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Theoretical foundations for service innovation research in sport management – insights from nonprofit sport organisations

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HAL Authorization

Introduction

1 Sport and innovation are closely intertwined (Gerke, 2016; Newell & Swan, 1995).
2 Research on sport and innovation encompasses products and technology (Desbordes, 2001;
3 Gerke, 2016; Hoerber & Hoerber, 2012; Shah, 2000), social progress (Svensson et al., 2020;
4 Svensson & Hambrick, 2019), organisational change (Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2017;
5 Winand et al., 2016), and services (Behnam et al., 2022; Svensson et al., 2020; Wemmer &
6 Koenigstorfer, 2015; Winand et al., 2016; Winand et al., 2013). While there are theoretical
7 advances in sport innovation research (Corthouts et al., 2023; Ratten & Ferrand, 2017;
8 Tjønndal, 2017), there is a knowledge gap regarding how to theoretically approach innovation
9 in nonprofit sport organisations (NPSO).
10

11 The management literature focuses on various dimensions of innovation, including
12 innovation as both a process and outcome (product/service) (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010;
13 Utterback & Abernathy, 1975), innovation diffusion (Baldrige & Burnham, 1975),
14 organisational innovativeness (Damanpour & Evan, 1984; Damanpour et al., 1989), and
15 innovation processes (Wolfe, 1994). Innovation definitions refer here to new products,
16 services, processes, administrative structures or systems within an organisation (Crossan &
17 Apaydin, 2010; Damanpour, 1991).

18 Another research stream emerged alongside of three conceptualisations of service
19 innovation – assimilation, demarcation, and synthesis (Carlborg et al., 2014; Gallouj &
20 Savona, 2009). While previous service innovation studies were more likely to have used
21 either the assimilation or demarcation perspectives (Tether, 2005; Toivonen & Tuominen,
22 2009), some researchers have developed a multidimensional service innovation framework
23 proposing four archetypes of service innovation - output-based, process-based, experiential,
24 and systemic (Helkkula et al., 2018). This research stream emerged mainly from marketing,
25 proposing service innovation as an all-encompassing concept for value co-creation

1 (Kowalkowski & Witell, 2020). As was the case for the marketing-inspired work on service
2 innovation, our work is relevant for public, for-profit, and nonprofit organisations (Chandler
3 et al., 2019).

4 Nonprofit organisations are a popular context for service innovation scholars.
5 Nonprofit organisations experience pressure to be more business-like (Choi, 2014), hence the
6 need to innovate and compete with private sector firms entering their field of activity (e.g.,
7 health, education) (McDonald, 2007). Innovation research on nonprofit organisations includes
8 the role of leadership and organisational climate for innovation (Brimhall, 2021), motivations
9 for funding innovation in the nonprofit context of foundations (Jaskyte, 2004) and the role of
10 innovation in social enterprises aiming at solving social problems (Weerawardena & Mort,
11 2012). Our study extends the body of knowledge on service innovation in nonprofit
12 organisations by focussing on the service innovation practices of NPSOs (Corthouts et al.,
13 2022; Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2016).

14 Despite the service-intensive nature of the sport industry (Behnam et al., 2022;
15 Corthouts et al., 2023; Hoeber et al., 2015; Winand et al., 2016), service innovation was not a
16 prominent concept in early sport management innovation research. When service innovation
17 became the focus, studies relied upon frameworks related to exploring the nature of
18 innovation (i.e., product and process innovation) (Hoeber et al., 2015; Svensson & Hambrick,
19 2019). Service innovation studies in sport implicitly adopted either an outcome-based
20 (Tjønnedal, 2017; Winand et al., 2016) or a process-based perspective (Hoeber & Hoeber,
21 2012). Corthouts et al. (2023) suggest other approaches to innovation (e.g., strategic
22 dimension). Hoff et al. (2023) address this with their study on innovation strategies, drivers,
23 and barriers for the organising committees of Olympic Games. Lefebvre et al. (2023)
24 examined the impact of governance on sport innovation. However, there is no comprehensive
25 theoretical framework explaining service innovation within nonprofit sport organisations. It

1 will ensure the use of common terminology, the development of a more coherent development
2 agenda, and more effective application of service innovation theories to understanding service
3 innovation in NPSO.

4 In this research, we address the question: *How do nonprofit sport organisations*
5 *engage in service innovation?* We view service innovation here as doing something that is
6 new to the organisation (Snyder et al., 2016; Toivonen & Tuominen, 2009), requiring changes
7 in the competencies applied by service providers and customers leading directly or indirectly
8 to an improved offering not previously available to customers (Kowalkowski & Witell, 2020).
9 This aligns with previous definitions for service innovation in sport management literature
10 (Tjønnedal, 2017; Winand et al., 2016). We analyse service innovation in golf clubs using
11 multiple theoretical perspectives drawn from literature (Carlborg et al., 2014; Gustafsson et
12 al., 2020; Helkkula et al., 2018; Skálén et al., 2015).

13 This research makes three contributions. First, we set a common ground for future
14 service innovation research in the nonprofit sport context by demonstrating the
15 complementary nature of diverging theoretical perspectives of service innovation. Second, we
16 provide empirical support for existing service innovation frameworks. Third, our research
17 provides concrete managerial implications for nonprofit sport organisations' managers to
18 stimulate service innovation.

19 **Theoretical Framework**

20 **Theoretical Perspectives of Service Innovation**

21 The assimilation perspective applies product innovation principles to service
22 innovation (Witell et al., 2016). New technology leads to service innovation (Toivonen &
23 Tuominen, 2009). Within this firm-centric approach, innovation depends on organisations'
24 internal resources and their combination (i.e., R&D capacities) (Terziovski, 2010). Others
25 emphasise the ability to adapt the resource base to environmental changes (i.e., dynamic

1 capabilities) (Lütjen et al., 2019). Another perspective considers the role of users, suppliers
2 and other actors within a firm's network for innovation (Witell et al., 2017). However, the
3 central actor remains the focal firm and its ability to use new technology in conjunction with
4 network actors to develop new services (Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2015). This approach
5 reflects the view that service industries are by nature not innovative and only product and
6 technology changes lead to service innovation (Tether, 2005).

