for incremental innovation among the 952 firms they studied; however, it was insufficient for radical innovations in that context, where the absorptive capacity of the firms to identify, acquire, transform, and implement new knowledge was a direct condition of radical innovation, an observation that was reinforced by [Engen and Holen's \(2014\)](#) finding that the successful adoption of radical (vs. incremental) innovations was more dependent on information from customers. This is similar to radical innovation in the nonprofit CSOs we studied, as knowledge and ideas for these novel practices were also brought to the board by club members in what may be seen as a “co-production” between CSO “consumers” ([Brandsen et al., 2020](#)) and the governing board members.

The intentions of the CSOs in our sample for radical and incremental innovations were similar with regard to improving club management, albeit different aspects. However, radical innovations were also intended to address club growth (membership and sport programs) with an outward focus, while incremental innovations were targeted to participant development (sport participation, personal growth, and satisfaction), with an internal focus. Thus, the goals of the radical innovations appear to align with both economic-based (competition-wealth) and social-based (adaptation-progression) views. It suggests that, just as there may be a mix of types of radical innovations (technical and administrative), they may also have economic and social goals. [Corthouts et al. \(2023\)](#) found that the nonprofit sport organizations they studied had overwhelmingly social goals for their innovation, suggesting that they may have been examining predominantly incremental changes, which may be most common in CSOs anyway (cf. [Hoerber et al., 2015](#)). Taken together, the findings support the complexity and potential nuances of radical innovation and radicalness that warrant further exploration.

The research literature indicates that some conditions are different for radical and incremental innovations, and some are similar across the continuum of radicalness (in other words for all innovations). Our findings in the context of the nonprofit CSOs are consistent with this observation. A positive attitude or perspective at the managerial (or board) level has been reported to be an important condition for any magnitude of innovation in other studies ([Corthouts et al., 2020](#); [Delshab et al., 2022](#); [Dewar & Dutton, 1986](#); [Hoerber & Hoerber, 2012](#); [Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2016](#)). Highlighting a further nuance of radical innovation, the clubs in our study indicated the importance of a board characterized by openness to ideas and willingness to take risks for this degree of change in these nonprofit grassroots membership associations. Cooperation and consensus only were indicated for considering and making decisions about incrementally new ideas. Similarly, [Koberg et al. \(2003\)](#) found that a culture of experimentation, which supports flexibility and strategic responsiveness to a changing environment while remaining focused on the present, was only meaningful for radical innovations in firms across a variety of industries. Radical innovations, by definition, constitute big and perhaps never before experienced changes for organizations, so an assumption and acceptance of risk must inherently be part of their successful adoption.

Although nonprofit board members with expertise and experience that can support an innovation were important factors for both radical and incremental innovation, they were emphasized more for the former than the latter. The particular importance of individual expertise for radical innovation was highlighted by [Weerawardena and Mort \(2012\)](#) in their study of nonprofits and [Dewar and Dutton's \(1986\)](#) study of manufacturing firms, and in particular, it was highlighted in our study for radical idea champions. Weerawardena and Mort also reported the importance of radical innovation for individuals with outside networks, a finding that parallels our observation of board member connections for radical innovations in the CSOs. Thus, human capital appears to be a necessary condition for the

adoption of any magnitude of innovation, but relevant skills and experience, as well as external connections, appear to be particularly important for more radical changes. Future research is warranted to unpack the specific skills and experiences that may be critical to radical versus technical innovation in this context.

Club culture was an organizational condition for innovation across the radicalness spectrum, although the nature of that culture varied for radical and incremental changes. Cooperation and collaboration across the club was found to be important for radical innovations, suggesting that it is important if not necessary for members of these nonprofit grassroots associations (and not just the board) to be engaged in and committed to the idea and its implementation. This extends [Wemmer and Koenigstorfer's \(2016\)](#) conceptualization of the importance of managerial commitment; however, they did not specify the radicalness of innovation in their model. In contrast, incremental innovation in the CSOs was dependent on members being informed so that they can understand the relatively minor changes taking place.

