

Examining the Environmental Characteristics of Shared Leadership in a Sport-for-Development Organization

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To promote community development, sport-for-development (SFD) organizations strive to build local leadership that fosters long-term sustainability. Although shared leadership (SL) structures are particularly effective in these settings, there has been limited attention to SL within the SFD context, especially from a multilevel perspective. While previous studies of leadership in sport have primarily focused on the individual traits of leaders, multilevel analysis is required to understand how environmental characteristics relate to leadership development. This qualitative case study analyzes the development and deployment of SL in an American SFD organization. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are used to generate data, and theoretical thematic analysis is used to identify key themes related to the environmental characteristics of SL. Results highlight how environmental characteristics are related to SL, as well as group and task characteristics. The discussion integrates these findings with SL theory to discuss implications for the management of SFD projects in this context, and recommends integrated forms of leadership that combine shared and servant leadership approaches.

Keywords: case study, community sport organizations, sport organization management

Sport-for-development (SFD) is broadly defined as the use of sport to induce positive changes in areas such as public health, social justice, cross-cultural relations, and economic development (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). One area that has received significant attention is the role of sport in promoting community development (Schulenkorf, Sherry, & Rowe, 2016). Well-designed SFD programs provide settings to unite divided communities behind sport teams, events, and programs (Schulenkorf, 2010), and the strategic management of SFD organizations can help strengthen social relations and build local skills and knowledge (Jones, Edwards, Bocarro, Bunds, & Smith, 2017). The efficacy of this process is contingent upon the empowerment of local communities, which requires the cultivation of local

leaders to communicate goals, mobilize resources, and collectively guide projects in the long term (Schulenkorf, 2010). Sport offers a viable context to develop leadership as sports figures often have high levels of trust and credibility among community members (Burnett, 2006) and the leadership skills developed through volunteering and working in sport organizations can transfer to other important community settings (Parent, Oliver, & Séguin, 2009).

To facilitate this process, scholars recommend “bottom-up,” rather than “top-down,” approaches to managing SFD projects (Schulenkorf, 2012; Skinner, Zakus, & Cowell, 2008). Bottom-up management involves decentralized structures that engage community members in key decision-making processes and leverage prevailing social and institutional networks to facilitate collaborative management (Vail, 2007). This approach necessitates unique leadership strategies that transcend conventional leader–follower dualities, with most scholars indicating that shared leadership (SL) approaches are most effective (Edwards, 2015; Schulenkorf, 2010, 2012; Vail, 2007).

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Interestingly, despite a burgeoning body of literature on SFD projects utilizing decentralized management approaches, there has been far less attention to related SL strategies. Although leadership has remained a popular line of inquiry within the sport management field, a review by Welty Peachey, Damon, Zhou, and Burton (2015) found that SL remains an “avenue of future exploration” (p. 582). In particular, there is a noticeable gap related to the environmental characteristics that influence SL, particularly in the nonprofit community sport sector (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). Understanding these environmental characteristics is particularly salient for SFD projects, considering they often operate in distressed and underserved communities. Complex environmental issues, such as resource deficiencies, entrenched social divides, and limited human capital, often characterize the context of most SFD projects and can influence attempts to facilitate SL. Although previous research has highlighted how SFD organizations engage community members through bottom-up managerial strategies, there is far less insight on how SL is developed in these settings (Schulenkorf, 2017). In fact, Schulenkorf (2017) notes an overall lack of leadership research within the SFD literature and highlights a pressing need for SFD scholarship focused on different leadership strategies.

The purpose of this study was to address that gap by analyzing how environmental characteristics influenced the development of SL in an American SFD organization. Hitt, Beamish, Jackson, and Mathieu’s (2007) multilevel nesting model of leadership was adapted to frame the study, and Pearce and Sims’ (2000) framework of SL was utilized to guide the analysis. This multilevel approach aligns with frameworks in the sport management (e.g., Welty Peachey et al., 2015) and broader leadership (e.g., Yammarino, 2013) literature, and contributes to the special issue by examining how SL is developed in a unique social and managerial context.

Literature Review

Shared Leadership

SL can be defined as “a dynamic, interactive process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 1). The groundswell of interest in SL began in the early-to-middle 20th century, as interest in concepts, such as co-leadership (Solomon, Loeffler, & Frank, 1953), mutual leadership (Bowers & Seashore, 1966), and participative decision making (Vroom & Yetton, 1973) contributed to a paradigmatic shift in how leadership was conceptualized (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Rather than viewing organizations as static hierarchical institutions that produce outputs from inputs, scholars increasingly focused on dynamic interactions between the individuals and groups within them (Drescher & Garbers, 2016). Although the influence of “heroic”

leadership traits remains salient, leadership has been increasingly conceptualized as an embedded feature of multidirectional, rather than just hierarchical, exchanges (Yammarino, Salas, Serban, Shirreffs, & Shuffler, 2012). This perspective is especially salient in the nonprofit sector, where leaders must remain adaptable to unstable resource environments and accountable to multiple goals and stakeholders (Pearce, Yoo, & Alavi, 2004).

In contrast to traditional forms of leadership where power and influence is centralized in one individual or group, SL structures distribute leadership responsibilities broadly across the organization (Pearce & Conger, 2003). This approach is intended to draw on the unique skills and abilities of the collective, not just the leader or leadership group, to inform strategic decision making (Pearce & Manz, 2005). By allowing leaders to emerge around specific needs, organizations are able to integrate more domain-specific knowledge into each decision (D’Innocenzo, Mathieu, & Kukenberger, 2016). This requires a degree of informality that is not typically present in traditional hierarchical leadership structures, as organizations with SL must accommodate lateral influences *among* leaders rather than just downward influences from leaders to followers (Fletcher & Käufer, 2003).

SL is also distinguished by the importance placed on relational interactions (Contractor, DeChurch, Carson, Carter, & Keegan, 2012). Rather than relying on static organizational charts and strict protocols for communication, SL is rooted in dynamic social exchanges between individuals who share leadership responsibilities (Hiller, Day, & Vance, 2006). As leaders emerge around different organizational needs, the function and role of any single person can vary considerably depending on the task (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016). While an individual may take a prominent leadership role for completing tasks within their knowledge domain, they may occupy more of a supportive role in others (Hiller et al., 2006). This multiplexity requires individuals to balance task-oriented roles, such as technical support and coordination, with relational roles, such as building trust and reciprocity among team members (Carson, Tesluk, & Marrone, 2007). Importantly, roles may change as the organization faces new problems, implements new initiatives, and responds to changes in the operating environment (Cox, Pearce, & Perry, 2003).