7 The demarcation perspective assumes significant differences between product and
8 service innovation. Here, the service innovation displays different dynamics and has different
9 characteristics than product innovation. Hence, traditional product or process innovation
10 approaches are not applicable. A service-innovation specific perspective is needed, suggesting
11 that service firms (e.g., banks) innovate differently (e.g., unsystematically and across the
12 entire firm, rather than organised in specific R&D departments) (Toivonen & Tuominen,
13 2009). The demarcation perspective highlights the differences between product and service
14 innovation; however, it ignores the common threads (Carlborg et al., 2014; Coombs & Miles,
15 2000; Sundbo, 1997).

16 The synthesis perspective encompasses goods and services, as well as technological
17 and non-technological innovations (Howells, 2010; Kowalkowski & Witell, 2020). It
18 recognises that the entire economy consists of service-like activities (Coombs & Miles, 2000;
19 Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In contrast to the firm-centricity within other perspectives, the
20 synthesis perspective is customer-centric. Whilst the firm can make a new or modified value
21 proposition, it is the customer that ultimately determines value (Skålén et al., 2015; Vargo &
22 Lusch, 2008).

23 **Archetypes of Service Innovation**

24 The output-based archetype of service innovation equates service innovation with
25 outputs and emphasises the attributes of service innovation, hence it mirrors aspects of the

1 assimilation perspective (Utterback & Abernathy, 1975). Both the firm providing the new
2 service and the consumer (i.e., beneficiary) must acquire new competences to benefit from the
3 new service proposition (Helkkula et al., 2018).

4 The process-oriented archetype corresponds mostly with the demarcation approach
5 because it emphasises the phases of the customer's service consumption and the consumer's
6 inseparability from the service consumption process. In the process-based archetype, service
7 innovation is understood as an activity or process (of new service development). Hence,
8 factors like employee and customer involvement are essential for value creation throughout
9 the service process (Helkkula et al., 2018).

10 The experiential and systemic archetypes build on the synthesis approach (Helkkula et
11 al., 2018). The experiential archetype is based on individual and subjective experiences
12 (Helkkula et al., 2018). Therefore, service innovation is an individual experience that is
13 dependent upon the customer's social and economic context in the moment of use and co-
14 creation of value (Chen, 2017; Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). The experiential archetype
15 highlights the individually determined value of an experience by the consumer (i.e., service
16 beneficiary). The consumer determines the value of a specific service innovation dependent
17 on the wider context in which it occurs (e.g., social context, environmental and climate
18 conditions, individual physical condition). Service innovation happens through socially
19 cocreated experiences within a service ecosystem (Buser et al., 2022; Helkkula et al., 2018).

20 The systemic archetype incorporates market-facing resources (i.e., resources possessed
21 or controlled by the firm), but also private-facing resources (i.e., resources possessed or
22 controlled by an individual (e.g., the customer)) and public-facing resources (i.e., resources
23 possessed or controlled by society (e.g., nature) (Chandler et al., 2019). The systemic
24 archetype positions service innovation as a reconfiguration of resources, actors, and
25 institutional arrangements. Value creation occurs within a social system composed of actors,

1 their resources, and institutional arrangements. Service innovation creates new value
2 propositions by integrating available resources within a system of service-for-service
3 exchange in a specific context (Helkkula et al., 2018; Lusch & Nambisan, 2015).

4 **Service Innovation Practices**

5 Practices are routine activities that integrate resources of multiple actors (Skålén et al.,
6 2015). Practices can integrate both operant resources (i.e., knowledge and skills) and operand
7 resources (i.e., tangibles) (Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Combining practices and resources creates
8 novel value propositions, which underpin value co-creation and resource integration by
9 customers and other actors (Skålén et al., 2015).

10 Skålén et al. (2015) categorised ten common practices in three aggregates: Provision
11 practices, representational practices, and management and organisational practices. Provision
12 practices ensure the fulfilment of the value proposition. There are three types of provision
13 practices. *Operating practices* aim at supporting value creation for the core customer as stated
14 in the value proposition. *Problem-finding* refers to identifying problems with value creation
15 and needs for new forms of creating value. *Problem-solving* refers to solving customer
16 problems (Skålén et al., 2015). Representational practices enable communication between
17 actors. These practices integrate resources to describe, comprehend and communicate the
18 value proposition, either fully or partially, to internal and external stakeholders. There are
19 three types of representational practices. *Naming and labelling* describe the activities of the
20 value proposition and their fulfilment. *Modelling practices* refers to the structure of the value
21 proposition. *Interaction practices* enable the communication of value propositions to
22 customers or the co-creation of value propositions with customers (Skålén et al., 2015).
23 Management and organisational practices are the baseline working methods and resources
24 needed for provision and representational practices. These practices align and organise
25 provision and representational practices, and the resources that these practices integrate. Four

1 practices fall under management and organisational practices. *Organising practices* refer to
2 organising the work of providing and representing value propositions. *Staffing and team*
3 *building practices* relate to staff recruitment, team structures and team building. *Networking*
4 *practices* occur when a firm involves members of its network to create, deliver, or negotiate
5 value propositions. *Knowledge-sharing* refers to sharing knowledge, skills, and resources
6 throughout the organisation (Skålén et al., 2015).

7 **Methods**

8 This study was guided by an interpretivist epistemology (Crotty, 1998). Ontologically,
9 interpretivism asserts that objectivity cannot be attributed objectively, because it reflects the
10 collective distillation of various viewpoints (Levers, 2013). Epistemologically, interpretive
11 research contends that knowledge is contextual, shaped by historical, temporal, cultural, and
12 subjective factors (Benoliel, 1996). Given the open-ended nature of our research questions,
13 we used a basic qualitative methodology (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) combined with an
14 inductive-deductive data analysis strategy (Miles et al., 2014). This approach combines
15 inductive and deductive reasoning methods to acquire a more comprehensive and nuanced
16 understanding of the research problem (Gioia et al., 2013). This approach is particularly
17 valuable when dealing with complex or exploratory research questions that may benefit from
18 multiple perspectives and insights (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

19 **Data Collection**

20 The sport industry is a complex service system where actors from the public, private,
21 and nonprofit sphere create value (Buser et al., 2022; Gerke et al., 2020; Woratschek et al.,
22 2014). At the time of the study, Australian golf clubs operated in a declining and hostile
23 market (Golf Australia, 2019). McGinnis et al. (2019) attributed the participation decline to a
24 variety of factors, including leisure choices, race, economic, and gender differences among
25 Millennials. Golf clubs were compelled to provide a range of service innovations (Craw &

1 Dickson, 2018). Problematically, golf clubs were anchored in traditional institutions (i.e.,
2 norms, symbols, and behaviour). Therefore, the golf clubs are an appropriate context to study
3 service innovation.

