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May 2019

Elements of Capacity in Hmong Community-based Organizations

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ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY IN HMONG COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Urban Studies

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2019

ABSTRACT

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by

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The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2019
Under the Supervision of Professor Chia Youyee Vang

Capacity building efforts in for-profit and non-profit organizations are thought to be positively associated with increasing organizational effectiveness. As a result, organizational capacity research on non-profit organizations continues to expand as federal funding, charitable giving, and private donations decrease or remain stagnant. With less funding opportunities in combination with the increasing number of non-profit organizations and for-profit organizations competing for scarce resources, how to increase organizational capacity is one area of research scholars are pushing for further analysis. This dissertation continues that analysis through a case study of Hmong mutual assistance associations in Wisconsin and asks: What factors hinder the ability of Hmong community-based organizations to meet their goals and objectives? What are the capacity constraints of Hmong community-based organizations? While previous research on organizational capacity focused on larger (e.g. higher total revenue, age, and the number of staff) non-profit organizations, the research on smaller, community-based organizations remains understudied. More specifically, the discourse surrounding the capacity building in non-profits overlooks the ability of smaller organizations to initiate the evaluation process. I argue that the that lack of financial resources coupled with the absence of knowledgeable and skilled human

resources in community-based organizations negatively affect their ability to determine where to apply capacity building efforts and develop strategies to increase their capacity. This produces additional hardship in organizations with limited resources seeking to increase their capacity. The goal of this study is to provide an understanding of the current state of Hmong mutual assistance associations and to expand or add to the areas of evaluation in which capacity building efforts might result in the greater sustainability of these agencies and advance the Hmong community.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is dedicated to all the individuals who have believed in me, even when I did not believe in myself. Without these individuals, I would not be where I am today. Whether we have shared laughs, tears, or a meal together, I hold every experience dear to my heart. First, I want to thank my family and friends for always having a warm bed for me to rest, a warm meal for me to eat, and advice for me to grow. Special thanks are given to my father who is no longer with us, my mother who is the strongest person I know, to my siblings who are my backbone, to my nieces and nephews who remind me of the joy in the littlest things, and my best friend who has seen me at my worst and at my best. You are all irreplaceable. Secondly, I want to thank all the various members that have been a part of my committee throughout the years. Your knowledge and skills have been crucial to my journey personally and as a researcher. Thirdly, I want to thank the members of my dissertation committee. To Dr. Chia Vang, Dr. Marc Levine, Dr. Joel Rast, and Dr. Joe Rodriguez — thank you for your guidance throughout the years and for exemplifying who I should strive to be as my journey moves onward. Dr. Chia Vang and Dr. Marc Levine, no amount of words could ever be enough to express my gratitude for what you both have done for me. I am grateful for the opportunities and experiences everyone has given me. Lastly, I want to thank the organizations and individuals who have shared their experiences and knowledge with me. This dissertation would not have been possible without your support and participation. You all have reminded me of who I am and where I have come from. I hope that my work continues to support your efforts and inspire others to do the same.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since the late-1970s and mid-1980s Hmong mutual assistance associations (MAA) have

played a vital role in influencing Southeast Asian refugee resettlement policies and programs,

delivering social services, and providing a space for community bonding. These organizations

continue to benefit the older Hmong generations and individuals of lower socioeconomic status

that use their services. Not only do the organizations benefit the Hmong community, but also

other ethnic groups and newly arrived refugees into the United States (Ranard, 1990). However,

in an era where there are no more Hmong refugees arriving into the United States and less

government funding for the non-profit sector, an examination of the capacity of Hmong MAAs

to fulfill their missions is necessary to understand their imperiled existence and ability to deliver

services to the Hmong community and other ethnic groups.

Capacity building is the process of enhancing the overall resources of an organization in

order to facilitate the achievement of goals (Rao et al., 2017). It has been gaining research

attention in the non-profit sector because of its ability to solve problems arising from the

decreases in federal funding, charitable giving, and private donations. Scholars such as Murphy

and Robichau (2016) have found that an increase in organizational capacity is positively linked

to organizations receiving more government funding and contracts. Organizational capacity has

also been associated with an enhanced ability to influence public policies (Sabo et al., 2017).

However, the discourse surrounding capacity building in non-profits overlooks the ability of

smaller organizations to initiate the evaluation process. I argue that the that lack of financial

resources coupled with the absence of knowledgeable and skilled human resources in

community-based organizations negatively affect their ability to determine where to apply

capacity building efforts and develop strategies to increase their capacity. This produces additional hardship in organizations with limited resources seeking to increase their capacity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to exemplify the utility of the multidimensional approach to capacity building and to highlight what contradicts or supports previous works of scholarship. The multidimensional framework entails the evaluation of an organization's capacity with a focus on their financial, human, and structural resources. Financial capacity refers to the organization's ability to generate revenue and pay expenses. Human capacity refers to how adequately staffed and knowledgeable the workforce is within an organization. Structural capacity relates to an organization's ability to utilize non-financial capital. The framework also provides a general guideline for organizations with limited resources to begin evaluating their capacities. It is essentially a framework in which organizations can help themselves and plan their capacity building efforts. The researcher examined six Hmong mutual assistance associations in Wisconsin with two goals in mind: first, to provide an understanding of the current state of Hmong community-based organizations and second, to expand or add to the areas of evaluation in which capacity building efforts might result in the greater sustainability of these agencies and advance the Hmong community.

Background of the Problem

The term mutual assistance association refers to ethnic-based organizations that prompt the ethnic community to support refugee resettlement and to provide them social services (U.S. Legal, 2016). In the United States, one of the first Hmong mutual assistance associations was established in 1978 in California by General Vang Pao, a figure well-known within the Hmong community for his leadership in the U.S. Secret War in Laos. Within a short time, more MAAs

emerged in areas with large populations of Hmong refugees (Lucke, 1995) and as a result of the special consideration they received from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in order to help deliver and provide social services to the community (Ranard, 1990). The proliferation of Hmong organizations in the United States is also attributed to the clashing political differences among various Hmong clans that divided the Hmong community (Vang, 2010). At present there are 180 MAAs within the United States representing various ethnic groups, with 21 MAAs operating in Wisconsin (SEARAC MAA Directory, 2015).

Since their establishments, Hmong MAAs have encouraged solidarity among the Hmong community and provided support and protection from the hostility, discrimination, and isolation imposed by the larger community (Lucke, 1995). With MAAs serving as a central gathering location, community members shared cultural traditions, planned New Year celebrations, and taught language, dance and art to younger generations (Lucke, 1995). Beyond preserving and teaching cultural practices, the MAAs are considered to represent the voice of the Hmong community. However, the concept of the "Hmong community" is complicated by differences in perspectives relating to the clan, gender, political, and generational politics (Vang, 2010). The continual existence of Hmong MAAs may have preserved these fractionalizations and helps to explain their current organizational challenges.

MAAs are operated by the local refugee community members and can be categorized based on the services they provide and purposes of their programs (Ranard, 1990). These service categories include "cultural preservations/social activities, religious services, special constituency groups, resettlement/social services, business and economic development, and advocacy and political action" (Ranard, 1990, p.3). Of these various types of MAAs, Ranard (1990) considers those focused on cultural preservation/social activities to be the most prevalent.

In Wisconsin, MAAs were often the first source of assistance for Southeast Asian refugees since they provided services related but not limited to overcoming language barriers, job training, obtaining health care, school registration, housing, obtaining citizenship, and understanding the U.S. monetary system (Lucke, 1995). In 1982, there were approximately 300 Indochinese MAAs in the United States (Refugee Reports, 1982). Existing research indicates that nine Hmong MAAs existed in Wisconsin by 1995 (Lucke, 1995). In Milwaukee, Laotian Assistance Organizations (LAOs), Hmong Assistance Associations (HAAs), and the Traditional Society of Milwaukee (TSM) were three of the nine organizations (Lucke, 1995). LAOs focused on helping members learn English and obtain a general education. HAAs focused on youth activities (Lucke, 1995). The TSM differed from both LAOs and HAAs in that it provided the means to fulfill cultural needs, usually in the form of planning and implementing New Year celebrations (Lucke, 1995).

Generally speaking, MAAs are funded through federal grants, which are redirected to state and local social service agencies, as well as through donations from private and non-profit organizations. For participating in the Key States Initiative (KSI), Wisconsin received a federal grant in 1987 to support refugees in reaching self-sufficiency, an approach which was later described as "a family economic development program" (Fass, 1991). The program focused on reducing the number of refugees on welfare by finding suitable employment opportunities for people of working age. The income of all the employed individuals within the family had to be greater than what would have otherwise been received on public assistance (Fass, 1991). With a primary focus on employment, many of the refugees did not become proficient in English. To overcome the language barrier, the KSI program placed refugees who were deficient in English with other refugees who could translate and counsel them (Fass, 1991).