Similar to other forms of leadership, empirical investigations of SL in applied contexts have produced somewhat mixed results (D’Innocenzo et al., 2016). Most studies indicate SL is positively related to indicators of organizational performance (Hoch & Kozlowski, 2012) and is a better predictor of success than vertical leadership strategies (Ensley, Hmieleski, & Pearce, 2006). In addition, longitudinal studies have outlined how SL structures can help teams adapt to intervening variables, such as cohesion and conflict, which similarly influence organizational performance (Gupta, Huang, & Niranjana, 2010). Yet results have not been uniformly

positive, as some studies have found negative associations between SL and team performance in certain instances (Boies, Lvina, & Martens, 2010). This highlights the need for empirical analyses of SL in different contexts, with particular emphasis on elucidating how SL is developed.

SL and SFD

In the field of sport management, most SL research has focused on the structures of governance guiding amateur and professional sport systems and organizations (e.g., Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2009). Previous studies have analyzed integrated boards and collaborative governance structures, as well as important issues, such as power (Hamm-Kerwin & Doherty, 2010), role ambiguity (Doherty & Hoye, 2011), strategic capabilities (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011), and communication (Hoye, 2004), that significantly influence SL in different sport contexts. Yet very little research has focused on SL within the SFD context. In fact, scholarly attention to SFD leadership has been mostly anecdotal, with only recent studies providing empirical investigations of specific leadership strategies (i.e., *servant leadership* in Wells & Welty Peachey, 2016; Welty Peachey & Burton, 2017). Although this early work has been encouraging, there remains a need for empirical analyses of different leadership approaches to inform the field and identify opportunities for integrated strategies, which have become increasingly prevalent within mainstream leadership research and practice (Pearce, Conger, & Locke, 2008).

Conceptually, SL represents a viable leadership strategy for SFD projects focused on community development. Participatory approaches to management that engage and empower local stakeholders are considered the most effective means to foster long-term and sustainable community change through sport (Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016; Schulenkorf, 2012). Indeed, scholars often juxtapose these bottom-up approaches with the more conventional top-down tactics in which community stakeholders are recipients, rather than partners, in the community development process (Burnett, 2006; Skinner et al., 2008). SL is instrumental to this approach as it brings together diverse stakeholders, allows for shifts in authority and responsibility, and galvanizes community engagement with development initiatives (Vail, 2007). Moreover, SL among local leaders can help communicate goals and objectives, motivate community members, improve coordination, and collectively guide the implementation of locally led initiatives (Edwards, 2015). Moreover, Schulenkorf (2017) alludes to the importance of SL in sustaining SFD programs by suggesting that organizations should “continue to invest in developing the leadership potential of others to help prepare for periods of leadership transition . . .” (p. 5).

Nevertheless, previous research has uncovered unique challenges that may influence the development of SL in SFD contexts, many of which stem from prevailing

environmental characteristics. For example, community development requires participation from the entire community, yet this is not always feasible. In underserved areas, some community members do not have the time, capital, or resources to assume leadership roles in SFD initiatives (Schulenkorf, 2012). This lack of participation can lead to unbalanced leadership systems that limit the voice of certain groups (e.g., low socioeconomic status, racial/ethnic minority, immigrant; Skinner et al., 2008). Moreover, as many SFD organizations struggle to build and maintain organizational capacity, leaders may simply struggle to design, implement, and coordinate effective SL strategies (Schulenkorf, 2012). In addition to the short-term consequences of these deficiencies, falling short of program goals and objectives can also frustrate stakeholders and impinge long-term engagement efforts (Schulenkorf, 2012).

Prevailing sport value systems also influence SFD organizations. Sport value systems can influence leader credibility and prototypicality within sport organizations by causing people to perceive leaders more favorably due to their sporting experience and expertise (Swanson & Kent, 2014). While this credibility can be leveraged effectively in certain instances, it can also inhibit community-building efforts if leaders do not buy into SFD values or have difficulty transferring sport-specific leadership to other domains (Boshoff, 1997). SFD differs from traditional sport practices by strategically leveraging sport programs and policies toward more human-oriented functions, such as community development (Lyras & Welty Peachey, 2011). This represents a specific conceptualization of sport that is not always shared by sport leaders or cultures, especially those focused more on elite performance and competition. In the United States, for example, sport policies and practices generally prioritize elite sport development, so building consensus around SFD values may be especially difficult (Frisby & Millar, 2002; Welty Peachey & Cohen, 2012).

Interestingly, although many of these issues stem from aspects of the broader environment, leadership research in sport management has remained primarily focused on individual traits (Welty Peachey et al., 2015). This gap is also evident in the broader leadership literature, with Yammarino et al. (2012) indicating that, “given the lack of prior work, the extent to which leadership can be shared, the conditions facilitating the success of shared leadership, and the implications of these two unknowns have for organizational structures is currently unknown” (p. 390). Even as the study of leadership in sport management has gradually shifted to relational rather than attributional conceptualizations, a progression that mirrors the trajectory of mainstream leadership research and practice, there remains a need to build and refine sport-specific theory that reflects the diverse operating environments of sport organizations (O’Boyle, Murray, & Cummins, 2015). As Schulenkorf (2017) indicates “while leadership is arguably one of the most researched topics in the field of business studies,

the concept still needs to be fully deciphered and understood in different social and managerial contexts” (p. 5).

Conceptual Framework

Although previous research has shed light on the outcomes of SL, the development of SL is still relatively unexplored, with Cullen-Lester and Yammarino (2016) suggesting “the emergence of SL is still not well understood” (p. 175). Pearce and Sims’ (2000) conceptual model outlines three key components that contribute to the development of SL: (a) group characteristics, (b) task characteristics, and (c) environment characteristics. Group characteristics are composed of the attributes of individuals in the organization and include traits, such as ability, personality, familiarity, and diversity. These traits are also influenced by the size and capacity of an organization, as well as the presence of vertical leadership strategies. Task characteristics relate to what the organization must do in order to achieve objectives. Tasks that are complex or demand a greater deal of creativity are more conducive to SL (Pearce & Sims, 2000), while tasks that are not perceived as critical to the operation of an organization are less likely to elicit productive SL (Pearce & Sims, 2000). Finally, environment characteristics represent the key macro-level issues that affect organizational and individual functioning. These include the level of support available (e.g., knowledge and skills) and prevailing cultural systems (e.g., shared beliefs, norms, and values) within a specific environment.

