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# NIRSA Members' Perceptions of Organizational Effectiveness

**Corinne M. Daprano, Donna L. Pastore, and Carla A. Costa**

This study assessed National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA) members' perceptions of effectiveness in a sport association. Specifically, this study investigated the extent to which professional members of the NIRSA perceive it to be effective in achieving its stated and operative goals. A stratified systematic sample of professional NIRSA members ( $N = 600$ ) was selected to complete the survey. The survey was sent to NIRSA members who had 1 through 4 years of membership, 5 through 9 years of membership, and 10 or more years of membership in the association. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare perceptions of organizational effectiveness among the membership groups. No significant differences were found between the three membership groups and satisfaction. Correlations and multiple regression analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between stated and operative goal effectiveness and satisfaction. Significant relationships were confirmed between satisfaction and several stated and operative goal factors.

**Keywords:** goals, professional associations, recreation, sport

The sport, recreation, and leisure-services sector has become a major industry with immense economic impact (Kraus, 2001; Street & Smith's Sport Business Journal, 2006). The industry encompasses a diverse group of organizations that span the nonprofit, public, and for-profit sectors. One significant area of recreation is the growing field of student campus recreation. As Kraus (2001) explains, "campus recreation is generally viewed as an important element in the full spectrum of student services that includes housing, health care, counseling, and academic advice" (p. 59). This integration of recreation services with the overall student experience has led to an increase in the importance of recreation programming on college campuses (Turman & Hendel, 2004; Woosnam, Dixon, & Brookover, 2006).

In addition, increased competition among universities and colleges for students has resulted in a building boom for student recreation departments. Universities nationwide have begun building student recreation centers as a means of recruiting and retaining students to their campuses (Turman & Hendel, 2004; Woosnam et al., 2006). Within the past several years, new multimillion dollar facilities have been

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built at Washington State University (\$39 million, 2001), Boston University (\$90 million, 2005), and The Ohio State University (\$140 million, 2005). Moreover, it is predicted that colleges and universities will spend “\$3.2 billion on new or remodeled recreation facilities in the next five years” (Blumenstyk, 2005).

In 1950, the National Intramural Association was founded to meet the needs of recreation professionals and their member institutions. The association, now renamed the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association (NIRSA), has approximately 4,000 individual professional, student, and associate members and over 700 institutional members throughout the United States and Canada (NIRSA, 2007a). The NIRSA is an important aspect of the sport and recreation field and a significant organization to examine because of its role in the industry as a trade and professional association.

The American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) estimates that there are 86,054 trade and professional associations (classified under Section 501(c)(6) of the U.S. tax code) in the United States, approximately one-quarter of which are national associations such as the NIRSA (ASAE, 2006). One of the primary purposes of these associations is to provide education and training to members. In addition, associations develop industry product and service standards, conduct industry research, engage in lobby efforts, promote networking and information sharing among members, and foster ethical behavior (ASAE, 2006; Mull, Bayless, & Jamieson, 2005). Taken as a whole, these activities serve several purposes: (a) to increase the professionalism of the field and (b) to provide stability against uncertainties in the environment that impact organizations in a particular industry.

Thus, the focus of this investigation was the NIRSA and its effectiveness as a trade and professional association. Although student recreation departments pursue their own respective goals, the NIRSA plays a central role in the field by contributing to the development of its members and ultimately shaping the direction of the campus recreation industry. The continued growth, development, and effectiveness of the NIRSA, similar to other trade and professional associations, is dependent on its ability to provide efficient and quality services and programs to its members in an increasingly complex and turbulent environment.