Club capacity was another important condition, both in driving and deterring innovation in the CSOs we studied. Capacity continues to be of particular interest in CSO research, with attention to the multiple dimensions that may impact club performance in general (e.g., operations, quality programming, community presence; [Doherty & Cuskelly, 2020](#)) and specific initiatives (e.g., [Kitchin & Crossin, 2018](#); [Nowy et al., 2020](#)). However, it does not appear to have been examined with regard to innovation. Human and financial resource capacity have been identified as consistently critical dimensions across a variety of CSO circumstances. The dimension of human resources, and specifically sufficient, skilled volunteers, was important to both incremental and radical innovations in our study, highlighting its centrality in this aspect of CSOs as well. However, financial (and well as physical resources) capacity was identified only for the adoption of radical innovations. CSOs, like other grassroots membership associations, have been known to do what they can with the personnel they have available. However, the findings suggest that radical innovations, which may require not just a bigger investment in knowledge (cf. [Hoeber et al., 2015](#)) but also finances, are circumscribed by this dimension. The findings also suggest that CSOs may innovate within their capacity to do so, particularly with regard to human resources and finances.

A number of environmental conditions for innovation in the nonprofit CSOs were identified, with some variation between radical and incremental. A market opportunity for the club was indicated as an important driver of both degrees of innovation, even though club growth was not an innovation goal of CSOs engaging in incremental innovations. They may have realized this opportunity as they drew on knowledge from other clubs and perceived that they would be more “out there” by adopting practices that other CSOs had been using. Notably, competition in the sport club environment was identified as a driver of incremental innovation only, and again perhaps surprisingly as their goals for innovation were improved for club management and participant development. Again, when drawing new ideas from outside the club, a perception of what others were doing in the same domain may have prompted a sense of competition to at least stay in the game. Competition is not innate to nonprofit organizations (e.g., [Svensson et al., 2020](#)); however, it is being examined particularly in the context of CSOs (e.g., [Rossi et al., 2024](#)) and may increasingly be a driver of innovation, as well as radicalness for these nonprofits.

A more complete investigation of the “chain of innovation”, particularly regarding radicalness, is missing ([Damanpour, 2020](#)), and our study addresses this gap by also reporting at least a small contrast between decision making for radical compared to incremental innovations. As perhaps expected, given the magnitude of the respective innovations, decision making was exclusively a formal process for radical changes, involving the board most commonly but also the full club in some CSOs. This may be a function of the riskiness

of radical innovation, which may be tempered by the formality of the decision process, as well as the trust of members in an idea champion who carried the idea through. In contrast, some incremental innovations were decided on more informally and even through casual discussion. This too warrants further investigation to determine whether the formality of decision making aligns with the continuum of radicalness, with implications for managing those decisions.

It was encouraging to see the positive impact for the clubs that implemented radical and incremental innovations, although we note below that this may reflect a limitation of the study. Nonetheless, what may be most interesting was the evidence of unanticipated, positive consequences of the CSOs' innovations, with many more examples given for the radical than incremental changes implemented. The findings suggest that there is more of a ripple effect with the major changes in the CSOs, including an appetite for still further development.

### *6.1. Implications for Theory and Practice*

Our findings make several contributions to innovation theory, particularly the concept of radicalness. The focus on CSOs, a type of nonprofit grassroots membership association, provides insight to the types, awareness of new knowledge, intent, conditions, decision making, and consequences of radical versus incremental innovations that may be found in this context. The specific findings may not be generalizable beyond the context of the 14 Ontario CSOs we studied; however, our observations highlight new insights concerning radicalness that may be explored further in a broader sample of CSOs and in similar types of nonprofit grassroots membership associations (e.g., arts groups, cultural associations, and recreation clubs).

Our findings suggest that radical innovations are more likely to be technical than administrative in type but not exclusively. Several examples of radical administrative changes to organizational structure and operations were considered to be of great magnitude. Economic-based innovations focused on competition-wealth in relation to the marketplace, and specifically, club membership growth in the current study may tend to be more radical than incremental in similar contexts, perhaps given their outward focus and a perceived need for bigger and even riskier change to attract new members. Radicalness of innovations may be distinguished by who brings the ideas to a decision making level and whether the new knowledge is adapted or adopted directly. Radical innovations in the current study were brought forward by members throughout the organization and were exclusively adapted to the context and capacity of the CSO. In contrast, more incremental innovations were identified by the board and were adapted and adopted in equal measure. Radicalness of the innovations described by the CSOs varied in the conditions driving (or impeding) the magnitude of changes, with radical innovations supported uniquely by a board's focus on the bigger picture (success, survival), willingness to take risks, expertise, champions, and capacity. Our findings suggest that these conditions exist along a continuum that parallels radicalness.