Previous SL studies have focused primarily on group characteristics, such as communication and communality (e.g., Aime, Humphrey, DeRue, & Paul, 2013; Drescher & Garbers, 2016), and task characteristics, such as cohesion and trust (e.g., Drescher, Korsgaard, Welpe, Picot, & Wigand, 2014; Serban & Roberts, 2016), yet there has been far less attention to environmental characteristics. This oversight is intriguing, considering Osborn, Hunt, and Jauch (2002) suggest environmental influences are essential to contextualizing existing group- and task-related theories of leadership. Indeed, previous research indicates policies, industry structure, and supportive resources play an important role in determining the efficacy of leadership strategies, and highlight the importance of multilevel conceptualizations.

Hitt et al. (2007) provide this type of multilevel framework by organizing environmental influences into nested arrangements whereby individuals, groups, and units are nested in organizations, which themselves are nested within broader policy, resource, and competitive environments (Hitt et al., 2007). As Hitt et al. (2007) notes, “the prevailing logic in management research is that the larger context within which lower-level processes are nested generally exerts a stronger downward influence, and the lower-level variables generally exert a weaker upward influence” (p. 1388). Although they provide a useful conceptual framework, it is also

necessary to adapt Hitt et al.’s (2007) model to the specific mode of leadership being studied. This allows for more focused and context-specific analysis of specific leadership strategies through each level. When SL is framed from this multilevel perspective, environmental characteristics represent the larger context that exerts downward pressure on group and task characteristics, which ultimately manifest in the leadership of individuals, groups, and units within an organization (Hitt et al., 2007). This conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

Sport management scholars have acknowledged the importance of integrating multilevel perspectives into leadership research, yet leader-centered perspectives continue to pervade the sport management field (Welly Peachey et al., 2015). Integrating multilevel perspectives into sport leadership research may prove especially salient for SFD organizations promoting community development, as unique environmental circumstances can significantly influence leadership processes (Hitt et al., 2007).

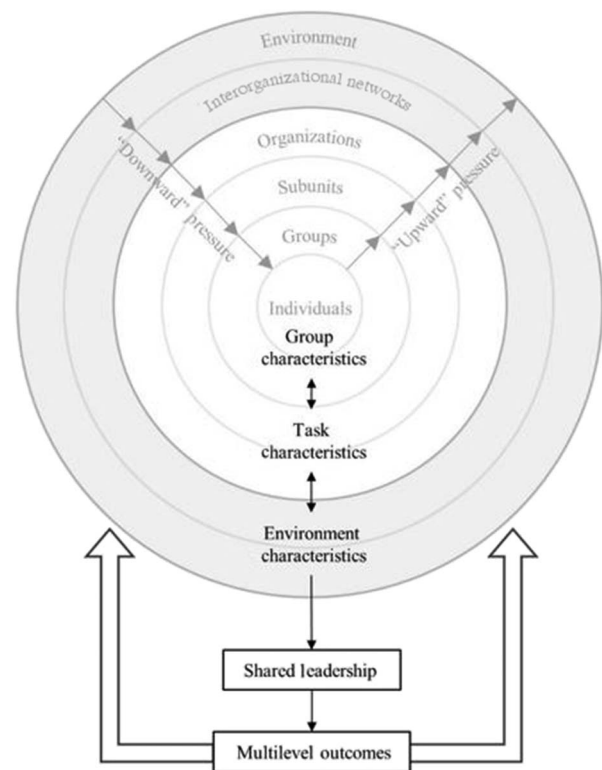


Figure 1 — Conceptual framework for shared leadership. Adapted from Pearce, C.L., and Sims, H.P. (2000). Shared leadership: Toward a multi-level theory of leadership. In M. Beyerlein (Ed.). *Advances in Interdisciplinary Studies of Work Teams* (Volume 7). Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, pp. 115–139; and Hitt, M.A., Beamish, P.W., Jackson, S.E., and Mathieu, J.E. (2007). Building theoretical and empirical bridges across levels: Multilevel research in management. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6):1385–1399.

This is particularly true in the United States, where SFD organizations operate in an especially unique environment. As public funding for sport and recreation programs has declined in the United States, a large number of SFD organizations have emerged to address prevailing social issues, such as crime, public health, and community development, through sport (Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011). Although national and international agencies operate in this context, many American SFD programs are delivered by nonprofit community sport organizations (CSOs). These organizations tend to rely on volunteers more than nonprofits in other industries (Schoenberg, Cuskelly, & Auld, 2016), have varying degrees of formalization (Hoye & Inglis, 2003), and are rather loosely organized by nonprofit governing bodies at the local, regional, and/or national level. Although this informality and autonomy can be beneficial to enabling SL, previous research indicates a degree of structure is required for SL to be effective (Ensley et al., 2006). Thus, understanding how American CSOs balance informality with structure is essential to understanding how SL is developed in this context.

Moreover, unlike commercial sport organizations whose primary motivations are profit-driven, CSOs are typically formed around multiple social goals (Ferkins, Shilbury, & McDonald, 2005). In addition to maintaining the financial vitality of operations, leaders of these organizations must ensure activities remain aligned with stated goals and objectives (Ferkins et al., 2005). This plurality can create tensions for leaders of SFD initiatives, who must balance the somewhat paradoxical tasks of procuring external funding and delivering on key social mandates (Svensson & Seifried, 2017). Indeed, SFD organizations often depend on short-term grants, philanthropic donations, and other forms of aid to operate programs, and leaders who are unable to balance these tasks may either lose financial support or fall victim to mission drift in the search for external funding (Coalter, 2010). These pressures are especially salient in the United States, where recent economic downturns have restricted government subsidies, external grants, and in-kind donations to nonprofit organizations, and increased the competition between CSOs over existing funding sources (Chikoto & Neely, 2014).