## Organizational Effectiveness

Organizational effectiveness has been described as a contradictory concept (Quinn & Cameron, 1983), is often mentioned as an integral aspect of analysis conducted on organizations (Benson, 1977; Cameron, 1980), and has been studied using multiple notions of criteria (Robbins, 1990). Despite the complexity and difficulty of measuring effectiveness, researchers have recognized the importance of this concept to organizations and leaders. Slack and Parent (2006) contend, “despite the problems associated with the idea of organizational effectiveness, creating a successful organization is in many ways the central task of the sport manager” (p. 37). Given the importance of organizational effectiveness to sport managers, researchers have examined effectiveness in a variety of sport organizations including intercollegiate athletic programs in Canada (Chelladurai & Danylchuk, 1984) and the United States (Trail & Chelladurai, 2000), national sport organizations (NSOs) in Canada (Chelladurai, Szyszlo, & Haggerty, 1987; Frisby, 1986) and

Greece (Karteroliotis & Papadimitriou, 2004; Papadimitriou, 2001; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000), Finnish sport clubs (Koski, 1995), campus recreation departments (Weese, 1997), and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA; O'Rourke & Chelladurai, 2006).

## Goals Approach

One of the earliest approaches used to assess organizational effectiveness, specifically in sport organizations, was the goals approach (Slack & Parent, 2006). This approach focuses on the goals or output of an organization and on evaluating how well the organization meets those goals. In a trade or professional association such as the NIRSA, the goals of the organization are an important way of communicating the values of the association both to members and to external constituent groups, such as sponsors, suppliers, and the general public (Slack & Parent, 2006; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000). The strength of this approach then is that it provides a systematic way of evaluating organizational effectiveness. In addition, using the goals approach offers an opportunity to capture the perspectives of different internal constituent groups.

Several of the studies mentioned in the previous section used the goals approach as a means of measuring organizational effectiveness in sport organizations. Frisby (1986) used the goals and systems resource approaches (i.e., a focus on the inputs of an organization and how effective the organization is at attaining needed resources) to measure the effectiveness of Canadian NSOs. In this context, Frisby (1986) used world rankings and performance effectiveness as output measures and determined that an NSO's ability to acquire financial resources was related to performance excellence. Trail and Chelladurai (2000) investigated the importance faculty and students attach to the goals and processes of intercollegiate athletics. The results demonstrated differences in the relative importance faculty, students, males, and females attached to these goals and processes.

## Stated Goals

The previous two studies (Frisby, 1986; Trail & Chelladurai, 2000) demonstrate that there are many different types of organizational goals and ways of examining those goals. This study focused on stated and operative goals as a means of assessing the effectiveness of the NIRSA. Official goals are "the general purposes of the organization as put forth in the charter, annual reports, public statements by key executives, and other authoritative pronouncements" (Perrow, 1961, p. 855). The official goals of the NIRSA are indicated in its mission and goal statements and listed in the member bylaws. These official goals are (a) to serve the needs of the membership, (b) to promote recreational sports programs that meet the needs and interests of all persons, (c) to contribute to the academic development and understanding of recreational sports programs, (d) to develop intramural-recreational

sports associations at more localized levels, (e) to sponsor research and publication of research, (f) to increase the visibility of the Association, and (g) to actively recruit members and encourage involvement of all professionals (NIRSA, 2007c).

## Operative Goals

Operative goals, in contrast to official goals, are usually not explicitly stated by the organization. These goals “designate the ends sought through the actual operating policies of the organization; they tell us what the organization actually is trying to do, regardless of what the official goals say are the aims” (Perrow, 1961, p. 855). Assessing operative goals is challenging because they are usually not stated, creating an opportunity for the researcher to decide how to identify those goals. Chelladurai and Danylchuk (1984) conducted a study to determine the operative goals of intercollegiate athletics in Canada. Transmission of culture, athletes’ personal growth, public relations, and prestige emerged as important operative goals.

For the purposes of this study, it was decided that network functions would serve as the NIRSA’s operative goals. Networks are characterized by social and structural aspects that provide a means of analyzing relationships among actors in a network (Cousens & Slack, 1996; Kraatz, 1998; Provan & Milward, 1995). Network functions are related to the economic and social factors that motivate organizations to form linkages with other organizations in their environment. Kraatz (1998) argues that interorganizational networks play an important role in “mitigating environmental uncertainty and promoting social learning of adaptive responses among linked organizations” (p. 622). In addition, these networks also create greater access to environmental resources, thus assisting their member organizations to increase financial performance (Human & Provan, 1997).