The recruitment of MAAs by the Office of Refugee Resettlement would continue their critical role in Wisconsin. Because of the structure of the MAAs, the community leaders were thought to have an influence on family decisions related to work and welfare. A majority of the resources of the KSI program was spent trying to convince MAAs to participate and community members to utilize their services (Fass, 1991). By March 1990, about 1,300 families had joined the KSI program, and about 920 out of the 1,970 employable adults were able to find employment (Fass, 1991). This resulted in 472 families becoming self-sufficient (staying off welfare for at least 90 days) (Fass, 1991). Despite these results, the long-term implications of the program are unknown.

By 2003, five Hmong MAAs were in operation in the greater Milwaukee area (Moua, 2003): The Hmong American Friendship Association, The Lao Family Community, The Hmong Educational Advancements, Hmong American Women's Association, and Shee Yee Community of Milwaukee (Moua, 2003). The services provided by each MAA in the greater Milwaukee area had both some overlap and some distinguishable features. Services included food distribution, job placement, and translation programs. Moua (2003) discovered that Hmong organizations lacked the ability to provide mental health services and that the reoccurring concern surrounding funding overshadowed all the organizations' activities. She also found that future funding was dependent on remaining relevant to the problems of the Hmong community, which, as one interviewee stated, "will require restructuring, a new direction, and new ideas" (Moua, 2003, p. 6). However, this view was not shared by all the interviewees and was reflected in their "hopes that the Hmong population of Milwaukee becomes so Americanized that they don't need translators and job placements" (Moua, 2003, p. 6). In addition to these organizations, the Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations (WUCMAA), formed in 1986,

has continued serving Southeast Asian Wisconsin residents as well. According to WUCMAA, nine Hmong MAAs were still operating in Wisconsin in 2017.

Federal funding cutbacks can help to explain why some organizations have closed over the years. Of those MAAs that remain, many have had to partner with other organizations (Lucke, 1995; Ranard, 1990) in order to more easily secure private funding sources as well as to promote a sense of unity for political or community advocacy (Ranard, 1990). The growing dependence on volunteers can also be attributed to cuts in federal funding (Vang, 2006). Although the MAAs are suggested to be very effective, those that depended on the Office of Refugee Resettlement as their only source of funds faced uncertainty as the number of refugees decreased (Ranard, 1990). However, Werbner (1985) found that ethnic associations with broadly stated missions incorporating multiple interests in social, cultural, and political issues were more likely to remain operational. Hein (1997) added that ethnic associations able to adapt to the interests of the government, clients, and funders were also more likely to support long-term operations.

Given that mutual assistance associations have continued to operate in the 21st century and remain of importance to the Hmong community and the non-profit sector, this dissertation seeks to examine the dimensions of capacity of Hmong MAAs in their current context and to determine how capacity affects their ability to fulfill their goals and objectives. Organizational capacity is an important aspect to consider because it pertains to the overall resources within an organization that are instrumental in the accomplishment of goals and objectives (Rao et al., 2017). While previous studies on organizational capacity focused on larger (i.e. higher total revenue and more staff) non-profit organizations (Ateljevic & Gallagher, 2017; Raman, 2016), the research findings regarding smaller, community-based organizations remain under-studied

and under-explored. Smaller non-profit organizations may present challenges to which existing capacity building research that focuses on larger non-profit organizations address. Compared to larger non-profit organizations, the deficiencies and challenges in smaller community-based organizations are often more pronounced and magnified (Zhang et al., 2017).

Capacity building is multi-faceted and may include knowledge, finance, social factor, planning, and development (Brown, Andersson, & Jo, 2016; Despard, 2017). Capacity building in community-based organizations has been found to be beneficial in enhancing overall organizational effectiveness (Murphy & Robichau, 2016; Nasca, Changfoot, & Hill, 2018). Despite the benefits associated with increasing an organization's capacity, non-profit leaders are selective in their capacity building activities. For instance, York (2017) found that non-profit organization leaders do not place building their human capacity through volunteers as a priority, resulting in difficulty recruiting, retaining, and managing volunteers effectively.
With regard to small community-based organizations, including those consisting of Hmong leaders and members, research by Zhang et al. (2017) has shown that their capacity is particularly deficient in accomplishing their goals and objectives. As a result of limited resources and volunteers, Hmong community-based organizations, just like other ethnic-based non-profit organizations, struggle with sustaining their organizations. Many of these organizations rely on the assistance of the federal government for funding (Teal et al., 2015).

Among Hmong community-based organizations, human capacity and financial capacity are particular areas of need (Vang & Hein, 2015). In terms of human capacity, Hmong community-based organizations have limited numbers of volunteers all over the United States despite the efforts of the Hmong Nationalities Organization (HNO) to boost their numbers (Suab Hmong News, 2015). Ranard (1990) also found that Indochinese MAAs have a limited number

of volunteers because refugees perceive the organizations as adequately staffed and financially fit. With regard to the financial capacity of Hmong community-based organizations, leaders are often constrained by the terms of the federal government, foundations, and corporations that offer funding (Vang & Hein, 2015). Similarly, Ranard (1990) found that funders have stringent requirements with a difficult application process and require organizations to demonstrate a history of their program's success. Long-term sustainable funding in particular is difficult to procure. Indochinese MAAs reported that private foundations limit the application of the funds received via grants strictly to activities and projects (Ranard, 1990). Beyond funding from foundations and the government, Indochinese MAAs found it challenging to raise funds from their own ethnic community because of their members' lower socioeconomic status (Ranard, 1990). Without the proper funding resources to address the needs of the community, many MAAs may lose the support of the community (Ranard, 1990). These issues found in the literature serve as the foundation of the problem statement, which is identified and expounded upon in the following section.

Statement of the Problem

Since Hmong MAAs are long-standing providers of social services and provide a place of social bonding in Hmong communities, it is necessary to understand the factors that currently impact how well Hmong MAAs can achieve their missions. Existing research has shown that many small community-based organizations do not have the capacity to fulfill their organizational goals and objectives (Zhang et al., 2017). Small community-based organizations are structurally fragile and often overextend their limits, undermining their capacity to achieve successful outcomes (Zhang et al., 2017).

Within the specific context of Hmong community-based organizations, issues regarding funding and human capacities may affect the ability of leaders to pursue their goals successfully (Vang & Hein, 2015). With fewer funding opportunities available, there is increased competition for those limited funds among community-based organizations, non-profit organizations and for-profit organizations. Many scholars are pushing for further analysis of methods to increase overall capacity within these organizations (Moreno, Noguchi, & Harder, 2017; Vu, Nguyen, Tanh, & Chun, 2017). The process of capacity building has not been clearly understood, prompting researchers to undertake further studies to examine the different factors involved in the capacity building process (Moreno et al., 2017). Moreover, ethnic non-profit community-based organizations have not been studied extensively, highlighting the need to further explore the operations of these types of organizations (Vu et al., 2017).

This literature suggests Hmong MAAs are operating in an environment of scarce resources and increased competition. At the same time, the need of their services and social benefits continue to serve a portion of the Hmong population throughout the United States. Although the capacity of Hmong MAAs may be diminishing in the current context, the organizations that lack the human, financial, and structural capacity to assess and address their predicaments are at a disadvantage. In response, this dissertation also takes the initial step to assess several factors that negatively affect the overall capacity of Hmong MAAs and identifies the challenges that need to be addressed.

Purpose and Significance of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to demonstrate the usefulness of the multidimensional approach to understanding of the perceived capacity constraints of Hmong

mutual assistance associations. A multidimensional study of organizational capacity highlights the interconnectedness of each dimension and provides a comprehensive overview of the organization's current standing. The dimensions under examination include the organization's financial, human, and structural capacity. Based on the research problem identified, the following research questions are asked: What are the capacity constraints of Hmong community-based organizations? What are the factors that hinder the ability of Hmong community-based organizations to achieve organizational goals and objectives?

This study is significant because it can also provide a systematic framework to guide ethnic community-based organizations lacking resources to engage in an analysis of their current financial, human, and structural capacities. It outlines how to select which organizational capacities to focus on while highlighting areas that present the greatest challenges and demand the most resources to remediate. It also presents a multidimensional approach to analyzing organizational capacity that challenges the existing research omitting the interconnectedness of each dimension. Without such consideration, the evaluation of an organization's capacity and efforts would be incomplete. This study is also significant in that it brings existing research on Hmong mutual assistance associations to date and builds upon the literature regarding capacity building in generally small community-based organizations in the United States. Researchers have recommended further studies on capacity building in both small community-based organizations and ethnic non-profit community-based organizations (Moreno et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2017). This study can address this literature gap by providing insight that refutes or supports research onto the challenges in capacity building from the perspective of their own organization leaders.