To understand how these unique environmental characteristics influence SL, this case study utilizes Hitt et al.'s (2007) multilevel leadership model to analyze an American CSO. Building on the conceptual models of Hitt et al. (2007) and Pearce and Sims (2000), the analysis focuses on how environmental characteristics influenced the development of SL in the SFD context. Specifically, we focus on three broad research questions:

- a. How do environmental characteristics influence the development of SL?
- b. How do environmental characteristics influence the group characteristics of SL?
- c. How do environmental characteristics influence the task characteristics of SL?

Methods

To facilitate an in-depth and multilevel analysis of SL, a single qualitative case study approach was deemed the most appropriate method for this research (Yin, 2009). The qualitative case study allowed us to explore the SFD organization using multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, and document analysis. Considering the uniqueness of the environment under study, we took a constructivist approach to “recognize the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning” within this context (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, p. 10). In particular, we followed Yin's (2009) approach focusing on “how” and “why” questions to understand the development of SL in a single organization.

Wakefield Youth Sports (WYS; pseudonym) was purposively selected due to its approach to community development and location within a socioeconomically disadvantaged community. Information related to the organization was initially gathered through a semistructured interview with a member of the board of directors, which was part of a prior research project. In addition to outlining the operations and objectives of the program, this interview also identified WYS' unique community development strategy. After the initial interaction, subsequent data collections were scheduled to examine these strategies in more detail.

Study Setting

Considering SL emerges from the interactions and social constructions of a particular setting (Grint, 2005), it is important to highlight the unique organizational and environmental context for the study. WYS was founded in 1950 as a youth sport center that leveraged the operation and management of sport programs to promote community development, and this remains its core mission. WYS operated as a private, membership-based CSO until 1990, when they were granted 501(c)3 status to operate as a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. WYS constitutes a semiformalized organization that is still member-focused. Although a national sport governing body provides regulations for competitive rules and league structures, WYS remains operationally and strategically autonomous, and locally focused on serving its community. The program is operated by approximately 30 unpaid volunteers, and the board of directors is composed of six community members elected annually, with volunteers from the local community filling operational and managerial roles (e.g., coaches, team parents). WYS programs currently include American football and cheerleading, which collectively serve approximately 150 youth.

WYS is located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area in the Southeastern United States. Similar to other nonprofit organizations, fluctuations in the social and economic climate have drastically altered its revenue structures. Figure 2 displays the revenues of the

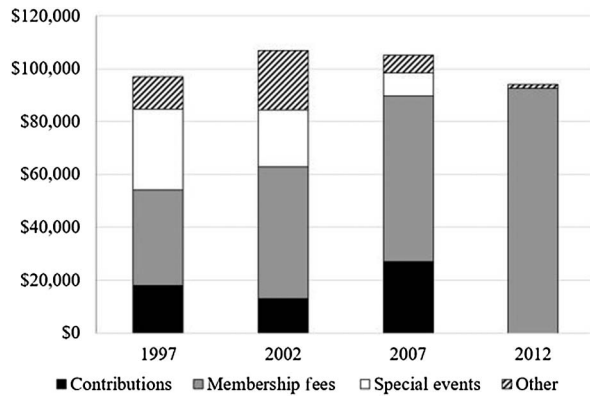


Figure 2 — Revenue structures of WYS. WYS = Wakefield Youth Sports. Source: Guidestar.com.

organization from 2001 to 2012. In 2001, 21% of revenue came from public support, contributions, and/or government grants; 38% came from membership fees; and 41% came from fundraising, special events, inventory sales, and other revenue. By 2012, 94% of revenue was coming from membership fees, with only 4% coming from public support, contributions and/or government grants, and only 2% coming from fundraising, special events, inventory sales, and other revenue. At the time of this study, approximately 97% of WYS' revenue came from membership fees. This trend has affected the operation of WYS, as many residents cannot afford heightened membership fees, and the organization has struggled to keep up with the costs of maintaining the facility.

Data Generation

Data were generated between December 2015 and February 2016. Multiple sources were utilized to triangulate methods and allow for the reexamination of data (Tracy, 2010). First, eight semistructured interviews were conducted with the commissioner, members of the board of directors, and all head coaches. Leadership questions were guided by a set of open, theory-driven, and probing questions organized around the quality and development of SL, and were designed to be flexible to the interview situation and the interviewee's experiences (Markula & Silk, 2011). The purpose of open questions was to introduce the interviewee to the topic of SL and solicit their expertise. Examples of open questions included "How does your organization identify and build leadership among volunteers?" The purpose of theory-driven questions was to verify interviewees' responses and to determine whether their insight corresponded with theoretical suppositions from the literature. Examples of theory-driven questions included "How does your organization leverage sport leadership in other nonsport contexts?" Additionally, probing questions related to previous questioning and were intended to clarify the

subjective theory presented by the interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2007). Second, one coaches meeting and one parents meeting were purposively selected for observation. The lead researcher attended each meeting, and although attendees were made aware of his presence, he did not influence subsequent discussions. Each meeting was audiotaped, and the researcher took notes of social interactions that occurred within the context. Finally, program documents were collected and analyzed to develop a deeper understanding of the organization. Registration and membership forms, participant contracts, memorandums, meeting agendas, sponsorship and advertisement forms, flyers, and Internet documents from the organization's website were all collected to provide multiple accounts of organizational functions and procedures.

Data Analysis

The lead researcher transcribed the interview data verbatim in Microsoft Word 2013 (New York). The audio content from meetings was transcribed using similar methods and cross-referenced with the researchers' log to ensure dependability. The verbal data from interviews and observations were uploaded with the corpus of documents into QSR NVivo 10 (Victoria, Australia). The multilevel conceptual model shown in Figure 1 was utilized to frame the coding process. The primary aspects of Pearce and Sims' (2000) model (i.e., environment, group, and task characteristics) provided a priori coding categories, and theoretical thematic analysis was used to develop codes and themes from the data, with particular attention to the downward pressure of environmental characteristics within each domain.

Braun and Clarke's (2006) theoretical thematic analysis was chosen as the appropriate approach given its flexibility in case study analysis and the theory-driven research questions guiding the coding process. The lead author worked through the data line by line searching for "repeated patterns of meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). This process led to the generation of initial codes that were sorted into themes under each category. Following Braun and Clarke, these themes were reviewed and refined based on the collation of relevant data extracts and labeled to reflect their meaning. To support the credibility of themes, researchers strived to provide enough detail in the data extracts so that readers could come to their own conclusions regarding the data, rather than "telling the reader what to think" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843).