4 We pursued a purposive sampling strategy (Patten & Newhart, 2018). We recruited
5 club general managers (GM) or board directors from twenty nonprofit golf clubs that were
6 finalists or award-winners in the Australian Professional Golfers' Association (PGA) "Club of
7 the Year" Awards for 2017-2019. These awards recognise "excellence in all aspects relating
8 to the management and operations of a facility, as well as administering financial success of a
9 golf club over the past 12 months" (PGA Australia., 2021). This "award winner" approach
10 imitates the sampling approach used by Svensson and Hambrick (2019). The "award winner"
11 sampling frame was selected because it identified seemingly progressive organisations, which
12 augured well for their innovativeness and their willingness to talk about such innovations.
13 Both general managers and directors are well placed to describe innovation within their
14 organisations because they are actively involved in adopting, developing, and implementing
15 innovations. We contacted approximately 50 clubs throughout Australia, aiming for an equal
16 distribution of clubs based on geographical location, size, and access. Table 1 summarises
17 interviewee details.

18 Insert Table 1

19 Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, either via telephone, video
20 calls, or face-to-face meetings. The interview guide reflected four key issues: 1) introduction
21 (Can you tell me more about your current role?), 2) innovation practices (Can you tell me
22 about recent changes at the club?), 3) resources and practices (Can you tell me how the club
23 creates, extends or modifies its resource base?), 4) innovation and resources (Can you recall
24 how the club acquires new resources or knowledge to innovate its core activity?).

1 **Data Analysis**

2 We used Nvivo and a combined inductive-deductive approach for coding the data. The
3 first stage used *in vivo* coding strategies to identify themes related to practices and resources
4 preceding service innovation (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2013). This helped to reduce and
5 sort the data (Miles et al., 2014). We identified inductively second or third order themes that
6 were collapsed into first order themes.

7 The second stage used a descriptive coding strategy (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana,
8 2013). It implied assigning the quotations from the first coding round to practice categories
9 theoretically derived from Skålén et al. (2015) (e.g., operating practices) and to the service
10 innovation archetypes (e.g., output-oriented) (Helkkula et al., 2018). Then, the authors
11 distilled examples for innovation practices.

12 Both authors conducted several rounds of individual coding and joint comparison.
13 Then, following Campbell et al. (2013), the principal investigator coded all the remaining data
14 and the second investigator scrutinised the robustness and pertinence of the data coding. At
15 this stage both researchers discussed critical cases of coding, and the second author served as
16 critical peer to ensure that the first author's interpretation resonated with the research purpose.
17 This included arbitration when examples fitted two different categories.

18 Table 2 summarises the interviewees that provided evidence for the different practices
19 and whether these reflected an output, process, experiential, or systemic perspective.

20 **Insert Table 2**

21 Table 3 summarises the different practices aiming for provision, representation, or
22 management and organisational purposes and displays whether these practices reflected an
23 output, process, experiential, or systemic perspective.

24 **Insert Table 3**

Findings and Discussion

Provision Practices

Operating practices. Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice directly or indirectly support the value proposition made to the customer?* (Skálén et al., 2015) New operating practices were related to new food and beverage offerings, comfortable furniture, extended opening hours of bar/restaurant, theme nights and live music, play experiences for children, sports programmes on TV, and the provision of a golf simulator and/or mini golf. These additional offerings generated additional revenues and attracted other target groups (e.g., family and friends of golf playing members). We considered these as *output-based* innovations because they are additional service offerings that can be adopted by the customer. The results of this service innovation can be measured by the number of new services launched and the number of new customers and sales achieved (e.g., number of meals sold per evening, number of members) (Helkkula et al., 2018). Club A explained, “I believe we would struggle to break even if we relied just on our golfing members but with the social membership [...] It allows a wider breadth of offer for golfing members.”

Further operational practices included different competition formats, allocation of people to playing groups, allocating tee times for different groups. These practices reflect the *process-based* service innovation perspective because they concern different phases of the customer’s service consumption process (e.g., after playing), the close integration of the customer in these practices (e.g., group configurations requires the participation of players), and modification and evaluation of competences of service provider and beneficiary (e.g., setting up visitor and member tees).

There are operating practices that indirectly supported the value proposition (i.e., golf play and other entertainment). We identified adopting environmentally friendly practices (e.g., intelligent waste management, use of solar power, and finding alternatives to pesticides

1 to preserve greens). These practices reflect the *process-based* perspective of service
2 innovation because they enhance the performance of existing services through new
3 technologies (e.g., waste management systems, solar technology, alternatives to chemicals).

4 Club L explains:

5 We've been involved with a new technology which is called Nano bubble technology.
6 [...] Essentially the technology places extra oxygen into the water, and in addition it
7 injects ozone which kills all bacteria. It allows us to utilize less fungicide and
8 herbicides.

9 Several *operating practices* reflect the experiential archetype of service innovation.

10 These practices directly or indirectly support the value proposition to the customer but depend
11 on the individual customer's situation and social context during consumption (Helkkula et al.,
12 2018). The club provides potentially "a second home" to club members but only if they
13 perceive the club environment and its social context as such. The same is true for creating a
14 family friendly atmosphere which requires the club to change the applied operant (e.g. staff to
15 facilitate children's cooking class) and operand resources (e.g., children's playroom) (Vargo
16 & Lusch, 2004). While some actions overlap with the outcome-based practice of providing
17 other forms of entertainment, the difference is that other entertainment forms are only a means
18 to the end of creating an entirely different experience.