Definition of Terms

Several terms are used to describe organizations and their dimensions of capacity throughout this dissertation. To avoid confusion, the terms community-based organizations, mutual assistance associations and ethnic community-based organizations should all considered under the umbrella of the non-profit sector. Additionally, because the definition of capacity and the dimensions of capacities are defined differently among scholars in the non-profit literature, for the purpose of this study the related terms are also defined below.

- *Mutual assistance associations*. Mutual assistance associations refer to ethnic-based associations that galvanize ethnic community support for refugee resettlement and provided services that helped refugees understand and navigate in United States (U.S. Legal, 2016).

- *Community-based organizations*. Community-based organizations are types of organizations wherein the main objective is to provide a type of service to low-income groups or minorities (Bowen et al., 2015).

- *Hmong*. Hmong is a globally-dispersed refugee minority group originating from Southeast Asia, particularly Laos (Her, 2014).

- *Capacity*. Capacity is the ability of individuals and organizations or organizational units to perform functions effectively, efficiently, and sustainably (UNDP, 1998).

- *Organizational capacity***.** Organizational capacity refers to the overall resources of an organization that can be responsible for the accomplishment of goals and objectives (Rao et al., 2017).

- *Capacity building*. Capacity building pertains to the process of building the overall resources of an organization in order to facilitate the accomplishment of goals and objectives (Rao et al., 2017).

- *Financial capacity*. Financial capacity refers to the ability of the leaders of an organization to carry out objectives based on the sufficiency of available funds (Svensson & Hambrick, 2016).

- *Human resources capacity/Human capacity*. Human capacity refers to the ability of leaders of an organization to utilize human resources to carry out organizational goals and objectives (Svensson, Hancock, & Hums, 2017).

- *Structural capacity*. Structural capacity refers to the ability of an organization to utilize non-financial capital (Hall et al., 2003).

- *Infrastructure and process capacity*. Infrastructure and process capacity pertains to the different elements within an organization that support its day-to-day operations (Hall et al., 2003).

- *Planning and development capacity*. The planning and development capacity of an organization refers to its ability to develop plans related to programs and proposals (Hall et. al., 2003; Svensson et al., 2017).

- *Social capacity*. Social capacity, also known as relationship and network capacity, is the ability of an organization to build mutually-beneficial relationships with outside actors and organizations (Hall et al., 2003).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

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The first assumption of this study is that the interviewees were honest and candid with their answers. The second assumption of this study is that the archival records were accurate and interpreted properly. Finally, this research assumed that the interviewees have an accurate understanding of their organization's daily operations and the current environment. The first limitation of this study pertains to the generalizability of the findings. The results may not be generalized to all ethnic community-based organizations in the United States given the unique challenges of each ethnic minority group. Another limitation of the study is that the research setting was confined to Hmong community-based organizations in Wisconsin. The unique contextual characteristics of Wisconsin may not be applicable in other states with different socioeconomic demographics. The first delimitation of this study was that the research context was confined to six Hmong community-based organizations in Wisconsin. Another delimitation of this study was that the data collection was confined to interviews, archival records, and online resources, facilitating the triangulation of data for more credible findings.

Conclusion

Since many small community-based organizations are noted to be limited in their capacity to make internal changes and are often structurally fragile (Zhang et al., 2017), researchers have recommended further studies on the benefits and strategies of capacity building in both small community-based organizations and ethnic community-based organizations (Moreno et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2017). To date, research on Hmong community-based organizations has been limited in non-profit capacity literature. Therefore, this study examined six Hmong MAAs in Wisconsin and aimed to provide an empirical representation of their organizational capacity in the current context. Hmong community-based organizations are

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reported to face issues relating to their funding and human capacities that negatively affect the ability of their leadership to achieve intended outcomes (Vang & Hein, 2015). The results of this study are meant to provide an understanding into the current state of Hmong mutual assistance associations and to provide a general framework through a multidimensional approach to analyze small community-based organizations.

Chapter two lays out the study's theoretical framework and reviews the organizational capacity literature in the non-profit sector. The theoretical framework will be based on Hall et al.'s (2003) multidimensional approach to organizational capacity. The literature review reflects the activities that have been found to be effective in building capacity and the different ways to increase the success of capacity building efforts. The review commenced with studies focusing on a single dimension of capacity and expanded to research studies that have incorporated multiple dimensions of capacity to demonstrate the interconnectedness of each dimension. Chapter four, five and six presents the research findings pertaining to the organizations' financial, human, and structural capacity. Chapter seven summarizes the findings and identifies specific areas that Hmong mutual assistance associations should take into consideration when evaluating and directing their capacity building efforts.

<center>**Chapter 2: Literature Review**</center>

This chapter begins with an overview of the theoretical framework utilized for this study and then provides a review of the literature on organizational capacity. The theoretical framework highlights the multidimensional approach to evaluating capacity. The literature review discusses the assumptions about why non-profit organizations engage in capacity building and provides a selective literature review on how organizational capacity has been studied to demonstrate different methods.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework developed by Hall et al. (2003) was used to guide this research study and to analyze the elements of capacity in six Hmong mutual assistance associations. Hall et al. (2003) consulted with more than 300 non-profit organizations in different major sub-sectors about their challenges relating to their ability to fulfill their missions. The development of Hall et al.'s framework was derived from the five most common dimensions of capacity described in literature focused on the non-profit sector. Those dimensions are human, financial, relationship and network, infrastructure and process, and planning and development capacities. Hall et al.'s framework places the relationship and network capacity, infrastructure and process capacity, and planning and development capacity into sub-categories of the structural capacity of an organization. Table 1 provides an outline of Hall et al.'s framework.

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Table 1. Theoretical Framework

	Dimensions of Capacities
1	Financial Capacity
2	Human Resources Capacity
3	Structural Capacity
a.	Relationship and Network Capacity
b.	Infrastructure and Process Capacity
c.	Planning and Development Capacity

Hall et al.'s multidimensional approach was suitable to guide this research study because capacity is multidimensional, meaning that a combination of dimensions of capacity is required for organizational effectiveness and improvement (Connolly, 2006; Letts et al., 1999). The five dimensions of capacity are not mutually exclusive, although in many instances one may have a greater influence than another. Overall, the framework provides an understanding of the organizational characteristics and attributes that shape the ability of community-based organizations to operate effectively. Additionally, the framework helps to identify and describe various capacity building activities that may be used to overcome organizational difficulties (Moseley, Maronick, and Katz, 2012) and discover which capacity characteristics best contribute to fulfilling mission goals and objectives (Hall et al., 2003).

The term human resources capacity refers in general to an organization's workforce, and in particular to whether that organization is adequately staffed, and whether the workforce has the requisite knowledge base for peak performance. This dimension is noted to have the most direct influence on all other dimensions of capacity and is reported by non-profit organizations to be the most important dimension for their success (Hall et al., 2003). Challenges to human capacity within an organization include the inability to recruit, hire, and retain staff members and volunteers (Hall et al., 2003). Low turnover rates among the staff and those in leadership

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positions can help contribute to the stability of an organization (Elwood and Ghose, 2001). Furthermore, the staff and board members' knowledge and experience are important to procuring resources through strategic avenues (Elwood and Ghose, 2001). These avenues can occur at all levels of government and can also involve navigating outside political structures.

The second dimension of capacity is financial and refers to the ability of an organization to procure funding resources to create revenue and pay expenses. This capacity is reported by non-profit organizations to be the most difficult to increase, given that the external non-profit funding environment is experiencing government cutbacks and increased competition for scarce resources (Hall et al., 2003). Linked to human capacity, non-profit organizations have reported that employees' lack of skills results in a decrease in an organization's financial capacity (Hall et al., 2003). Consistent funding can help support the daily and long-term functions of an organization (Elwood and Ghose, 2001).

The third dimension is social capacity, also known as relationship and network capacity. Social capacity refers to the ability of an organization to build mutually beneficial relationships with outside actors and organizations (Hall et al., 2003). Benefits can include anything from sharing information and funding resources to creating joint ventures to fulfill mission-related goals (Hall et al., 2003). Knowing how and where to gain access to resources can create a network of collaborative relationships beneficial to the organization. Relationships can exist between an organization and individuals as well as with other governmental agencies (Elwood and Ghose, 2001).

The fourth dimension of capacity is infrastructure and process capacity, which refers to the elements within an organization that support its daily operations (Hall et al., 2003). Such elements include internal databases, manuals, company policies, and information technology

infrastructure (Hall et al., 2003). Non-profit organizations reported challenges related to the lack of information technology training as well as difficulties maintaining their IT infrastructure. (Hall et al., 2003).