Results

The results are organized into categories that reflect the research questions that guided the analysis: (a) environmental characteristics and SL; (b) environmental characteristics, task characteristics, and SL; and (c) environmental characteristics, group characteristics, and SL.

Environment Characteristics and SL

SL is considered an embedded feature of the broader environment that emerges from interactions within a particular setting (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Human and physical resources are essential to this process, and SL is adversely impacted when such resources are not available (Yammarino et al., 2012). Three themes emerged from the data related to environmental characteristics and SL: (a) limited interorganizational network, (b) image and legitimacy, and (c) sport culture.

Interorganizational exchanges play an important role in facilitating or constraining leader behavior (Hitt et al., 2007). Depending on how an organization is “nested” within the broader network of interorganizational exchanges, leaders may experience varying degrees of autonomy and interdependence that influence strategic action (Hitt et al., 2007). Data indicated WYS lacked a strong interorganizational network to support and extend SL structures. Kevin described the overall climate by stating, “the economy a few years ago hurt everybody, so everybody was kind of tight, a lot of businesses are holding onto money, whereas before they were more willing and giving.” Unlike commercial organizations whose interorganizational exchanges are dictated by organizational rather than individual ties (e.g., Barden & Mitchell, 2007), partnerships involving nonprofit CSOs form primarily through the social networks of volunteers and stakeholders (Sharpe, 2006). Thus, partnership effectiveness depends on the resources embedded in the stakeholder network, as well as in the leaders who maintain relationships (Babiak & Thibault, 2009).

Both of these aspects have been difficult for WYS to develop, as Kevin explained, “our parents are working all the time, they don’t have as much time or access to business sponsors, [other programs] are organizations where more parents have their own business kinda thing, so they can give back more.” Kevin continued, “we see what other teams are doing, how they raise money, we can try to do that but it [will] not fit our demographics.” Similarly, Michael explained, “I find it limiting based on who has the network out there to invite these [businesses].” Even when WYS has established effective partnerships, they have struggled to develop leadership teams to turn short-term partnership outputs into long-term structural capacities. As Michael indicated, “you had [a car dealership], they came out [and] donated a car for a raffle, and it was real big . . . but when the kid pulled out all that stuff kind of went away.” Without sustained connections facilitated by a leadership team, WYS has struggled to plug themselves into the broader community leadership network.

Environmental characteristics have also affected the image and legitimacy of WYS. For example, Michael acknowledged, “in comparison to all the [other programs] . . . ours is more minority, low income families, with single parent homes.” This contributed to a certain perception of WYS throughout the league, with Coach Tim stating, “we had a bad [reputation], it was

like oh they’re too ghetto, it’s too rough.” Moreover, Kevin highlighted how this perception was compounded by the WYS facilities, explaining, “[it’s] the kind of thing where people drive by [and say], that’s WYS, that’s why we left.” David added, “people come by and see [the facility], and it’s not a good sight, and it actually puts a black eye on [us] as an association.” Coaches also indicated how the quality and appearance of WYS teams influenced organizational image and legitimacy, with Coach Anthony stating, “we play against organizations that have resources, the kids, man when you look at them the kids [look] different.”

The image and legitimacy of an organization is particularly important to SL. While sport organizations can build social capital and contribute to community development, they can also amplify social wedges by reinforcing stereotypes (Nicholson & Hoyer, 2008). This limits opportunities for SL, as perceived similarities and value congruencies between member groups are essential to creating balanced SL structures (Drescher & Garbers, 2016). The negative image of WYS hindered the ability of WYS leaders to connect with other community leaders, which is essential to community development. As Owen stated, “until you’re doing well as an organization I don’t think anyone wants to touch you, so to speak.” In addition, Michael specifically described groups who were not interested in establishing true SL, but instead “looked for the benefits of tax write-offs or all that stuff.” Data indicated this image also influenced participation rates, as David described a situation in which a parent requested a tour of WYS because she heard “it was run down,” and did not want her child to be “part of an organization that’s not up to a certain level.” Similarly, Coach Tim remarked, “some people [stereotype] you, [and] it’s hard to get that black cloud off your head.” Reversing this image was a primary objective of WYS. During the coaches’ meeting, one coach emphasized the importance of “changing the face of WYS, changing what [people] know about the old WYS versus the new WYS.” Similarly, Owen mentioned, “I think when the facility gets up and running, and everything is flowing like it should, and it looks great . . . the whole mindset changes [in] people.”

Finally, data suggest a cultural emphasis on competitive sport constrained opportunities for developing SL around SFD values. For example, Michael described how the WYS’ recent lack of on-field success led to reductions in participation, stating, “we haven’t really been that competitive in sports in a while . . . so a lot of parents [have taken] their kids to the other [teams].” Even parents of the younger age groups were primarily focused on the athletic success of their children, with Coach Nolan stating, “my parents . . . they’re coming in, this is their first or second year [of] playing football man, they’re coming in trying to treat it basically as a college program.” This preoccupation with competition has made it difficult to build SL structures around community, rather than sport development goals. As Kevin explains, “WYS is a youth center for sports, so [parents]

don't look at it as oh there needs to be trash pick-up and stuff, it's basically we pay our registration fee, kids play football or baseball, and we leave." In fact, Michael said that the biggest challenge for WYS was, "getting [parents] to look past the sports side, quit focusing on sports as the primary reason why WYS is around." When describing the involvement of most parents, Owen stated, "they bring their kids, they pay their registration fee, and basically that's how they are involved." Michael described similar transactional relationships, stating, "we have community days, but people will drop their kids off and keep going, you don't really see the parent support like that." This cultural emphasis on competitive sport made it difficult to recruit parents into leadership positions or promote engagement in nonsport programs, which are essential to SFD initiatives.