The findings extend our understanding of innovation in CSOs as an important and valuable mechanism for increasing their capacity to achieve their sport development goals. Research to date suggests that these nonprofit grassroots membership associations are clearly moving beyond traditional ways of delivering sport, and the clubs we studied were adopting programs and practices that represent both incremental and more radical changes. Radical changes tended to be around the growth and further development of the club in general, while athlete development tended to be associated with incremental changes, all implied in the degrees of change. The continuum of radicalness uncovered here, and associated conditions, may provide a platform to help the CSOs in our study,



and similar grassroots nonprofit membership associations, navigate a range of innovations in their context. Further, regional, provincial, and national sport governing bodies that direct sport policy and strategy to CSOs with the intention of guiding various changes at the community sport level (e.g., introduction of disability sport, changes to coaching development, and safe sport practices) should be aware of what CSOs consider to be innovative, as well as how they process innovation. Our research highlights what may be important considerations for the successful adoption of change that is considered innovative and radical for CSOs. Additional support from those governing bodies may be required. Important considerations for CSOs and stakeholders may include the possibility that idea champions who can push a radical idea through to implementation are critical and may be found anywhere in the club, although they are likely a skilled, experienced, and respected individual; the impetus and ideas to innovate can come from within and beyond the club; capacity barriers to innovation must be acknowledged and addressed before adoption, and existing capacity strengths that are fundamental to successful innovation adoption should also be recognized and leveraged. Radical, and seemingly to a lesser extent, incremental innovations may elicit unanticipated consequences that CSOs should be prepared for in order to capitalize on those (often) bonus outcomes. These findings have implications for CSOs to be aware of the seemingly greater potential of radical innovations to elicit other changes, as well as to be ready for those, especially as some may be incremental and subject to any of the conditions outlined in this study and even radical and reliant on the particular conditions associated with the update of that magnitude of change.

#### *6.2. Limitations and Directions for Future Research*

We aimed to counter a possible pro-innovation bias in favor of innovation as a positive organizational practice (Rogers, 2003) by uncovering CSOs' actual experiences rather than broader market perceptions of what is radical or even innovative. However, we only spoke with leaders of clubs that had successfully implemented, or were set to implement, radical and incremental innovations, and thus, our sample was limited to clubs that were able to move forward with both. The sample was intentionally delimited to nonprofit CSOs that had experience with both forms of innovation in order to help participants distinguish between and describe radical and incremental practices, which was the intent of the study. Building on this investigation, future research should explore a greater range of CSO experiences including clubs that prioritize one type of innovation over the other, those that reject innovation altogether, and those that fail to adopt or implement either type.

Given the investment associated with radical innovation in CSOs (by the board, members, and sometimes in partnership with other organizations) and the unintended but generally positive outcomes experienced, longitudinal qualitative study designs that follow radical innovations over time would be informative. These include participatory action research, action research, and/or ethnography that may be best served by researchers being closely aligned with or perhaps even embedded in organizations to be able to observe and follow the innovation process. Understanding the radicalness of innovation in CSOs may also be extended with field survey research that aims to quantitatively verify the themes identified in the current study, and in subsequent work, verify these themes in a broader sample of clubs and across different cultural, legal, and financial contexts.

Building on the work of Delshab et al. (2022) and Wemmer et al. (2016) in the CSO context, the phenomenon of open innovation and coopetition may be explored with respect to radical innovation (or the continuum of radicalness). These are intriguing practices in the context of nonprofit sport and other organizations and may constitute very effective approaches to growth and performance. Research can unpack the types, conditions, process, and consequences of these approaches with respect to radical innovation.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly as it has been a theme throughout this discussion, scholars should aim to examine and better understand more nuanced degrees of radicalness along its continuum, as well as the corresponding types, conditions, process, and consequences of levels of radicalness, beyond the dichotomy of radical and incremental. The findings of this study illuminate several aspects of innovation that suggest organizations may experience different levels of radicalness and may be limited to less radical innovations than they would like. Unpacking radicalness further can provide a platform for the effective management of this aspect of contemporary nonprofits and CSOs.

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