Therefore, as the “linking” agent in an interorganizational network, the effectiveness of an organization such as the NIRSA can be judged on the basis of how well it carries out its functions or operative goals. O’Rourke and Chelladurai (2006) surveyed intercollegiate athletic administrators to study the organizational effectiveness of the NCAA using the association’s 16 guiding principles and three network functions: (a) marketing and development, (b) management enhancement, and (c) image projection. Results of a regression analysis demonstrated that image projection was the variable that contributed the most to satisfaction with the NCAA.

The initial operative goals developed for this study are defined in Table 1 and include: (a) establishing relations with supplies, sponsors, and other related organizations; (b) communicating with members; (c) strategic planning; and (d) encouraging the participation of underrepresented groups in the association’s activities. Furthermore, the O’Rourke and Chelladurai (2006) study demonstrated that member satisfaction with organizational performance might be linked to evaluation of the organization. NIRSA members, like NCAA athletic administrators, are the association’s prime beneficiaries and those who benefit directly from the services provided. Consequently, satisfaction was also included as an outcome variable in this study.

**Table 1 Stated and Operative Goal Factors**

Goal	Factors
Goal 1 (research and professional development)	Sponsor research and professional development opportunities that enhance the career development of members
Goal 2 (governance of the association)	Encourage establishment of regional and state associations that provide opportunities for members to become involved in the governance of the association at all levels
Goal 3 (focus on member needs)	Provide programs and services that meet the needs of recreation professionals, students, and member institutions
Goal 4 (promotion of recreational sport programs)	Promote recreational sports programs for diverse participant groups (e.g., participants with different skill levels, abilities, interests, and needs)
Operative Goal/Function 1 (involve members in strategic planning)	Keep members informed of association services, solicit members' opinions, and plan for the long-term future of the association
Operative Goal/Function 2 (external relations)	Establish and maintain relationships with suppliers, sponsors, governmental agencies, the general public, other associations, and organizations
Operative Goal/Function 3 (diversity initiatives)	Provide opportunities, programs, and services to encourage the participation of underrepresented groups in the activities and governance of the association

## Method

### Instrument

Initial construction of the survey instrument was based on a review of the literature. The instrument contained a demographic section, 39 statements regarding the perceived-stated and operative-goal effectiveness of the NIRSA, and five statements regarding satisfaction with the NIRSA. Respondents were asked, on a scale of 1 (*very ineffective*) to 7 (*very effective*), to indicate the degree to which they perceive the NIRSA to be effective in fulfilling its various stated and operative goals (i.e., network functions) and the degree to which they were satisfied with the NIRSA. Content and face validity were established by submitting the survey to a panel of experts and by conducting a field test. A pilot test was then performed with a representative stratified systematic sample of NIRSA members ( $n = 150$ ). Appropriate revisions to the instrument were made after each phase of testing.

### Sample

The target population for this study consisted of the approximately 2,700 professional members of the NIRSA (NIRSA, 2007a). Student members and associate

members were excluded from the final sample because they are often less involved and thus less knowledgeable about the association. In addition, those individuals who had participated in the panel of experts and field test were excluded from the final sample.

A stratified systematic sample was drawn from the NIRSA professional membership list, which was obtained from the NIRSA National Office. Systematic sampling procedures involve selecting a sample by taking every  $k$ th case from a list of the population. The sampling interval ( $k$ ) was determined by dividing the total number ( $N$ ) of professional members on the NIRSA list by the needed sample size ( $n$ ). The NIRSA professional membership list was blocked by membership year and already in random order; thus, systematic sampling was a reasonable substitute for random sampling (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996). The professional members of the NIRSA were assigned to three groups as follows: (a) Group 1 represented those who had been members for 1 through 4 years; (b) Group 2, those who had been members for 5 through 9 years; and (c) Group 3, those who had been members for 10 or more years. A total of 600 NIRSA members, 200 per strata, constituted the sample for this study.