Environmental Characteristics, Task Characteristics, and SL

The effectiveness of SL is influenced by the type of tasks a group must accomplish (Pearce & Sims, 2000). To be effective, individuals within SL structures must be comfortable serving in a variety of roles that range in magnitude and focus (Carson et al., 2007). In addition, it is important to consider the reward system implemented by an organization to incentivize task completion (Pearce & Sims, 2000). Unlike the commercial sector where employees are dependent on the organization for financial compensation, unpaid volunteers make up a majority of the nonprofit workforce and can simply walk away if they have a negative experience (Pearce & Manz, 2005). This is particularly salient to CSOs, such as WYS, who have an even greater reliance on volunteers than other nonprofit organizations (Schoenberg et al., 2016). Two themes emerged related to environmental characteristics, task characteristics, and SL: (a) limited task rewards and (b) task complexity.

Similar to other SFD organizations, WYS struggled to find external funding sources to support programs. As a result, they were unable to pay volunteers and struggled to find people who were willing to commit unpaid time. As Owen stated, "not everybody [is] willing to [volunteer] without receiving some kind of pat on the back." This limited reward structure made it difficult for WYS to perform functional tasks, as Owen indicated:

We always encourage them to help out on gameday, doing chains, helping the concession stand, helping at the gate, taking money, help with the clock, cleaning up the facilities . . . [but] it's not successful at all, because if people don't see an immediate benefit to themselves, they're not going to help.

To increase volunteer engagement, WYS has created committees to complete these tasks. As Linda explains, "we set a committee up for homecoming, we set a committee up for grounds, we set a committee up for equipment . . . so if I [delegate] to you and you're in charge of 15 people then I know you got it." However,

committees have not been successful. For example, David discussed the decline of the sponsorship committee, stating, "it was set up for that committee to go out in the community and talk to the various different businesses and things like that to kind of build that relationship, but . . . that committee has kind of dwindled."

Although the lack of interest in functional tasks has been highlighted in previous sport volunteer research (e.g., Busser & Carruthers, 2010), it is also important to consider the characteristics of the tasks themselves. There are many functional tasks required by SFD organizations (e.g., paperwork, cleaning, facility, and equipment maintenance) that are relatively menial and do not involve much creativity. Despite their practical importance, volunteers do not always associate these tasks with the overarching purpose of the organization. As a result, when functional tasks are siloed into committees or teams, such as those created by WYS, volunteers may feel disassociated from the organizational mission. Instead of the dynamic role and task *rotation* that is characteristic of SL (Carson et al., 2007), individuals stuck in these "silos" may not feel connected to the core leadership team.

Another key theme that emerged from the data was the task complexity faced by leaders. Individuals assuming leadership roles in WYS were often discouraged by the social issues they confronted. For example, Owen discussed how complex social issues influenced the leadership training process, stating, "it always starts out great and then the discouragement sets in . . . they have great ideas and then they get discouraged because they put them out there [and think] it's going to work and it doesn't." Kevin expressed similar sentiments, stating, "there's been times when the parents come it's like wow, this is too much I didn't sign up for this." David provided a particularly insightful overview:

So let's just pretend everything is on [these] papers . . . and I took all these papers and ripped them up, how willing would you be to say, okay I'm going to start all over again? And that is WYS, because we get challenged like that all the time . . . so when you get people involved, how many are going to continue to say you know what, I'm going to keep fighting at this thing? And you don't because it's so easy to say this is volunteer, I'm not dealing with this anymore, I have my own family and my own life to live.

As a result, the board has taken a much more deliberate and cautious approach to developing leadership. For example, Owen mentioned, "I constantly try to keep people down, as far as their expectations, before they get involved." Similarly, Kevin explained that, "if [volunteers] come and they have all these ideas, we don't shoot it down, we [say] let's see it on paper or let's see the plan on how this is going to be successful." This has helped WYS limit the potentially negative consequences of failed projects and initiatives, which Linda alluded to:

The worst thing we've found is if you tell people you're going to do something and you don't, you lose them. There's no getting back on that, and that's the community in which we live in, if I say I'm going to do something, and I don't do it, or I don't do it well, it's worse than me just not even saying anything about it at all. So we are careful about what [leadership] structures we put in place.

However, this approach has negatively influenced leadership succession within WYS. The current SL structure is operating at almost half its intended capacity, and WYS has struggled to recruit new leaders each year. Although WYS leaders currently contribute to a variety of tasks, Michael highlighted the need to become more visible in this capacity, stating, "if you see the board member doing it, maybe it will influence other people to do it also . . . trying to influence not only the kids but the parents also, or [community members] attending the events."

Environmental Characteristics, Group Characteristics, and SL

The attributes of individuals play a significant role in the effectiveness of SL (Pearce & Sims, 2000). Although there is a tendency in leadership research to focus on characteristics of leaders, it is important to understand these traits within broader relational and organizational contexts (Yammarino & Dansereau, 2011). Two themes emerged related to environmental characteristics, task characteristics, and SL: (a) limited human capital and (b) lived experiences.

Although human capital is a strength for some sport organizations (e.g., Misener & Doherty, 2009), low levels of professional expertise tend to characterize most CSOs, such as WYS (Sharpe, 2006). This was evident in the data, as board members described how deficiencies in human capital constrained task completion. For example, Kevin explained how a lack of human capital limited WYS' attempts to solicit external funding, stating, "we can say we are going to try and get grants . . . but that requires skills and resources to write grants a certain way, and time to devote to the application process, and I, we, don't really have that." Coach Nolan also indicated that, while he is capable of mobilizing action, he does not have the expertise to take on some of the legwork, stating, "I'm the guy that can get up in front of [people] and present it, and do the presentation part, but I can't do the grant or research part." Similarly, Michael described WYS' limited marketing and outreach efforts by stating, "the biggest challenge I would say is communication, or the lack of communication . . . how do we promote the program? I don't know that." Data indicated this limited human capital was compounded by a lack of secondary, or peripheral, volunteers. Instead of using their existing human capital in leadership and strategic roles, board members were often forced to assume a litany of functional tasks. As Kevin

explained, "when you're there all the time [and] you don't see it you get frustrated [and you] just say, well I'll just do it myself." These operational issues crowded out more strategic discussions at board meetings and limited their ability to form and leverage SL structures.