19 There are operating practices that integrate resources from other community actors,
20 indicating a *systemic* perspective. Club R shared:

21 We host a charity day, we give it [the club house] to them at cost price but it is one
22 hundred and thirty people that come to the facility. Then [they're] having their weekly
23 meetings here, their quarterly big gatherings. It's bringing more people here which
24 means high private food and beverage revenues. [...] It's actually just getting people
25 to visit your venue and then, you've got to have the products or services. They go

1 'wow' what a great place, we're going to come back here. [...] you can find
2 innovative ways within the community to bring them here [...].

3 *Problem-finding practices*. Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice*
4 *directly or indirectly help identifying customers' problems with the value creation or*
5 *customers' needs for new forms of value creation?* (Skålén et al., 2015). Introducing a new
6 CRM platform enabled better understanding of customers' problems. This practice reflects an
7 *output-based* archetype because it lead to innovation through measurable, valuable
8 achievements (Helkkula et al., 2018). Club L explained:

9 Innovation for us is regarding how we communicate with our members and our way of
10 becoming more refined in our communication skills. We're utilising a new
11 CRM/marketing platform. With that, our business intelligence side, our polls, and a
12 membership database [improved]. We're able to understand exactly what our members
13 are utilising and what their likes and dislikes are.

14 In terms of *problem-finding* from a *process-based* perspective, we identified new
15 forms of golf, acquiring feedback from member surveys, and direct communication between
16 staff and customers. These practices engage directly with the customer. A *problem-finding*
17 practice taking an *experiential* approach would be if a staff member followed the journey of a
18 customer throughout the club, accounting for the subjective perspective of the customer and
19 his/her service experience. A *problem-finding* activity that reflected a *systemic* archetype was
20 clarifying future business models before building the golf and club facilities as indicated by
21 Club A:

22 The way we went about that was tapping into the local community pre-move,
23 establishing relationships out here with, whether it's schools or businesses, before
24 actually opening. And then providing facilities that we felt would be very attractive to
25 non-golfers.

1 *Problem-solving practices*. Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this*
2 *practice directly or indirectly help solving customers' problems?* (Skålen et al., 2015). The
3 introduction of a driving-range membership *resolved the problem* of customers wanting to use
4 the range more frequently at a better price. The new service offering is an *outcome-based*
5 innovation. Club D explained:

6 A major change for us and probably quite rare within the golf industry is to offer a
7 driving range membership. [...] We had several heavy users who would use the
8 driving range often. We introduced a way for those heavy users to come down and
9 practice. They would pay \$999 a year and then they get unlimited access to the driving
10 range.

11 We identified a few *problem-solving practices* as *process-oriented* service innovation
12 because they focus on changes in the process of delivering and accessing the value
13 proposition. One was related to the hospitality service and the introduction of an app to order
14 food and beverages. This innovation solved the customers' problem of needing to enter the
15 club house to place an order. Another customer-facing *process-oriented* problem-solving
16 activity was the installation of a payment machine, which allowed non-members to pay when
17 the clubhouse was unattended. A third example - an internal process-oriented service
18 innovation – was the implementation of a long-term plan to improve the course.

19 An example of *experience-based* service innovation was the use of ball-tracking
20 technology at the club's driving range (Club D):

21 All our driving range bays have this technology which allows the customer to track
22 their ball flight and digitise golf. There is an element of gamification around what that
23 technology provides.

24 This technology is an example of experiential *problem-solving* service innovation because of
25 the subjective perception of the value proposition through the application of customers' skills.

1 If the customer is not performing well, he/she might not like the technology as opposed to a
2 golf player who performs well whilst using the new technology.

3 Reflecting a *systemic* archetype, we identified an operations-related *problem-solving*
4 activity related to maintaining golf greens during the winter. The golf course superintendent
5 participated in an international conference to learn new greens' maintenance practices. In
6 doing so, he integrated the knowledge of other professionals from other golf clubs.

7 ***Representational Practices***

8 *Naming and labelling practices.* Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this*
9 *practice directly or indirectly describe the activities of the value proposition and their*
10 *fulfilment ?* (Skålén et al., 2015). Labelling and promoting the region as golf tourism
11 destination goes beyond the value proposition of a golfing experience because it contains a
12 tourism element. For example, Club E explained:

13 [...] that event has gone from just being a golf tournament, we've now leveraged that
14 to become a more of a golf tourism destination. We want them to be able to come and
15 experience that tournament from all over the country.

16 Another form of labelling was referring to the club as a high-performance golf centre
17 incorporating an elite coaching and practice facility. The third example was the aggressive
18 labelling of competitive pricing initiatives (e.g., March Madness). All three practices were
19 aimed at changing the profile and image of the club to attract more and different customers.
20 All represent a change occurring at a specific time (e.g., when the label is created) in pursuit
21 of a specific measurable and valuable outcome (i.e., repositioning). Therefore, these naming
22 and labelling practices are *output-based* service innovations (Helkkula et al., 2018).

23 Redesigning the website is a *process-based* service innovation that enhanced the
24 performance of existing technology (Helkkula et al., 2018). The redesign required the
25 customer to engage with the redesigned interface. Club S explains:

1 We would often have people say, ‘I can’t find where to book on the website’, now on
2 my website it's on the front page right in the middle and it never moves. Even though
3 it seems like the simplest of things, when you've got a high-volume facility, you need
4 to make those little things easy so that the customers path to purchase experience is
5 seamless and quick and efficient.

6 Some naming and labelling practices are aimed at enhancing the customer experience.

7 Club A testifies:

8 If you look at the welcome home sign that you drove past when we first came. A sign
9 like that generates so much conversation. Because it means different things to different
10 people. You will have a member that will say, ‘geez, I don't know why you would
11 bother, doing it seems like a waste of money’And then you might have a member
12 come in and they are in tears because seeing that type of sign prompts memories,
13 prompts issues with families that they might be having, and it does make them feel
14 like it's a home.