Finally, the planning and development capacity of an organization refers to the ability to develop plans for programs, policies, and proposals (Hall et al., 2003). Planning helps support the long-term viability and direction of an organization. Elwood and Ghose (2001) suggested that if the organizational priorities, strategies, and status align with those of individuals or institutions providing resources, the organization is more likely to receive those resources. Importantly, the consistent implementation of the organizational mission reflects the ability of the leadership and staff to fulfill its goals while meeting the needs of the community (Elwood and Ghose, 2001).

Review of Literature

Over the last several decades, scholars have described, debated, and theorized the use of capacity building efforts to increase organizational effectiveness in non-profit and for-profit organizations. As noted by Trudeau (2008), the focus on organizational capacity in non-profit organizations became increasingly relevant as the welfare state system was restructured through privatizing state functions, retrenchment of funding, and devolving state responsibilities to non-state organizations (Brenner and Theodore, 2002).[1] The goal to become a "leaner" state—a concept well-known in the private sector to achieve efficiency by lowering costs while maximizing capital accumulation—is used to justify these changes (Trudeau, 2008). By utilizing non-profit organizations to carry out state functions, researchers questioned their capacity to

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[1] *Keynesian* refers to the economic theory suggested by John Maynard Keynes that requires government intervention for economic growth. Under this theory, during the boom period of an economic cycle, the government should increase taxes or cut spending. In contrast, during the bust period of an economic cycle, the government should engage in deficit spending (https://www.investopedia.com/terms/k/keynesianeconomics.asp).

provide these new responsibilities/services while maintaining an activist agenda and in meeting their mission goals and objectives (Pradeep, 2001, Stoecker, 2003; Gooding, 2012; Cornforth, 2014). To address capacity issues, non-profit organizations are encouraged to participate in public-private partnerships, pursue private funding sources, and obtain the skills and expertise that would otherwise be unattainable working alone (Stoecker, 2003). Whether these capacity building activities and others have a positive impact on organizational effectiveness is the topic of continuing research and of this literature review.

__Why Capacity?__ The term *capacity* encompasses a wide array of tangible and intangible items and activities. If an activity or item helps increase the ability of an organization to fulfill its mission, it can be considered an effort toward capacity building. Some examples include raising money, forging partnerships, organizing work, training board members and employees, and evaluating programs (Light, 2004). In theory, efforts toward changing some element of capacity in an organization will lead to increasing an organization's ability to do work efficiently and to effectively meet its goals (Light, 2004). In practice, however, it remains difficult to ascertain exactly how to go about increasing capacity and even more difficult to measure whether efforts are effective. The inability to develop standard measures of effectiveness for non-profit organizations results from differences in defining effectiveness among various organizations (Forbes, 1998; Light, 2004; Willems, Boenigk, & Jegers, 2014; Renz, 2016). Despite this, there is still much to be discovered when examining organizational capacity in an environment in which changing social, political, and economic factors affect how non-profits function and perform.

Regardless of the lack of evidence supporting the costs and benefits of for-profit incorporation, areas of for-profit social services—including hospitals, proprietary day-care centers, trade and technical schools, and welfare-to-work programs—continue to expand (Ryan, 1999). As more for-profit organizations begin to offer social services, the line between public and private organizations is becoming blurred. Scholars such as Dees and Anderson (2003) describe the benefits and concerns of this phenomenon. Benefits to having for-profits delivering social services is said to include the effective application of resources, long-lasting solutions, greater accountability, and greater financial capacity. In contrast, concerns include lower social performance outcomes, lower quality of services, mission drift, less participation in advocacy activities, the loss of certain charitable characteristics, and the growing division between the haves and have-nots.

Public pressure and this trend toward privatization reinforce government outsourcing to the private sector. No longer focused on an organization's status, government agencies now award contracts based on performance and the capacity to carry out services efficiently (Ryan, 1999; Witesman & Fernandez, 2013; Bradfield, Akagi, Clowes, & Fenner, 2015). Right-leaning advocates of this trend support competition among organizations, whether for-profit or not-for-profit. In contrast, left-leaning individuals tend to support the continuation of non-profit organizations delivering services at the community level (Ryan, 1999). In a market that focuses on efficiency and performance outcomes, scholars have questioned the capacity of non-profits to compete with private organizations while fulfilling their mission and questioned the characteristics that differentiate them from for-profit organizations (Ryan, 1999).

By mirroring the for-profit business model, the federal government emphasizes the importance of efficiency when awarding contracts—leading to "risk sharing, pay-for-

performance, and bonuses" among for-profit organizations (Ryan, 1999; Balong, 2013; Maier, Meyer, & Steinbereithner, 2016). This for-profit business model is appealing because of its capacity to deliver services, flexibility to adapt in different sectors, and the ability to adjust quickly to government demands (Ryan, 1999; Balong, 2013). Organizations that have less capacity, however, are less likely to win competitive bids. When government payment is dependent on whether the organization has met measurable performance outcomes and performance is evaluated based on the number of clients successfully serviced, for-profit organizations target specific clientele with higher chances of meeting the definition of success (Ryan, 1999).

In order to obtain funding, and with no other choice but to adapt, non-profit organizations are responding by establishing new partnerships both with other non-profits and with private organizations, or in some cases, converting to for-profit status (Ryan, 1999). In the case of developing new partnerships, there are benefits to each of these approaches. For example, non-profit organizations can obtain private funding in exchange for their localized expertise while providing access to targeted populations. On the other hand, other non-profit organizations may find it more advantageous to convert to for-profit status if it allows for more access to capital (Ryan, 1999).

With a government's mindset oriented toward adopting more business-like practices, *new public management* (NPM) reflects the value non-profit managers now place on efficiency, economy, and effectiveness of the organization (Terry, 1998). The assumption is that efficiency and competition will increase organizational performance and that private management practices are the best practices to adopt and implement. These reforms are supported by those that believe social programs have been ineffective, unwieldy, and excessively expensive (Gold, 1996).

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Because of these changes, and because non-profits are adopting a for-profit mentality, researchers are redefining what it means to be "business-like" in the public sector (Dart, 2004; Sanders, Harper, & Richardson, 2015). For Dart (2004), business-like activities are "characterized by some blend of profit motivation, the use of managerial and organization design tools developed in for-profit business settings, and broadly framed business thinking to structure and organize activity" (p. 294). He found that business-like organizations tend to have "goals of generating profits, service deliverables that have measurable performance variables, an entrepreneurial approach by management, and business-like linguistics within the organization" (Dart, 2004, p. 297-302).

Non-profit organizations are not only facing the implications of gutted governmental programming and new public management. The retrenchment of federal funding has forced them to build organizational capacity to meet new standards and requirements established by the government, foundations, and private donors. At the beginning of the 1960s, government programs were funded with billions of dollars directed toward poverty eradication, education, health care, community development, the environment, and the arts (Kerlin and Pollak, 2011). By the late 1970s and 1980s, the economic downturn resulted in welfare retrenchment and significant cutbacks in federal funding. Researchers assumed private contributions would increase to make up the difference (Hodgkinson &Weitzman, 2001; Clotfelter & Ehrlich, 2001). However, Hodgkinson and Weitzman (2001) found that private contributions also declined from 1977 to 1992 (Clotfelter & Ehrlich, 2001).

Given that there are multiple variables influencing the trend to adopt capacity building activities in non-profit organizations, the next topic explores two broader theories in the organizational behavior literature that generalize the multiple variables. These theories explain

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the use of capacity building activities among non-profit organizations. The first is the institutional theory that emphasizes the role of normative pressures on non-profit organizations (Selznick, 1949; Perrow, 1961; Wamsley, 1969; Zucker, 1987; Richard, 2008). In this theory, organizations must conform to norms, standards, and other rules to enhance their legitimacy and increase their potential to survive (Zucker, 1987). More generally defined, organizations must conform to the institutional environment (Kerlin and Pollak, 2011) dictated by dominant actors such as donors, stakeholders, and the community (Oliver, 1991). Organizations that fail to conform to the emerging norms and standards established by influential actors will themselves fail. Thus, capacity building becomes a necessary means to stay relevant for communities and donors.

A second theory is the resource dependency theory, which claims that organizational survival is dependent on its ability to acquire and maintain scarce resources (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Davis & Cobb, 2010). For example, retrenchment of federal government funding led many non-profit organizations to search for new funding sources available through state and local governments, private donors, and commercial revenue. From this perspective, organizations compete with one another, and those that can maintain a steady source of funds are labeled effective (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Davis & Cobb, 2010).