The lived experiences of leaders within WYS also influenced opportunities for SL, particularly among sport coaches. Sport coaches represent potentially valuable leaders in the community development process as they often have high levels of trust and loyalty among local stakeholders (Edwards, 2015). In particular, coaches who are "native" to a community, rather than outsiders, often carry a level of credibility that strengthens their leadership persona (Edwards, 2015). WYS relied heavily on parents to fill coaching vacancies, as Linda explained, "because it's not a paid position, [most coaches are] Dads, it's a Dad or it's somebody's Uncle." In addition to their familial involvement, many coaches were motivated by their affiliation with football. For example, Coach Tim indicated, "I once played for WYS when I was young, so I'm really coaching out of the love and out of the heart of WYS." Similarly, Coach Anthony explained, "I played football, I was a good athlete in high school and I made a lot of poor decisions [because] I didn't have anybody to guide me, I didn't have a mentor at that time." These lived experiences play a strong role in shaping leadership identities, as well as the salience of identities across various contexts (Swanson & Kent, 2014).

Consistent with previous research, data indicated lived experiences helped WYS coaches develop considerable trust and loyalty among parents. For example, Coach Nolan explained his close connections with participants' families, stating, "I'm in these guys lives, I'm in their households and their families talking to them, I know grandmothers and all that stuff." Similarly, Coach Tim described the loyalty of parents when he considered moving up divisions to coach another team, recalling, "the parents were like well if Coach Tim moves up we're going somewhere else . . . so I [coached both] to make everybody happy." Yet while coaches' utilized this trust and loyalty to build camaraderie around their teams, there was less evidence of these leadership qualities in other domains. On the contrary, several coaches highlighted a link between on-field success and organizational goals. For example, during the coaches' meeting one coach stated, "when we are successful on that football field, then you're able to go to a [Business A] or [Business B] and say sponsor WYS, and this is why because we have national recognition because our team is going somewhere." Similarly, Coach Anthony described how the prospect of playing in the national championship game would increase the reach of WYS:

That's why we need to try to get to [the national championship], because then we go to businesses and we're not just saying, hey this is what we do, now we [are] going to [the championship], we may be on ESPN, on national television, and they will be more likely to sponsor us and support us then,

because what we [are] doing is bigger and more far reaching.

Extending and utilizing coach leadership in other domains was a point of emphasis during the coaches' meeting, as David stated:

Volunteering is always tough, we always struggle as coaches, but I'm not even going to lie with you we need to get to a point where we do some volunteering throughout the off-season. I'm saying outside of normal [coaching] hours . . . I mean actually doing volunteer work at WYS and helping out. Some coaches have done a great job, other coaches have not done such a great job.

Discussion

SL offers the potential for multiple voices, knowledge bases, and perspectives to contribute to the overall success of an organization (Pearce & Sims, 2000). Although previous literature has acknowledged the importance of SL for SFD organizations, empirical studies of how SL develops in this context has been lacking (Schulenkorf, 2017). In particular, there has been limited attention to the environmental characteristics that influence SL, which is especially salient to the SFD context given the constraining environments in which these programs often operate. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap by examining how environmental characteristics influence SL development in the SFD context. The results of the study revealed a nuanced relationship between the SFD program and its surrounding environment, exposing both the challenges and benefits to utilizing SL principles.

Most notably, the environment surrounding WYS created social issues that were, in some ways, too complex given the organization's limited capacity. While complex problems can create a fertile space for SL to combine ideas and utilize resources across multiple perspectives (Pearce & Sims, 2000), the constraining environment of an SFD context can also serve as a barrier to developing effective SL. This is particularly salient when one considers the limited human and social capital of local leaders (Sharpe, 2006) and the immense structural inequalities that are characteristic of SFD contexts. Such an environment calls for integrated leadership systems that combine bottom-up leadership principles, which give voice to environmental knowledge and insider perspectives, with vertical leadership principles that allow for the development and implementation of institutional knowledge (Pearce, 2004).

For SFD projects in the Global South, external "change agents" have proven especially useful for accomplishing this objective (Schulenkorf, 2010). Change agents represent external stakeholders (e.g., development agency) who establish contacts, build communication channels, and provide the resources necessary to facilitate long-term community development (Schulenkorf, 2010).

Vertical leadership is utilized during initial phases of program implementation when setting a strategic focus and maintaining a sense of stability is paramount, and then gradually flattens out as leadership responsibilities are transferred to local leaders who collectively guide the project long term (Schulenkorf, 2010). This highlights the importance of temporality in integrated systems, as the balance of vertical and horizontal strategies depends on the life stage of the organization.

In the American context, many SFD programs are delivered by CSOs that do not necessarily need to be built from the ground up, but could similarly benefit from this process. The limited human and social capital in WYS mirrors the struggle of many SFD organizations in establishing and maintaining organizational capacity, and is consistent with Schulenkorf's (2012) conceptual argument. In this sense, the breadth of SL was constrained and not fully optimized within WYS. While SL might be the optimal goal for SFD organizations like WYS, it is important to recognize that the *development* of these structures might require vertical leadership strategies during the initial stages. For example, while SL can provide important opportunities for multiple stakeholders to be heard (Edwards, 2015), the presence of multiple voices and interests can actually impede the creation of a coherent sense of organizational purpose (Locke, 2000). Indeed, great visions within organizations are often created by a single mind, which then drives follower support and passion (Locke, 2000). In an environment with a heavy downward pressure, such as the one faced by WYS, vertical leadership strategies driven by a select group of leaders may be more effective than SL at setting a clear direction for the organization (Hitt et al., 2007). After this strategic vision has been set, then SL strategies may be slowly integrated to optimize resources and enhance organizational outputs (Pearce & Sims, 2000).

Although external change agents could certainly enhance this process in the American context, our data indicated that many of the necessary ingredients were already in place at WYS, they just had not been activated. Most notably, core leaders did not maximize their role in leadership development, as the WYS leadership model was based on *selecting* rather *developing* leaders in the local community. Although they performed a variety of strategic and functional tasks, core leaders were not visible to the community, and several board members specifically highlighted the need to increase their visibility. Vertical leadership strategies represent a useful approach to achieve this objective by providing opportunities for leaders to demonstrate initiative and encourage others in socially relevant ways (Pearce & Manz, 2005).