The survey was mailed to these NIRSA members, and after 2 weeks, a follow-up postcard was sent to those who had not returned the survey. A total of 294 usable surveys were received for a 49% return rate. Analysis of the demographic data revealed that 64% of the respondents were employed in a public, four-year college or university and 23% were employed in a private, four-year college or university. Fifty-six percent of respondents were employed in campus recreation departments that reported to student affairs, and 15.8% reported to athletics departments. Respondents had worked in their current position for less than a year to 45 years, with an average tenure of 7.7 years ( $SD = 7.9$ ). They ranged in age from 23 to 74 years with a mean age of 40 ( $SD = 10.4$ ). Sixty-six percent of the respondents were men, and 34% were women. Most respondents identified their race/ethnicity as White/Caucasian (86%). Each of the six NIRSA regions was represented, with the greatest percentage of responses (22%) coming from Region 3.

## Stated and Operative Goal Effectiveness Factors

Separate factor analyses were performed on the data pertaining to the stated goal, operative goal, and satisfaction items. The 25 items related to stated goal effectiveness were subjected to principal component analysis with a varimax rotation. The results indicated that four factors had an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more. Those four factors explained 54.7% of the variance in the data. In addition, only those items with a factor loading of .5 or higher were selected for inclusion in a factor (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). This eliminated seven items from further analysis, including all three of the items related to NIRSA Goal 5.

The first stated goal factor, which included five items, was labeled *Research and Professional Preparation* and subsumed NIRSA Goal 3. The second stated goal factor was labeled *Governance of the Association* and included two items each from NIRSA Goal 4 and Goal 6. The third factor, labeled *Focus on Member Needs*, included five items from NIRSA Goal 1, Goal 2, and Goal 6. The fourth factor, labeled *Promotion of Recreational Sport Programs*, included four items from NIRSA Goal 2 and Goal 4. Reliability estimates for the four stated goal factors

ranged from .75 to .81, which are above the recommended minimum value of .70 (Nunnally, 1978).

The 14 items related to operative goal effectiveness were then subjected to principal component analysis with a varimax rotation. The results indicated that three factors had an eigenvalue of 1.0 or more and explained 63.2% of the variance in the data. As in the previous analysis, those items with a factor loading of .5 or higher were selected for inclusion in a factor, which resulted in the retention of all 14 items for subsequent analyses.

The first operative goal factor was labeled *Involve Members in Strategic Planning*. This factor combined the items originally contained in Function 2 and Function 3. The second operative goal factor included three items from Function 1 and one item from Function 4. This operative goal factor continued to be labeled *External Relations* because the four items are related to establishing relationships with external organizations including those that provide sport programs for individuals with disabilities. The third operative goal factor included three items from Function 4 and retained the label *Diversity Initiatives*. Reliability estimates for the three operative goal factors ranged from .75 to .88.

Finally, one factor was extracted through principal component analysis of the five satisfaction items. Four items with factor loadings above .80 were selected to represent *Satisfaction with NIRSA*. The reliability estimate for this scale was .91.

## Data Analysis

The means and standard deviations for the stated goal factors, operative goal factors, and satisfaction by membership group and the total sample are presented in Table 2. The following assumptions were tested during the initial phase of the multivariate analyses: (a) normality, (b) homoscedasticity, (c) linearity, and (d) lack of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 1998).

## Membership Differences

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the effect of the three membership groups (1–4 years, 5–9 years, 10+ years)