Both theoretical approaches assume that non-profit organizations must depend on new resources as their existing resources are exhausted. However, the acquisition of new resources requires organizations to meet the demands of outside actors. As Mosley, Maronick, and Kats (2012) noted, these organizations must also address the need to increase their control over an uncertain funding environment, the need to respond to political and economic forces, and the need to maintain organizational legitimacy by adhering to prescribed norms and practices. The

institutional and resource dependency theories are essential to help explain the possible growing use of capacity building activities amongst Hmong mutual assistance associations and demonstrate the link between organizational capacity and effectiveness in various non-profit sub-sectors.

As Kerlin and Pollak (2011) suggested, particular sub-sectors of non-profit organizations are experiencing and adapting to their external environment differently. While the resource dependency theory helps explain the growing use of capacity building activities in relation to resource scarcity, the institutional theory suggests that the growing number of non-profit organizations overall contributes to the rise in capacity building activities. As the number of non-profit organizations increases, competition for government grants and private contributions increases as well. However, the amount of government grants and private contributions has not increased enough to meet the demands of the growing number of non-profit organizations (Kerlin & Pollak, 2011). Additionally, the cost to operate non-profit organizations has increased (Kerlin & Pollak, 2011), further supporting the trend toward the use of capacity building activities.

__How Has Capacity Been Studied?__ As the number of non-profit organizations increases every year so does the competition for those resources (Kerlin & Pollak, 2011). Organizations increase their ability to compete for scarce funds when they evaluate areas within their organization that need improvement and increase their overall effectiveness. Understanding how organizations have tried to increase their capacity has been a major focus of the existing research. This section summarizes how scholars have examined capacity, which activities have been found to be the most effective in increasing capacity, and how to increase the success of

capacity building efforts. It is important to note that there is no consensus among scholars on how best to approach measuring capacity and effectiveness (Light & Hubbard, 2004; Stevens, 2001; Strichman, Bickel, & Marshood, 2008). Despite this, scholars such as Light (2004) suggested that organizational capacity has an immeasurable impact on the ability of non-profit organizations to complete their mission (Ivy et al., 2012; Liket & Maas, 2015; Renz, 2016). Therefore, research on organizational capacity—even if difficult to conduct—remains critical to non-profit organizations that have few resources to draw upon. Light's findings specifically explained the linkage between organizational capacity and effectiveness. Figure 2-1 displays Light's logic of organizational capacity (Light, 2004).

Figure 2-1. The logic of organizational effectiveness
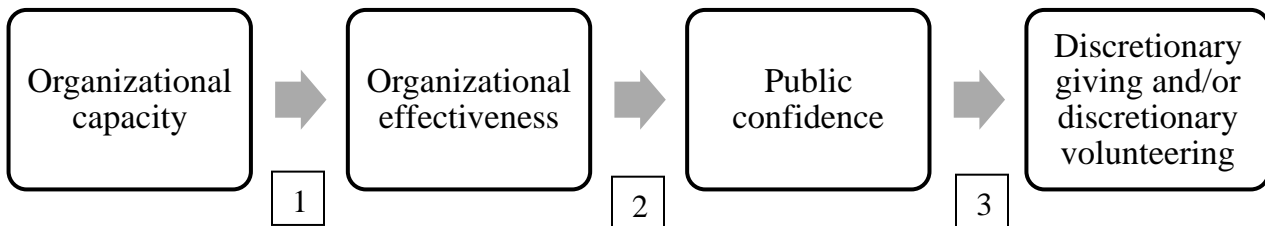
Based on evidence collected through telephone surveys of employees of non-profit organizations, Light found that the first link in Figure 2-1 is supported by employee perceptions on how well the organization operates. The employees that had access to organizational resources were more likely to say their organizations were effective in areas such as program management, financial management, and service delivery. The second and third links of Figure 2-1 are supported by evidence collected through random-sample telephone surveys of U.S. residents. U.S. residents that perceived non-profit organizations to be doing "a very or somewhat good job at running programs and services, spending money wisely, being fair in

decisions, and helping people" were more likely to give monetary donations and volunteer their time (Light, 2004, p.15).

It can also be concluded that capacity is multidimensional in that a combination of dimensions of capacity is required for organizational effectiveness and improvement (Connolly, 2006; Letts et al., 1999). Hall et al. (2003) suggested that the varying dimensions of capacity are linked such that when one is affected, other dimensions are affected as well. Similarly, Misener (2009) found that the lack of human resources and the inability to plan long-term strategies decreased the financial capacity of an organization. To reflect the variability in existing research approaches, the following sections begin with selective scholarship that is narrowly focused on particular dimensions of capacity and expand to scholarship that incorporates multiple dimensions of capacity.

Financial capacity. Focused on just one dimension of capacity, scholars such as Bowman (2011) and Chikoto and Neely (2014) evaluated the strategies by which non-profit organizations can increase their financial capacity. Bowman examined the short- and long-term financial capacity of non-profit organizations serving troubled youth. Unsustainable short-term financial capacity with sustainable long-term financial capacity meant that non-profits were consistently short on funds. On the other hand, sustainable short-term financial capacity with unsustainable long-term financial capacity provided non-profit organizations with current funding, although inflation decreased the value of their assets. Bowman also found that organizations were more likely to focus on short-term financial gains rather than long-term gains. Building on Bowman's work, Chikoto and Neely (2014) examined the effects of revenue concentration and diversification of non-profit organizations. The authors found that revenue

concentration increased financial capacity in addition to supporting administrative and fundraising activities.

Regardless of the type of organization, access to adequate resources is necessary to achieve organizational goals and preserve operational sustainability (Akintola, Gwelo, Labonté, & Appadu, 2016; Martin, Perine, Lee, & Ratcliffe, 2018; Svennson & Hambrick, 2017; Tural, 2017). The presence or absence of adequate financial support can facilitate or constrain an organization's ability to be effective (Tural, 2017). For instance, Svennson et al. (2016) found that having paid staff and a consistent flow of revenue are necessary financial factors in non-profit goal achievement. Akintola et al. (2016) also found that not being able to secure funding led to difficulties in providing benefits to staff and attracting volunteers and reduced the ability of the leaders of the non-profit organizations to provide services to the community.

Planning and development capacity. Other studies focused on the ability of organizations to plan and develop knowledge in order to continue achieving their goals and objectives (Breslau, Weiss, Williams, Burness, & Kepka, 2015; Ramanadhan, Minsky, Martinez-Dominguez, & Viswanath, 2017). This type of capacity has been particularly useful in community-based organizations wherein the primary services provided are health-related. For instance, Ramanadhan et al. (2017) found that knowledge and utilization of evidence-based research are crucial for leaders of community-based organizations to provide effective services to their communities. Breslau et al. (2015) also found that building the capacity of community-based organizations to utilize evidence-based research is important in the successful

implementation of health interventions because of the knowledge that can be gained when approaches or methods are effective.

In another area of the literature focusing on the infrastructure and process capacity of non-profit organizations, information technology was identified as a factor critical to an organization's success (Hall et al., 2003; Raman, 2016). Raman (2016) found that information technology such as social media, cloud computing, and data analytics all impact the organizational effectiveness of non-profit organizations. Hackler and Saxton (2007) found that capacity can be increased by capitalizing on the use of information technology. Information technology assists non-profits by improving management systems, improving communication, and helping to meet the accountability and monitoring requirements directed by funders. For non-profit organizations to reap the benefits of technology they must have a long-term outlook, engage in strategic planning, and provide adequate staff training. Organizations that continually improve their information technology capacity are thought to have a competitive edge when procuring funding opportunities (Schneider, 2003).

*Human capacit***y.** Scholarship focused on the human capacity dimension of an organization in relation to increasing volunteerism is another area of important research. Because non-profits, and particularly smaller, less-established organizations, depend on volunteer help, finding avenues to increase and retain volunteers is beneficial to carrying out an organization's mission, to reducing costs, and to improving the quality of services (Hager and Brudney, 2004). The human capacity of community-based organizations is heavily reliant on the ability of leaders to attract a consistent stream of volunteers to serve (George, Mehra, Scott, & Sriram, 2015; Leyva et al., 2017). The retention of long-term volunteers is one of the most important

components of human capacity building in community-based organizations (Dageid, Akintola, & Sæberg, 2016). An organization's local community is an important source of volunteers, thus highlighting the importance of intrinsic motivation and strategic recruitment in increasing a community's participation with the organization (George et al., 2015).

York (2017), in his summary of two comprehensive survey research studies, found that non-profit organizations, donors, and the government did not prioritize building an organization's human capacity through volunteers. As a result, organizations are unable to recruit, retain, and manage volunteers effectively. Hager and Brudney (2004) found that organizations are best able to retain volunteers when they match the skills of the volunteers to the task at hand, provide additional training, and recognize and acknowledge individual accomplishments. From a smaller-scale perspective, Kapucu et al. (2007), examined the volunteer capacity of minority community-based organizations. The authors found that the best strategies to recruit and retain volunteers included building relationships with their clientele and subsequently recruiting clientele as both volunteers and sources of information in order to improve services. Collaboration with other organizations and the use of minority media outlets were also found to increase the number of minority volunteers.