15 Whether this is the case depends on the individual user’s subjective point of view and their
16 social context (i.e., are all visitors familiar to the club and having the same feelings?) The
17 value of this *experiential* service innovation is subjectively co-created in the social context.

18 A naming and labelling practice in some clubs was to make use statements in internal
19 communications such as “it’s your club” and “community club”. The intentional use of this
20 language indicated the *systemic* nature of innovation where value is co-created in the social
21 context of the value proposition including both the beneficiary and other social actors
22 (Helkkula et al., 2018; Woratschek et al., 2014).

23 *Modelling practices.* Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice*
24 *directly or indirectly create the structure of the value proposition?* (Skålén et al., 2015)

25 Adapting the price, usage structure, and rules for the golf club facilities was such a modelling

1 practice as these elements provide the key pillars of the golfing experience (who can play
2 when and at what price?). This is *output-based* service innovation because it is another point-
3 in-time initiative based on the modified offer to achieve measurable outcomes (i.e., more
4 customers, sales, and profit).

5 There are different elements within a golf club's value proposition. A core structural
6 element is the golf course design because it determines the value that a customer co-creates
7 via their skills (Helkkula et al., 2018). Low-skill players are at risk of compromising the
8 enjoyment of other players. Customers co-create value in use when playing on redesigned
9 courses and new kinds of practice facilities, hence these are *process-based* service innovations
10 (Helkkula et al., 2018). Revamping the membership structure is a process-based service
11 innovation through a modelling practice because it changes how customers access the value
12 proposition. The membership structure is a less tangible structural element of the value
13 proposition. Club D explains:

14 We realised that we weren't providing a level of flexibility that catered to the changing
15 needs of our customer base. Rather than having a fixed package we created what we
16 term a bespoke membership. The member can select from all the different assets here,
17 whether it's coaching, driving range, golf course, retail and build out a membership
18 that's suitable to them. So, there's a level of flexibility that's built into that kind of
19 membership offering that has proven successful.

20 An *experiential* service innovation of a modelling practice was making the golf club a
21 social environment, hence designing a value proposition that goes beyond a place where you
22 can play golf but a place where a customer can find other enjoyments (e.g., food,
23 entertainment). This also included a social support network as explained by Club Q:

24 What I've found is that once they stop playing golf, they resign their membership [...]
25 that's something I really want to change. The golf club is more than somewhere you

1 come to play golf. It's your network, it is your community, and just because you've
2 stopped playing golf doesn't mean you can't still be part.

3 *Systemic* modelling practices included developing value propositions addressing the
4 local community. More specifically, this new value proposition reflects an open and inclusive
5 club environment that provides elements that can be enjoyed by non-golfers. For example,
6 "Fish Fridays" was a dinner event open to the entire community. Other efforts to embrace the
7 wider community included not only local citizens but also local government authorities (e.g.,
8 the local Council held meetings at golf club). A third systemic modelling practice were the
9 efforts to preserve and restore the ecological environment. Therefore, in these innovation
10 initiatives both private-facing (i.e., possessed by the customer) as well as public-facing (i.e.,
11 possessed or controlled by society) resources were integrated (Chandler et al., 2019; Helkkula
12 et al., 2018).

13 *Interaction practices.* The analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice*
14 *directly or indirectly enable the firm to communicate the value proposition to its customers,*
15 *or to cocreate it with them?* Introducing a loyalty system and membership card was a typical
16 *output-based* interaction practice as it is a vehicle to convey member benefits that combined
17 form the value proposition. Furthermore, the implementation of a loyalty system was
18 expected to produce positive attributes for both the customer (e.g., payment services) and
19 provider (e.g., information about the customers' behaviour). Another outcome-based
20 interaction practice was establishing a customer email database.

21 Communicating through word-of-mouth was a *process-based* interaction practice
22 because it creates great advocacy and effective prospection. A context specific interaction
23 practice was relaxing or abandoning dress codes. Rules concerning clothing worn in the club
24 house and on the course are anchored in golf clubs' traditions and have an impact on
25 interactions of people that might pay different levels of respect to those rules. Relaxing or

1 abandoning these traditions had a major impact on interactions between customers, but also
2 between customers and staff as it breaks down social barriers. Club N representative
3 explained, “We've also relaxed some of our really hard-line rules [about clothing], as golf
4 clubs tend to have really strict rules and regulations based around clothing”. Another
5 interaction practice was engaging in friendly and regular communication with customers as it
6 linked the value proposition directly to the customer, by involving them in the co-creation
7 process. This included embracing more relaxed and informal standards of communication, but
8 also the style and frequency of written communication to customers (e.g., newsletters,
9 mailings). Finally, another set of actions was refocussing staff on face-to-face service tasks
10 rather than standardised tasks (e.g., bookings). All these practices relate to improvements at
11 different points along the customer service consumption *process* and require the customer to
12 participate in the service innovation process.

13 *Experiential* interaction practices were related to personalising the service experience
14 and communication. For example, customers were “surprised” by a service that went beyond
15 their expectations (e.g., free drinks offered by the club’s GM) as shown here by Club A:

16 Before we opened this venue, we decided we wanted to be non-transactional. So, we
17 didn't want to create an environment where you'd like a pencil that's 20 cents, oh,
18 you'd like a tee, that's five cents, or you want a bucket of range balls, that's ten dollars.
19 So, we removed all that transactional requirement and bundled it all in together and
20 just said. “you pay your membership fees as a golfer and go and enjoy all of that”. It's
21 fabulous because when you see 20-30 people standing out on the practice range it
22 creates a sense of community as well.

23 The same practice of personalising is evident through personalised mailing that some clubs
24 favoured against impersonal mass communication. This service innovation practice puts the
25 customer and its subjective perception in the centre (Helkkula et al., 2018).

1 *Systemic* service innovation through interaction practices included engaging with
2 community stakeholders and forming relationships with various actors in the environment of
3 the golf club (e.g., tourism operators, wildlife, local authorities). Club A explains:

4 It's forming relationships and building trust with international operators, to then pick
5 up your product which will be nature-based tourism in this location because we have
6 beautiful wildlife up there - kangaroos, wombats, echidnas. The golf is merely one
7 component that adds on to that. Walking trails and then supporting the local region,
8 how is a business perceived to support others is important in that circle of community.