**Table 2** Means and Standard Deviations (SD) for Goal Effectiveness Factors and Satisfaction

	Group 1 ( <i>n</i> = 75)	Group 2 ( <i>n</i> = 98)	Group 3 ( <i>n</i> = 121)	Total ( <i>n</i> = 294)
Goal 1	4.27 (.90)	4.09 (1.04)	3.93 (.93)	4.07 (.97)
Goal 2	4.78 (1.04)	4.84 (.85)	4.74 (.96)	4.79 (.94)
Goal 3	5.15 (.84)	5.23 (.85)	5.31 (.90)	5.25 (.87)
Goal 4	4.76 (.93)	4.60 (.92)	4.57 (.91)	4.63 (.92)
Function 1	4.91 (.85)	4.96 (.88)	4.99 (1.00)	4.96 (.92)
Function 2	4.12 (1.04)	3.90 (1.03)	3.82 (1.01)	3.92 (1.01)
Function 3	4.24 (.95)	4.20 (1.09)	4.46 (1.12)	4.32 (1.07)
Satisfaction	5.10 (1.07)	4.98 (1.22)	5.09 (1.15)	5.06 (1.15)



on the stated goal factors and a second to determine the effect of the membership groups on the operative goal factors. In addition, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to determine the effect of the membership groups on satisfaction.

## Relationships With Satisfaction With NIRSA

Correlation analyses were carried out to assess the relationships between (a) perceptions of stated goal factors and satisfaction and (b) perceptions of operative goal factors and satisfaction. Simultaneous multiple regression analyses were conducted using satisfaction as the dependent variable and stated goal or operative goal factors as the predictor variables. Finally, a third regression analysis was conducted using the stated and operative goal factors that predicted satisfaction in the previous two regression equations.

## Results

### Membership Effects

Results of the MANOVA demonstrated that significant differences were found among the three membership groups on the stated goal factors,  $F(8, 576) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ , and on the operative goal factors,  $F(6, 574) = 2.80$ ,  $p < .05$ . An ANOVA on each dependent variable was conducted as a follow-up test to each MANOVA. These ANOVA analyses at the .05 level indicated no significant differences among membership groups on either the stated or operative goal factors. Lastly, no significant differences were found between the three membership groups and satisfaction,  $F(2, 291) = .314$ ,  $p = .731$ . Thus, the data for the three membership groups were pooled for further analyses.

### Relationships of Perceptions of Stated and Goal Effectiveness With Satisfaction

Bivariate correlations indicated that satisfaction was significantly correlated ( $p < .001$ ) with all of the stated and operative goal factors. The correlations ranged from a low of .35 to a high of .72. Presented in Table 3 are the results of the three simultaneous multiple regression analyses. The first analysis demonstrated that the linear combination of stated goal measures was significantly related to satisfaction,  $F(4, 289) = 89.16$ ,  $p < .001$ . Two of the stated goal factors uniquely and significantly contributed to the prediction of member satisfaction with NIRSA: Goal 1 ( $sr^2 = .107$ ) and Goal 3 ( $sr^2 = .399$ ). Overall, 55% (54% adjusted) of the variance in members' satisfaction can be predicted by knowing the scores on these stated goal factors.

The second analysis revealed that the linear combination of operative goal measures was also significantly related to satisfaction,  $F(3, 288) = 94.89$ ,  $p < .001$ . Two of the operative goal factors uniquely and significantly contributed to the prediction of member satisfaction with the NIRSA: Function 1 ( $sr^2 = .463$ ) and Function 2 ( $sr^2 = .111$ ). Overall, 50% (49% adjusted) of the variance in members' satisfaction can be predicted by knowing the scores on these operative goal factors.

**Table 3** Regression of Satisfaction on Perceptions of Stated and Operative Goal Factors

	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	$\Delta R^2$	Beta
Stated goal factors	.743	.552	.546	
goal 1				0.114 <sup>a</sup>
goal 2				0.097
goal 3				0.574 <sup>b</sup>
goal 4				0.017
Operative goal factors	.705	.497	.492	
function 1				0.627 <sup>b</sup>
function 2				0.145 <sup>a</sup>
function 3				-0.039
Stated/operative goal factors	.754	.569	.563	
goal 1				0.104
goal 3				0.442 <sup>b</sup>
function 1				0.264 <sup>b</sup>
function 2				0.019

<sup>a</sup>  $p < .05$ .

<sup>b</sup>  $p < .001$ .