Social capacity. Social capacity can be viewed in terms of collaboration and the social capital of organizations within their networks, including government agencies. Evaluating the worth of such relationships has been a major focus of scholarly work on non-profit organizations. Murphy and Robichau (2016) found that an increase in organizational capacity was positively linked to organizations receiving more government funding and contracts. Moving beyond the funder-recipient relationship, Shumate et al. (2018) highlighted that

exchanging knowledge with government agencies created benefits to strategic planning

capacities of non-profits. However, scholars such as Fredericksen and London (2000) are more

hesitant to conclude that government ties increase organizational capacity because government

agencies often overlook a lack of capacity to deliver services during the contracting process.

Community-based organizations, particularly at the local level, need to create social

networks with other organizations or entities in order to sustain their operations and remain

influential in achieving their organizational goals (Ateljevic & Gallagher, 2017; De Neve et al.,

2017; Juárez, 2016; Lyth, Baldwin, Davison, Fidelman, Booth, & Osborne, 2017). Strategic

community relationships have been particularly effective in boosting the social capacity of non-

profit organizations (Juárez, 2016). For instance, Nasca et al. (2018) found that collaboration

between community-based organizations and the residents and experts of a neighborhood

enhanced the ability of the organization to generate collective power in influencing political

activism. Furthermore, Ateljevic and Gallagher (2017) found that focusing on the social capacity

of non-profit organizations through entrepreneurship enhanced leaders' ability to help their

communities.

*Multidimensional approach to organizational capacity***.** The potential connections

among the dimensions of capacity are overlooked in scholarship that is focused on a single

element of capacity (Hall et al., 2003; Misener, 2009). To overcome this deficit and to highlight

the significant links between the dimensions of capacity, scholars have developed a

multidimensional approach to study capacity (Hall et al., 2003; Light, 2004; Brown, Andersson,

& Jo, 2016; Despard, 2017). However, when incorporating multiple dimensions of capacity,

scholars have differed in their selections. For example, Despard (2017) used 19 indicators in

relation to resource development, program development, management, and board development to measure capacity. Resource development included activities related to procuring new funding opportunities. Program development focused on how organizations improved services, increased the number of clients, and determined program effectiveness. Management capacity referred to how organizations managed their finances, managed volunteers, and provided training and leadership improvement opportunities. Board development reflected the activities related to community recruitment, networking, and expanding the knowledge of the members. All 19 indicators were statistically significant, and, more importantly, the 19 indicators provided a universal approach to measuring capacity regardless of organizational age.

In another multidimensional study, Brown, Andersson, and Jo (2016) found that human, financial, and social capital can positively influence organizational capacity. The quality of relationships within and outside the studied organization was noted to be the most important contributor to organizational achievements. Similarly, Misener and Doherty (2009) found that human capacity was the most important dimension identified by non-profit community sports organizations in their study.

Continuing the multidimensional approach, Light (2004) examined the relationship between organizational capacity and overall effectiveness by surveying non-profit organizations serving disadvantaged populations. He found that most organizations engage in a variety of activities related to human, social, and infrastructure capacity. Examples of building human capacity among these organizations included team building, adding staff, changing leadership, and staff training. Examples of social capacity mentioned by the organizations included collaboration and mergers. Activities related to building infrastructure capacity included improvements in information technology, accounting systems, and organizational assessments.

Based on the age and size of the organizations, Light (2004) found that non-profit organizations are selective in their approaches to building capacity. Younger and/or larger organizations were more likely to engage in network capacity building activities. Older and/or smaller organizations were less likely to focus on improving their human and infrastructure capacity. In contrast, Andersson et al. (2016) suggested that organizations will decide to engage in efforts to build a particular dimension of capacity depending on which stage or its lifecycle the organization currently operates within. The five stages of an organization's lifecycle are startup, growth, maturity, decline, and turnaround. The authors argued that the age of the organization is insignificant in determining which capacity activities are most relevant and are thus implemented. Instead, organizations should be examined from a non-linear organizational development approach. This dissertation does not consider the age of the organizations; however, the studied Hmong mutual assistance associations could be placed between the decline and turnaround stages. The decline stage reflects that services are no longer relevant, and the turnaround stage reflects that some organizations are beginning to reinvent themselves.

Light (2004) also examined the need for a definition of success when organizations embark on capacity building activities. Without a clear goal and definition of success, capacity building efforts can waste resources and be ineffective. Light suggested that capacity building efforts should correspond to individual situations. He found that organizations increase the probability that their capacity building efforts will succeed when they create a formal plan, use objective evidence collected through formal or self-evaluations, network outside of their organization, and procure and accept outside funding regardless of the source (Light, 2004). Referencing the general non-profit sector, Light argued for improvements to the regional and national infrastructure to increase the success and acceptance of capacity building activities.

Additionally, since organizations are highly reliant on human capacity, non-profits should focus on appealing to and training the future workforce.

Conclusion

Capacity building activities are thought to increase the ability of organizations to effectively achieve their mission and goals. However, discovering which activities to employ is still an imperfect process resulting in varied outcomes. Scholars have found that factors including organizational age, size, and lifecycle stage influence the propensity towards certain capacity building activities. Additionally, capacity building activities are dependent on the problem at hand. As a result, scholars have continued to develop comprehensive approaches to measuring capacity. Because the definition of success is highly dependent on the perceptions of an organization's staff and board members, measuring capacity through qualitative research methods continues to be supported by scholars in the non-profit and voluntary sectors. Scholars have also agreed that there is a link between capacity building efforts and overall organizational effectiveness, however, the strength of that link is debatable.

As competition increases and resources remain scarce, studies on capacity building efforts remain relevant to organizational effectiveness, evolution, and survival. This trend calls for more research to evaluate consequences, address existing barriers, and to explain this emerging reality. With the aforementioned objectives under consideration, this dissertation utilizes Hall et al.'s (2003) multidimensional framework to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the financial, human, and structural capacity constraints on Hmong mutual assistance associations. This is all the while accounting for the contextual variables that reflect the uneven distributive processes of government funding, the changes in political policies, and the possibly

unique cultural nuances presented by the local communities that can have an influence on

community-based organizations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This research is a case study that focuses on the Hmong mutual assistance associations (MAAs) in Wisconsin and the extent to which they are able to withstand social and political changes at multiple scales. To better understand the factors that impact their ability to provide services to constituents, qualitative data was obtained via interviews and archival and online research was carried out to gather relevant background information about the organizations.

Research Design

The research design used for this study was a qualitative case study. This design focuses on "an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). In order to examine a complex issue comprehensively, case studies use multiple sources of data for triangulation (Yazan, 2015). Triangulation, the process of comparing different sources of data to enhance the credibility of a study, is one of the most distinctive features of case study research design (Yin, 2017).

The case study was exploratory in nature. According to Yin (2017), an exploratory case study involves an in-depth examination of a phenomenon that, based on the literature review, has limited preliminary research available. Exploratory case study research is inductive in nature because the raw data collected from the participants serve as the basis for the findings (Yin, 2017). Inductive research is often considered the preliminary phase of knowledge and theory advancement, serving as the foundation of more complex research in the future (Woiceshyn, & Daellenbach, 2018). Therefore, the limited research on the organizational capacity of Hmong MAAs in Wisconsin justifies an exploratory qualitative case study research design.

The selection of case study research design has both strengths and weaknesses. The advantages of a case study design include a comprehensive list of data collection methods and tools such as documentation, archival records, and interviews (Yazan, 2015); a focus on studying a phenomenon in its natural context (as opposed to a controlled environment used in experiments); and flexibility of the approach (Yazan, 2015). The disadvantages and weaknesses of a qualitative case study design include the inability to draw causal conclusions, less reliability compared to quantitative methods, and the difficulty of generalizing findings because of the specificity of the phenomenon and context examined (Andrade, 2009).

The MAAs were studied through semi-structured interviews meant to identify and evaluate the variables that influence organizational capacity. This study also included archival research, analysis of organizational documents (e.g., funding proposals of government agencies, service user information) and the use of online resources to gain a historical understanding of why MAAs were developed and how they operate.