9 ***Management and Organisational Practices***

10 *Organising practices.* Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice*
11 *directly or indirectly organise the work for providing and representing value propositions?*
12 (Skålén et al., 2015) Incremental improvement of the golf course is indirectly related to the
13 value proposition because it seeks creating better outputs for customers with improved
14 attributes at the time of consumption. Introducing IT supported membership management
15 systems enables efficient membership management and otherwise unavailable insights about
16 the customers' behaviour. Scheduling strategic management and planning sessions concerns
17 work organisation necessary to provide and realise value propositions. These practices are
18 *output-based* as they turn inputs (e.g., course maintenance know-how, IT systems, strategic
19 planning sessions) into measurable outcomes (e.g., golf course improvements, membership
20 information, improved work organisation).

21 We identified several *process-based* organising practices. First, some clubs redesigned
22 the customer-club transactions using a diverse set of IT solutions. These included cloud-based
23 solutions providing real-time integration of membership point-of-sale, and accounting
24 systems. Another example is integrating internal resources and processes by installing solar
25 panels and enhancing battery capacity to power the golf carts. Outsourcing of non-core

1 activities (e.g., hospitality) is a practice that changed how value is created from a process
2 perspective. Finally, risk and opportunity assessment tools and methods are a process-based
3 organising practice as illustrated by Club C:

4 We have a small internal process called an MPS which is a Major Projects Submission
5 which we run through a series of checkpoints, and we identify whether we need to
6 consult with members [...] We tick off to make sure that what we're going to try
7 doesn't overcommit us financially firstly, and it also doesn't disrupt what we're
8 already doing.

9 An example for the *experiential* archetype is organising the internal department
10 structure around the customer's journey, from their first interaction with the potential
11 customer, to joining the club, using the facilities, and exiting the club.

12 An organising practice reflecting a *systemic* perspective was working with
13 stakeholders to create sustainable water access. Enhancing supplier relationships to access
14 best practices and machines for course maintenance was also evidence for systemic
15 approaches to service innovation beyond firm boundaries (Helkkula et al., 2018).

16 *Staffing and team-building practices.* Our analysis was guided by the question: *does*
17 *this practice directly or indirectly help hiring staff and forming teams that can provide and*
18 *communicate service?* (Skálén et al., 2015). Examples of practices reflecting the output-based
19 archetype would be exceptional salary and in-kind benefits for the employee (e.g., reduced
20 membership rate).

21 A staffing and team building practice reflecting the *process-based* archetype was
22 premised on having downtime with staff. This practice facilitated team building and altered
23 the employee's role to co-creating managerial and strategic improvements and changes rather
24 than simply undergo them. These practices included informal gatherings, and the ability to
25 discuss and acknowledge achievements.

1 An *experience*-based service innovation related to staffing related to differentiating
2 committee and staff roles. This enabled staff to work without undue director influence. Club
3 R explained:

4 [...] divorcing the role of committees away from the roles of staff and put a very clear
5 line in the sand about the roles and responsibilities. [...] none of our management staff
6 sits on the committee [...] they don't report to a committee and the committee are not
7 allowed to address the staff on work related matters. [...] Our superintendent left a
8 higher paying job at a bigger club [...] and he's come back to a club like this because
9 of the structure.

10 A *staffing and team-building practice* reflecting a *systemic* perspective was bringing
11 together internal staff and staff of key stakeholders for team-building activities.

12 *Networking practices*. Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this practice*
13 *directly or indirectly relate to or involve members of its network in order to create, deliver, or*
14 *negotiate value propositions ?* (Skålén et al., 2015) Network practices reflecting an *outcome-*
15 *based* perspective occurred in transactional relationships with stakeholders that had as
16 primary purpose achieving measurable outcomes. Club F engaged in a partnership with
17 Special Olympics to develop new adapted programmes and implement golf-specific
18 programmes in a school for students with intellectual disabilities. As a networking practice
19 from a *process* perspective, we noted that some clubs engaged systematically with customers
20 or other actors in a structured process towards improving service production and
21 consumption. An example for an *experience-based networking practice* would be engaging
22 with customers and other stakeholders to design the ideal experience. In terms of *networking*
23 *practices* reflecting a *systemic* archetype, Club F shared their view of being a community club
24 meaning engaging and creating networks with all stakeholders in the community including
25 other clubs, local schools, councils, businesses, indigenous tribes, etc.

1 *Knowledge sharing practices.* Our analysis was guided by the question: *does this*
2 *practice directly or indirectly entail the dissemination of knowledge and skills and important*
3 *resources throughout the company and beyond in order to realise the value proposition for*
4 *the customer?* (Skálén et al., 2015) Employees participation in designing their new office
5 space is a knowledge sharing practice reflecting an *output-based* archetype. Employees share
6 their experiences and preferences to design an optimal office space (output) which supports
7 the value proposition. An example for a *process-based* knowledge sharing practice would be
8 establishing systematic knowledge seeking processes and procedures throughout the service
9 production and consumption process. An example of an *experience-based knowledge sharing*
10 *practices* would be establishing systematic knowledge seeking activities around the perceived
11 customer experience. An example of *systemic knowledge sharing practice* would be
12 establishing knowledge sharing systems incorporating club stakeholders.

13 ***Combining Theoretical Frameworks for Service Innovation***

14 Based on these findings we combine the theoretical lenses into a practice framework
15 to stimulate service innovation (see Figure 1). In this framework, four service innovation
16 archetypes (Helkkula et al., 2018) on the y-axis (i.e., output-based, process-based,
17 experiential, and systemic) are integrated with three service innovation practices (Skálén et
18 al., 2015) on the x-axis (i.e., provision, representational, and management and organisational
19 practices). This framework guided the second (i.e., deductive) analysis. To use the
20 framework, a manager should first determine the area of action based on the three x-axis
21 questions. In essence the manager can a) provide a new or improved value proposition, b)
22 improve or renew ways of communicating and interacting with other actors, and c) improve or
23 renew baseline working methods and resources.