The final analysis determined that a linear combination of Goal 1, Goal 3, Function 1, and Function 2 (i.e., the factors that predicted satisfaction in the previous two analyses) was significantly related to satisfaction,  $F(4, 289) = 95.39$ ,  $p < .001$ . Two of the factors uniquely and significantly contributed to the prediction of member satisfaction with the NIRSA: Goal 3 ( $sr^2 = .0259$ ) and Function 1 ( $sr^2 = .146$ ). Thus, 57% (56% adjusted) of the variance in members' satisfaction can be predicted by knowing the scores on these two factors.

## Discussion

The focus of this study was on the effectiveness of the NIRSA in fulfilling its stated and operative goals as a network organization. There were no significant differences related to stated and operative goal effectiveness nor satisfaction among the membership groups. Therefore, it appears that length of membership in the organization is not significantly associated with perceptions of effectiveness or satisfaction. This finding is somewhat surprising in that, for different reasons, one might intuitively expect that either Groups 1 (1–4 years of membership) or 3 (10 or more years of membership) would have significantly higher perceptions of effectiveness and satisfaction than Group 2.

A possible explanation for this finding, in terms of Group 1, might be that it generally takes some time for members to become familiar with the specific goals and inner workings of an organization. Consequently, it might be difficult for new members to report with confidence their satisfaction and perceptions of organizational effectiveness, thus increasing the chance that they would be

somewhat generous with their assessments. Further, a limitation of the study was merging individuals with 1 through 4 years of NIRSA membership into one group and possibly skewing the results. A recommendation for future research would be to group members with 1 and perhaps 2 years of membership in a separate category.

In addition, perceptions of effectiveness and satisfaction might be associated, not with length of membership, but instead with the *importance* NIRSA members place on each of the stated and operative goals of the organization (O'Rourke & Chelladurai, 2006). In trade and professional organizations, such as the NIRSA, the organization should serve the needs of the members. The stated and operative goals might have importance to NIRSA members based on their professional development needs. Thus, further investigation should attempt to determine the importance of the various stated and operative goals to NIRSA members. Knowing the importance of each goal would make it possible to assess the alignment of the NIRSA's stated goals with its operative goals.

The results of the simultaneous regression for satisfaction revealed that 57% (56% adjusted) of the variance was explained by four of the stated and operative goals. One of the stated goals, Goal 3 ( $\beta = 0.442$ ), and one of the operative goals, Function 1 ( $\beta = 0.264$ ), contributed significantly to the prediction of satisfaction. Goal 3 (*Focus on Member Needs*) correlated highest ( $r = .72$ ) with satisfaction, followed closely by Function 1 (*Involve Members in Strategic Planning*), which was the next highest correlation ( $r = .70$ ).

Goal 3 was defined as providing programs and services that meet the needs of recreation professionals, students, and member institutions. Attainment of this overarching goal directly benefits individual NIRSA members, and thus, it is not surprising that it is significantly related to satisfaction. Function 2 was defined as keeping members informed of association services, soliciting members' opinions, and planning for the long-term future of the association. Communication and feedback are key factors related to satisfaction in service organizations (Andreasen & Kotler, 2003).

In addition, these two factors represent the short- and long-term concerns of NIRSA members. Focusing on the needs of the membership (Goal 3) and planning for the long-term future of the association (Function 1) through member input are related to the value of one's membership in an organization. There are several other trade or professional associations that compete with the NIRSA for members and funds. Effectively focusing on the needs of the members and involving members in key decision-making demonstrates a willingness to respond proactively to potential changes in the recreational sport industry. Serving, and even anticipating, the needs of members might generate greater satisfaction with the association.

Finally, the results of this study confirmed the validity and reliability of the instrument used to measure stated and operative goal effectiveness in the NIRSA. Consequently, the information from the current study can be used as baseline data for a longitudinal study of effectiveness in the NIRSA over a 5- to 10-year period. Also, replicating the study with a larger sample size drawn from a cross section of national professional associations related to sport and recreation, such as the North American Society of Sport Management; National Recreation and Parks Association; and American Alliance of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, would help to confirm the stated and operative goal dimensions.

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