The interviews with the organizational representatives serve as an appropriate method of inquiry because they capture details that would otherwise be limited by quantitative and survey research methods. As mentioned by Babbie (2010), the advantage of utilizing qualitative research methods lies in "the depth of understanding it permits" unlike other research methods that are said to be more "superficial" (p. 326). Another advantage to qualitative field research is the flexibility found in the research design and in the process of data collection (Babbie, 2010). A limitation to qualitative field research is the challenge inherent in generalizing sample data results to the population at large (Babbie, 2010). Regardless of the fact that due to constraints on time and available funding only a small sample was examined, this study should still be pursued for the valuable insight that it may provide (Babbie, 2010).

This research utilized archival materials because much of the relevant historical information was unavailable in existing literature. Archival material provides insight to the various programs and organizations assisting the resettlement of Hmong refugees in the United States. Archival materials can include, but are not limited to, organizational "documents, personal letters, diaries, logbooks, minutes of meetings, reports, plans, maps, and photographs" (Harris, 2001). As Harris (2001) mentioned, "archival scholarship at its best is an ongoing, evolving interaction between the scholar and the voices of the past embedded in the documents" (pp. 331-332). These sorts of archival materials allow researchers to "answer questions about the recent as well as the more distant past that are not recoverable by the other techniques or from the other available sources" (Harris, 2001, p. 174). When using archival material, it is important to evaluate the legitimacy of each source (Harris, 2001). This requires knowing the "original purpose of the document, the person that created it, the position they held, and how and when it was made" (Harris, 2001, p. 180). Harris also suggests that archival materials must be "understood in their wider context" and not in isolation (Harris, 2001, p. 181).

Although archival material may help the researcher gain insight from the past, it is not without intellectual and technical challenges (Harris, 2001). In terms of intellectual challenges, researchers must be aware that an organization's power structures in existence at the time of the archival documents' creation may create a bias or indicate fragmentation within the organization. Technical challenges have to do with the readability of the documents. Documents may be old, have illegible handwriting, and contain ambiguous or shorthand coding. Regardless, becoming familiar with such documents and secondary materials helped the researcher gain historical insight on Hmong MAAs.

In combination with semi-structured interviews and archival materials, this research also made use of online resources related to Southeast Asian refugees. Reviewed were websites containing valuable information on what programs, organizations, and resources are available, and how to apply for and receive support. Websites containing demographic information on Hmong refugees (i.e., census.gov and Hmong organizations' websites) were helpful in identifying trends throughout the years. Altogether, the qualitative research and findings from this study help fill the gaps that currently exist in archival and online materials.

Setting

The research was conducted in various locations throughout Wisconsin. The interviews with organizational representatives took place in the physical location of the organizations as well as over the phone. Wisconsin provides an ideal research site because of its historical association with Hmong refugees. According to the most recent data available, Wisconsin has the third-largest population of Hmong refugees (52,233) after California (97,705) and Minnesota (69,466) (Unites States Census, 2015). Large numbers of Hmong refugees settled in the United States beginning in the mid-1970s. As a result, multiple MAAs were established to support this vulnerable population. Wisconsin is a site of multiple Hmong MAAs and other Hmong organizations critical to this study.

Wisconsin has a total population of around 5,778,708 (United States Census, 2016). About 87.3% of the population is white, 6.7% is black or African American, and approximately 2.9% are Asians (United States Census QuickFacts, 2018). Employment within the state of Wisconsin has remained steady between 2000 and 2010 (66% and 64%, respectively) (Vang, 2012). The median household income is approximately $50,800 (Vang, 2012). The poverty rate

in Wisconsin is around 8%; approximately 2% of the households receive public assistance (Vang, 2012).

Most Hmong reside in the counties of Milwaukee, Marathon, Sheboygan, Brown, Outagamie, La Crosse, and Dane (U.S. Census ACS 5YR, 2017). The percentage of employed Hmong civilians was about 64% in 2000 and 63% in 2010 (Vang, 2012). The Hmong are employed in many sectors, including manufacturing, education, health care, social assistance, and retail (Vang, 2012). The median household income of Hmong in Wisconsin is not far behind the state at approximately $49,200. The poverty rate is about 19% of the Hmong population; approximately 4% receive public assistance (Vang, 2012). About 55% of the Hmong in Wisconsin identified as homeowners (Vang, 2012).

In the year 2000, more than half of the Hmong population in Wisconsin (57.1%) was below the age of 18, and more than two-thirds of the population was below the age of 24 (Hmong Chart Book, 2000). Nationally, a more current study suggests that by 2010 the percentage of the Hmong population below the age of 18 was less than half (43.1%) due to decreasing birth rates and household size (Pfeifer, Sullivan, Yang, & Yang, 2010). In 2010, the Wisconsin Hmong population had a median age of 20.2 years, while the median age in Wisconsin as a whole was 38.4 years (Pfeifer et al., 2010). Only about 3.1% of the total Hmong population in the United States was reported to be 65 years or older in 2010 (Pfeifer et al., 2010). By 2010, more than half of the foreign-born Hmong population (62.8%) in Wisconsin were U.S. citizens (Pfeifer et al., 2010).

When looking at healthcare coverage, about 14.9% of the Hmong population in the United States reported having private health insurance. Another 41.6% of the Hmong population in the United States receive public health coverage instead (Pfeifer et al., 2010). Within

Wisconsin, 59.8% of the Hmong population have private health insurance, 36% have public health coverage, and 13.3% have no insurance coverage (Pfeifer et al., 2010).

Participants and Data Collection

The goal was to capture the history and adaptation patterns of Hmong organizations since their inception with an emphasis on recent capacity building efforts. An exploration of the history of each organization leads to a better understanding of the evolution into their current structure. The interviewees were volunteers and were not compensated. All identifying information is omitted in order to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees and organizations. These organizations were chosen based on the availability of their data online and at the suggestion of Hmong community leaders. Due to time and monetary restrictions, the researcher limited the organizations eligible for this study to those in Wisconsin.

Of the 11 individuals with whom the researcher requested an interview, six volunteered. Ultimately, seven interviews were conducted. The low number of interviews was due to lack of response from the organizations. Table 2 displays the position of the interviewee within their organization. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half to two hours and took place from June 2016 to April 2017. To begin this research study, the researcher was able to directly reach the interviewees by physically visiting the organizations.

Table 2. Organizational Positions of Interviewees

Position	Number of Interviews
Executive Director	2
Board President	3
Office Administrator	1
Current Board Member	1

A list of several questions for the organization leaders/representatives was prepared before the interviews were conducted and is available in Appendix 1. The questions in the interview guide were open-ended in order to allow the participants to expound on their responses without being constrained by a yes or no answer. The questions were intended to learn information relevant to understanding the capacity constraints of Hmong community-based organizations, to learn about the factors that hinder their ability to build capacity and meet their goals and objectives, and to provide multiple perspectives. Even though an interview guide was used during the data collection, the researcher used follow-up and probing questions in order to further delve into the perceptions and experiences of the interviewees.

Archival materials were collected from the University of Minnesota in July 2016. With the help of an archivist, the researcher was able to identify archival collections located in the Refugee Studies Center within the broader collection of the Immigration History Research Center (IHRC).[2] The researcher examined newspaper clippings, letters, government reports, academic articles, memos, pamphlets, organizational reports, and policy reports. During the researcher's time at the IHRC, the archival collection under The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Records was being reorganized into different folders.[3]

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[2] The link to the original collection and description has been provided; however, the material in this study is cited according to the new folder and collection descriptions that are still under construction and are yet to be published. The most useful documents found at the Refugee Studies Center, University of Minnesota (1970-1999) can be found at http://archives.ihrc.umn.edu/vitrage/all/ra/ihrc2968.html. Related material includes: Series 13-Administrative Records Boxes 25-31, Series 9-Projects, Hmong Resettlement Study Box 14-18, Series 8-Newspaper Clippings Box 10-12, Series 6-Hmong Box 4-5, Series 3-Refugee Organizations Box 2-3, Series 2-Statistics Box 1, and Series 1-Office Resources Box 1.

[3] The United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants Records, General/Multi-Ethnic Collection, Immigration History and Research Center, University of Minnesota can be found at file:///C:/Users/Em/Downloads/US%20Committee%20for%20Refugees%252c%20Old%20Inventory%20(1).pdf Related Material: Box 12 V 13/14, MAA incentive grants 1984, 19 Laos 1990; 50 Laos, 59 Laos 1975, and 65 Milwaukee PRE-1991

Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews are the primary information source for this analysis. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. After this process was completed, the researcher coded the themes, concepts, ideas, perspectives, people, major projects, dates, and processes derived from the interview data. The themes reflected the areas of capacity in this study: financial, human, social, infrastructure and process, and planning and development. Key steps used for the analysis of the data follow.

First, the researcher engaged in open coding in which the "codes are suggested by the researcher's examination and questioning of the data" (Babbie, 2010). Open coding entails examining the raw data from the interviews, records, and online resources in order to assign labels or names to specific sections (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The labels represent the smallest units of data that allow the researcher to categorize the open codes into various groupings and clusters.