24 Once the area of action for the innovation activity is determined, the manager can then
25 determine the scope of innovation by using the four zones on the right-hand side of the figure.

1 He/she can approach innovation via a new technology to produce new combinations of
2 products and services (Zone 1). This approach will lead to output-oriented innovation.
3 Alternatively, the manager could focus on renewing and improving processes to optimise the
4 service delivery to consumers directly (i.e., processes related to service consumption) or
5 indirectly (i.e., processes related to service administration) (Zone 2). Managers that focus on
6 service innovation in Zone 3 will extend the scope beyond the organisation focusing on
7 improving or renewing the consumer experience. A manager who focuses on Zone 4 is taking
8 the broadest and most disruptive approach to innovation given they are integrating different
9 actors in the value creation system via the value co-creation process.

10 In summary, the framework highlights the different options for service innovation. It
11 can serve as a tool for analysis of past service innovation activity or future engagement in
12 service innovation. The boxes can be simply ticked or filled with examples of current or
13 future service innovation activities.

14 Insert Figure 1

15 **Conclusions**

16 Our findings suggest that innovation practices in NPSO reflect different theoretical
17 perspectives of service innovation. We found evidence for all service innovation archetypes,
18 with a propensity for the output-based (16 respondents) and process-based (17 respondents)
19 archetypes (Tether, 2005; Toivonen & Tuominen, 2009), and fewer examples for the
20 experiential (11 respondents) and systemic (9 respondents) archetypes (Helkkula et al., 2018).
21 Most practices relate to provision practices and representational practices with less evidence
22 for management and organisational practices. Missing data reflects our sample of smaller
23 organisations with their limited capacity to implement certain processes due to a lack of
24 formal structures (e.g., systematic knowledge seeking processes) (Prakash & Gupta, 2008;

1 Terziovski, 2010). The smaller golf clubs we investigated likely lacked the resources,
2 knowledge, and state of mind to implement novel practices such as experience-based or
3 systemic networking and knowledge sharing practices. We also recognize that some service
4 innovations were not evidenced because clubs can only prioritize a few innovations, or
5 because those innovations were not their current focus. The small nonprofit organisations
6 likely rely on more informal strategic planning processes and organisational structures
7 (Prakash & Gupta, 2008; Terziovski, 2010).

8 **Theoretical Implications**

9 *Creating Common Ground for Innovation Research in NPSO*

10 The majority of research on NPSO and service innovation in the sport management
11 literature has used an outcome-based perspective, with a focus on either types of sport
12 innovation (Tjønndal, 2017) or types of service innovation (Corthouts et al., 2023; Winand et
13 al., 2016). Some studies have taken a process-based approach (Behnam et al., 2022; Hoeber &
14 Hoeber, 2012) whereas others an open innovation (Wemmer & Koenigstorfer, 2015) or
15 network approach (Gerke, 2016). No sport management studies have studied how to approach
16 service innovation theoretically (i.e., assimilation, demarcation, or synthesis approach). Some
17 conceptual work points to the demarcation perspective (Ratten, 2016).

18 Our research advances the emerging knowledge on service innovation in sport by
19 combining established service innovation theoretical frameworks. We suggest a two-
20 dimensional analytical framework to analyse service innovation in different contexts (see
21 Figure 1). This framework provides a novel and rigorous analytical tool, consistent with latest
22 research on sport ecosystems (Buser et al., 2022). Our findings highlight the utility of this
23 framework for future research on service innovation in sport.

1 *Evidence for the Complementary Nature of the Different Service Innovation Archetypes*

2 Service innovation is a nascent field of research without an agreed conceptualisation,
3 definition, and measurement (Gustafsson et al., 2020; Snyder et al., 2016). The fundamental
4 problem is the divergence between empirical and theoretical studies. A fragmentation of
5 perspectives, definitions, conceptualisations, and frameworks hinders the theoretical
6 development and knowledge on how to stimulate service innovation (Gustafsson et al., 2020).
7 This research demonstrates the complementary nature of service innovation perspectives and
8 archetypes (Carlborg et al., 2014; Gustafsson et al., 2020; Helkkula et al., 2018; Kowalkowski
9 & Witell, 2020).

10 Overall, our analysis shows that assimilation, demarcation, and synthesis perspectives
11 provide complementary contributions to understanding innovation. We synthesise diverging
12 service innovation perspectives which consolidates service innovation knowledge (Carlborg et
13 al., 2014; Gustafsson et al., 2020; Kowalkowski & Witell, 2020; Witell et al., 2016).

14 **Managerial Contributions**

15 Investigating an industry whose value proposition relies upon traditional services (i.e.,
16 membership) and tangible products (i.e., golf course), we conclude that all four service
17 innovation archetypes are reflected in NPSO. Furthermore, analysing practices of NPSO
18 through the innovation practices typology suggested by Skålén et al. (2015) provides a
19 nuanced analysis of NPSO service innovation. These practices combined with operand and
20 operant resources (Vargo & Lusch, 2004) create the value proposition underpinning service
21 innovation (Skålén et al., 2015).

22 We provide concrete recommendations and an analytical framework (see Table 3 and
23 Figure 1) to help NPSO managers stimulate service innovation through practice-resource
24 combinations. Our research provides useful insights for managers of NPSO about how to
25 approach innovation. From a practical perspective, golf club managers can use the zones in

1 Figure 1 to analyse but also to develop the quantity and quality of innovation in their
2 organisations. We suggest using the different zones to stimulate new value propositions, new
3 ways of communication and interaction, and modifying baseline methods and resources. Our
4 research provides clear recommendations for practitioners to approach innovation from a
5 comprehensive understanding of service innovation rather than from a perspective limited to
6 certain categories of innovation (e.g., product or process innovation). Finally, this research
7 provides concrete recommendations on how to stimulate service innovation through specific
8 thinking patterns based on the underlying paradigms of the four service innovation archetypes
9 and the different kinds of practices.