In particular, servant leadership may provide a useful complement to SL in the SFD context. Servant leadership is founded on a tradition of altruism and emphasizes the needs and development of followers (Barbuto, Gottfredson, & Searle, 2014). From this perspective, the primary objective of leaders is to serve followers and demonstrate key qualities, such as authenticity, humility, and stewardship throughout the process

(van Dierendonck, 2011). This not only promotes interpersonal acceptance and trust among followers, but also empowers them to become leaders by providing direction, encouraging support, and building self-confidence (van Dierendonck, 2011). This focus on empowerment through a bottom-up rather than top-down approach has led scholars to highlight the applicability of servant leadership in the SFD context (Wells & Weltey Peachey, 2016; Weltey Peachey & Burton, 2017), and our results lend empirical support to this connection. Rather than taking a passive approach to recruiting leaders, WYS leaders could have benefitted from increasing their visibility and championing their service to the organization and community. By embodying the dimensions laid out by van Dierendonck (2011), WYS leaders could take a more active role in the development of SL. Rather than trying to force SL right away (e.g., forming committees), servant leaders could first build support around the mission and goals of WYS, then slowly integrate SL structures into the operations. Once again, the temporality of this transition is key, as incorporating SL principles can potentially help overcome some of the drawbacks often associated with servant leadership, namely its ineffectiveness in high change, dynamic systems (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004). As SFD programs often exist in spaces of great unrest and uncertainty, understanding this transition between servant leadership and SL may be key to maximizing organizational effectiveness.

Of course, the effectiveness of any leadership strategy is dramatically influenced by the capacity of the organization, which for CSOs like WYS, is often dependent on the capacity of the community. The limited capacity of the surrounding community influenced the financial resources available to WYS, and the downward influence of this environmental pressure was evident in our study. For example, WYS could not afford to compensate any volunteers. This limitation made it difficult to find volunteers willing to devote unpaid time, especially for functional tasks (e.g., gameday operations). While forming committees to accomplish functional tasks may work in certain contexts, it was not effective for WYS. Despite their importance to the operation of WYS, there was no clear connection between these tasks and the overall purpose of the organization.

An alternative approach might be utilizing SL to integrate functional and strategic tasks. In other words, rather than siloing functional tasks into committees that have limited voice in strategic leadership, WYS could alter this hierarchy so that individuals volunteering on committees have a legitimate voice in the strategic direction of the organization. Of course, stipulations must be in place to guide this process, such as elections for committee representatives or service time requirements, but given that most volunteers and community-level workers are driven by their passion for a cause, it is imperative that their contributions to organizational goals are discernible (Wilson & Musick, 1997). Indeed, effective SL requires individuals to serve in *multiple* roles

that vary in terms of their functional and strategic importance (D'Innocenzo et al., 2016). Accordingly, leaders must be comfortable with different people fulfilling these roles and recognize the importance of social interactions in building trust and connecting the goals of the organization to each specific task (Carson et al., 2007).

Finally, the downward pressure of the environment also influenced the group characteristics of SL development. Leaders of WYS noted that, while there was considerable interest in sport-related leadership roles, there was far less interest in nonsport leadership roles. Moreover, individuals interested in sport-related leadership roles often did not espouse SFD values, and, in some cases, saw competitive sporting success as a necessary means for achieving organizational goals. Although these individuals were able to build considerable trust among parents and participants based on their lived experiences and connection to the community, WYS struggled to transfer this leadership to community development objectives. Moreover, leaders indicated how negative stereotypes persisted and, in some cases, were reinforced by the perceived quality of WYS facilities and equipment, which were functions of the environment themselves. This negative image lowered the perceived organizational legitimacy in the broader community and made it difficult to establish meaningful partnerships with other organizations. More often, WYS drew interest from organizations interested in the potential benefits they provided as a tax deductible organization, not a valued partner.

One strategy that might help SFD organizations like WYS is the development of more formalized interorganizational networks at the community level. Previous research indicates that youth sport organizations in the United States operate rather independently of one another (Jones et al., 2017). In addition to increasing competition over resources, this climate can reinforce stereotypes between organizations from different social and economic backgrounds. By bringing organizations together in a more collaborative capacity, leaders have opportunities to dissuade perceived differences and establish more expansive SL structures. In addition, leaders can work together to distinguish SFD and collectively communicate its importance to the sport delivery system. This might help clarify and promote SFD among parents and community members and lead to greater interest in CSOs as vehicles for social change, not just sport providers.

Conclusion and Future Directions

In the American context, many community development SFD programs are delivered by CSOs. The sustainability and efficacy of these organizations is dependent on effective organizational structures and processes, including leadership, that are not always readily available. SL can offer space for community involvement, but as this study showed, the same environment that SFD organizations hope to affect can also constrain and limit

their success. Our results indicate that, while utilizing SL exclusively in the SFD context may not maximize organizational effectiveness, it offers a viable approach when integrated with vertical strategies, such as servant leadership. These approaches can collectively empower local champions and develop the structures necessary to capitalize on multiple community voices and assets.

In their dialogue on the usefulness of SL, Pearce et al. (2008) debate the ability of pure SL to facilitate organizational success. While they disagree to the extent that traditional leaders should and can play a role in an SL context, they do agree that any form of integrated leadership should be contextually based (Pearce et al., 2008). This study contributed to that conversation by highlighting the role of the environment in both constraining and facilitating aspects of SL, and elucidating the unique temporality of leadership transitions. In the SFD context, vertical leadership strategies, such as servant leadership, can assist in both clarifying the purpose of an organization and providing stability in the face of environmental challenges. Once momentum and resources have been developed through this process, SL structures can bring voice to the community and use environmental knowledge to optimize practices. This combination of vertical and SL is closest to what Locke (2003) refers to as “integrated leadership,” and highlights the importance of temporality in SL development.

This study also provided several directions for future research. Most notably, the analysis focused on the relationship between environmental characteristics and SL. By utilizing retrospective interviews and archival data, the results gave a snapshot of these relationships within one particular SFD context. However, Hitt’s (2007) model of the relationship among environment, group, and task characteristics suggests a coevolution of factors across space and time. Longitudinal studies that account for these factors and assess the interplay between servant and SL might prove particularly useful for SFD organizations. Furthermore, even though this study focused on the downward influence of the broader environment, upward influences may also simultaneously or subsequently inform the broader environment in which SFD organizations operate. Given the results of this study, future research should look to capture the simultaneous effect of both downward and upward processes over the life span of an organization to more completely examine the nuanced relationship between environmental characteristics and SL in the SFD context.

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