10 **Limitations**

11 A limitation of this research is that the theoretical framework's dimensions (i.e.,
12 practices and archetypes) are not mutually exclusive. Therefore, it might create confusion
13 amongst future users of this framework. This can be remediated by employing multiple
14 perspectives and critical discussion. Methodologically, the main limitations of this research lie
15 in the single industry approach and in the selection of award-nominated organisations.
16 Investigating other sport organisation including those that are under-performing in terms of
17 innovation would be instructive. More conceptual work is needed to set the research agenda
18 on NPSO innovation. We therefore reiterate the call for research to consider context specific
19 issues to develop the knowledge on service innovation from a systemic perspective. In this
20 research it would be worthwhile to deepen the knowledge on institutional work of different
21 actors involved in service innovation within the context of a particular ecosystem and with
22 regards to different innovation practices of different actors (Chandler et al., 2019; Skålén et
23 al., 2015; Vargo et al., 2015).

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Tables

Table 1

List of Participants and Club Characteristics

State	Code	Annual budget (000)	Golf playing members (n)	Social members (n)	Number of staff	Position	Tenure	Type of club	Type of club (location)
VIC	A	7 000	1200	1500	75	GM	2007	Private	Regional
	B	320	250		0	Director	2006	Semi-private	Regional
	C		640		2	GM	2018	private	
	D		550		12	GM - Operations	2018	Public	Metropolitan
QLD	E	24 000	980	60000	160	Manager	2013	Public	Regional
	F	5 000	1200		30	GM	2011	Semi-private	Metropolitan
	G	25	55		0	President	2007	private	Regional
	H		1318	155	43	GM	2018	Semi-private	Metropolitan
NSW	I	2200	750	350	23	GM	2007	private	Regional
	K	2750	500	50000	30	GM	2011	Public	Metropolitan
	L		900	650	70	GM	2013	Private	Metropolitan
	M	2700	980		16	GM	2012	Semi-private	Regional
	N		46		1	President	2014	Public	Regional

WA	O		650	140	10	GM	2018	Semi-private	Metropolitan
	P		600	200	5	GM	2018	Semi-private	Metropolitan
	Q	4700	1000	200	40	GM	2018	Private	Metropolitan
	R	2500	650	200	20	GM	2012	Semi-private	Metropolitan
	S		350			GM		Public	Metropolitan
	T	8600	1800		55	GM	2009	Private	Metropolitan
	U		40	10	0.5	Director	2016	semi-private	Regional

Table 2*Participants: Evidence for Innovation Practices*

Innovation	Output	Process	Experiential	Systemic
Provision practices				
<i>Operating practices</i>	A, K, N, Q, T	B, F, H, L, N, S, T, U, P	A, G, I, M, P, T	R
<i>Problem-finding</i>	L	C, H, M	---	A
<i>Problem-solving</i>	D, E	T, B	D	R
Representational Practices				
<i>Naming and labelling</i>	E, S	S	A, S	A, E
<i>Modelling</i>	L	A, D, S	Q, R	A, B, N, R
<i>Interaction</i>	B, E, O	A, L, N, O, P, Q, S, T	A, L, T	A
Management and Organisational Practices				
<i>Organising</i>	B, D, F, U	C, I, K, P, S	---	B, T
<i>Staffing + Team Building</i>	---	A	R	---
<i>Networking</i>	E, F, G, I, M	D, O	---	F, G, M, R
<i>Knowledge Sharing</i>	A	---	---	---

Table 3*Identified Archetype-Practice Combinations*

Practices	Theoretical Frameworks			
	Output	Process	Experiential	Systemic
Provision				
Operating	Activities other than golf	Adjusting the rules of the play	Providing a second home	Integrating resources from other community actors through hosting (charitable) events
Problem-finding	New CRM platform	Environmentally friendly practices Trialling new formats of golf	Creating a family friendly atmosphere <i>E.g., following the journey of a customer throughout the club</i>	Consulting with local community actors
Problem-solving	New membership category to use driving range New equipment to maintain course	Customer feedback App-based order and delivery service for food and beverages Payment machine for non-members players Planning and process of course improvement	New technology to improve customers' experience	Collaborative development of new greens maintenance practice
Representational				
Naming and Labelling	Promoting region as golf tourism destination Establishing high-performance centre	Website redesign	Providing meaning to a welcome sign	Intentionally specific inclusive language

Modelling	Adapting the price, usage structure, and rules	Designing easy golf courses	Enhanced social environment	Value propositions addressing the local community
		Providing easy practice and training facilities Revamping the membership structure and offering more flexible memberships		Value propositions addressing local authorities Embracing custodianship for the environment
Interaction	Loyalty systems and membership card	Communicating through word-of-mouth	Personalised service experience	Engaging with community stakeholders
	Customer/email databases	Relaxing or abandoning dress codes Engaging in friendly and regular communication Refocussing staff on face-to-face service tasks	Personalised communication	
Management and Organisational Organising	Incremental course improvements	Redesigning the customer-club transactional processes	<i>E.g., organise the internal department structure around the customer's experience</i>	Engaging in multi-stakeholder processes and debates
	IT supported membership management systems	Integrating internal resources and processes		Engaging in supplier relationships
	Scheduled strategic planning sessions	Implementing systematic decision-making processes Outsourcing of non-core activities		

Staffing + Team Building	<i>e.g., exceptional salary, free use of golf course facilities</i>	Having downtime with staff	Differentiating committee and staff roles	<i>E.g., gathering internal staff and staff of key stakeholders</i>
Networking	Engaging with stakeholders in transactional relationships	Systematic and structured engagement with customers or other actors	<i>E.g., engaging with customers and other stakeholders to design the ideal experience</i>	Being a community club
Knowledge Sharing	Partnerships to develop adapted programmes Designing new office space with staff knowledge	<i>E.g., establishing systematic knowledge seeking processes and procedures throughout the service production and consumption process</i>	<i>E.g., establishing systematic knowledge seeking around the phenomenologically perceived customer experience</i>	<i>E.g., establishing knowledge sharing systems including the entire eco-system and stakeholders of the club</i>

Note: Italics indicates no evidence found but possible practice identified

Figure 1

Practical Thinking Framework for NPSO Managers: Stimulating Service Innovation