Second, the researcher engaged in axial coding to identify the core concepts. This process entails examining how the different codes could be organized into several groups based on thematic similarities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). At this stage of the analysis, the researcher was able to generate several clusters of codes that were thematically related. Codes that did not fit any cluster were removed from the process of axial coding.

Finally, the researcher used selective coding to finalize the themes for this study. While using selective coding, the researcher directly linked specific clusters to the research questions of the study, as described by Corbin & Strauss (1990). These thematically-grouped clusters were

instrumental in determining the themes from the data and answering the research questions of the study. The results of the selective coding served as the bases for the findings of this study.

For the purpose of this dissertation, no qualitative software programs were used to manage and analyze the interview data. This dissertation was completed by using Excel, Notebook, a digital recorder, handwritten notes, and Microsoft Word. All of the formal, semi-structured, and informal interviews were conducted in English. Data from the archives were digitally copied and organized thematically. The archival material was labeled with the original filing information for citing purposes. The researcher carried out a content analysis of the archival data. Themes were derived from the analysis, and they provided useful insights into what organizations and programs exist to assist the Hmong population. Additionally, the archival materials helped the researcher develop a narrative from the mid-1970s to the present.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology of this dissertation. The researcher included discussions on the research method of choice, where the data was collected, from whom the data was collected, and how the collected data was processed to derive the research findings. The next three chapters will discuss the organizational challenges facing the six Hmong mutual assistance associations, focused particularly on their financial, human, and structural capacity. Chapter 4 will focus on financial capacity challenges, Chapter 5 highlights their human resources capacity challenges, and Chapter 6 lays out their structural capacity challenges.

Chapter 4: Financial Capacity Challenges

The Need for More Funding

Interviewee**s** reporting financial challenges described a general need for more funding, and in particular sustainable and discretionary funds. They indicated that they currently receive financial support from the state and federal governments, from foundations and local organizations, and via donations, membership fees, and fundraising. The critical need for funding was also reflected in the organizations' financial analysis, revealing that their overall total revenue has decreased over the past decade and with it the amount of total government grants. Interviewees suggested that the decrease in government funding issued specifically for Hmong MAAs and for providing Hmong refugee social services is attributed to federal retrenchment in combination with a decreased need for government assistance as the Hmong population becomes self-sufficient. The extent to which each possible explanation has affected the Hmong mutual assistance associations is not within the scope of this dissertation. However, we can conclude that the lack of funding has limited the organizations' financial capacity to operate.

Financial capacity is critical to an organization's ability to manage money and financial assets to meet their mission goals. It was reported to be the greatest need and challenge for all of the organizations. One interviewee mentioned:

> I think it is all about funding because if you do not have funding, then you cannot operate anymore. You cannot pay the staff, you cannot rent an office, and you cannot pay utilities. You just cannot run a normal operation if you do not have funding. And that is what happened to our organization over a period of time; we had to close down. I think the other organizations are feeling the same, too.

Another interviewee emphasized:

> I think we need funding. I need money. Money is the biggest issue. Like I said, this agency, this place, we rely too much on our members and we need programing. I personally think we need programing that is of interest to our community members. We also need other sources of funding that will be able to help with the upkeep of the center.

One explanation for their financial challenges is the retrenchment of government funding. This gradual fiscal reduction is reflected in the organizations' total revenue over time. Table 3 displays the aggregated total number of government grants and the total revenue for all six organizations in this study.[4] Cumulative revenue peaked in 2001 and 2006. From 2006 forward, total revenue displays a downward trend. The total number of government grants over time mirrors this trend. The highest number of government grants received occurred in 2002 and 2007. After 2007, the total number of government grants declined alongside organizational revenues. Table 4 illustrates that in 2000, 79% of total revenue came from government grants. Between 2001 and 2006, that percentage ranged between 33% and 58%. We see totals rise again in 2007 to approximately 72% and then continually decrease from 2007 onwards.[5] These revenue trends are consistent with the larger non-profit sector. Between 1968 to 1980 government social welfare spending grew at an annual average rate of 6.8% (Salamon, 2015). This period was associated with government expansion into scientific research and in health and social services. From 1980 to 1990 government spending on social welfare decreased to an average of 1.9% annually (Salamon, 2015). During this period federal government retrenchment specifically affected non-profits in the social and human services, education and training, community development, and non-hospital healthcare. From 1990 to 2007, government spending for social welfare increased to 3.2% annually (Salamon, 2015). However, government retrenchment occurs again from 2008 to 2013 and is initiated by the banking crisis that led to an economic recession.

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[4] Revenue data was collected through the 990 and 990 EZ forms available online by Nonprofit Explorer.
[5] Revenue data before 1999 was not available for any of the organizations.

Table 3. Total Government Grants and Total Revenue-Government Grants

■ Total (Government grants) ■ Total Revenue-Government Grants
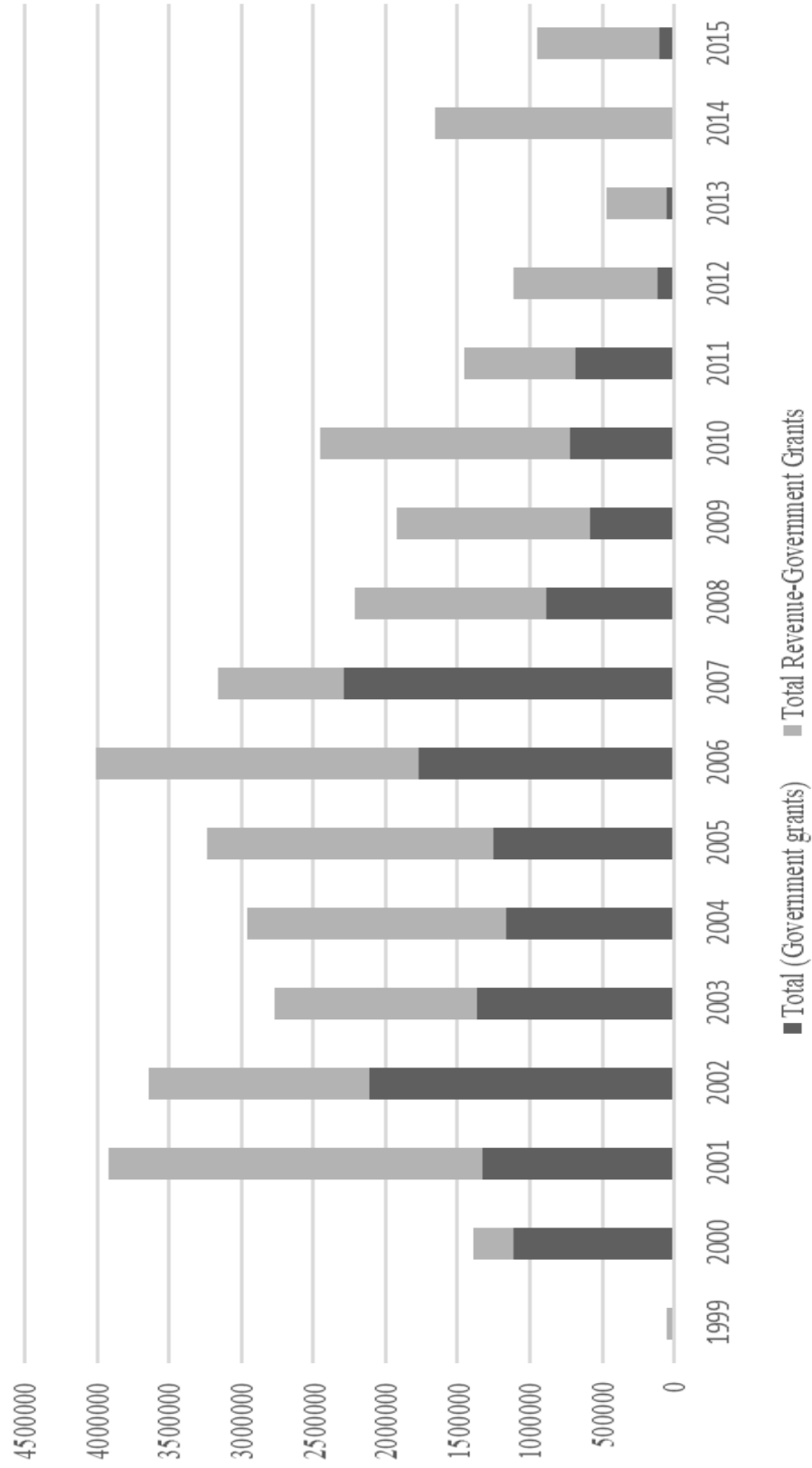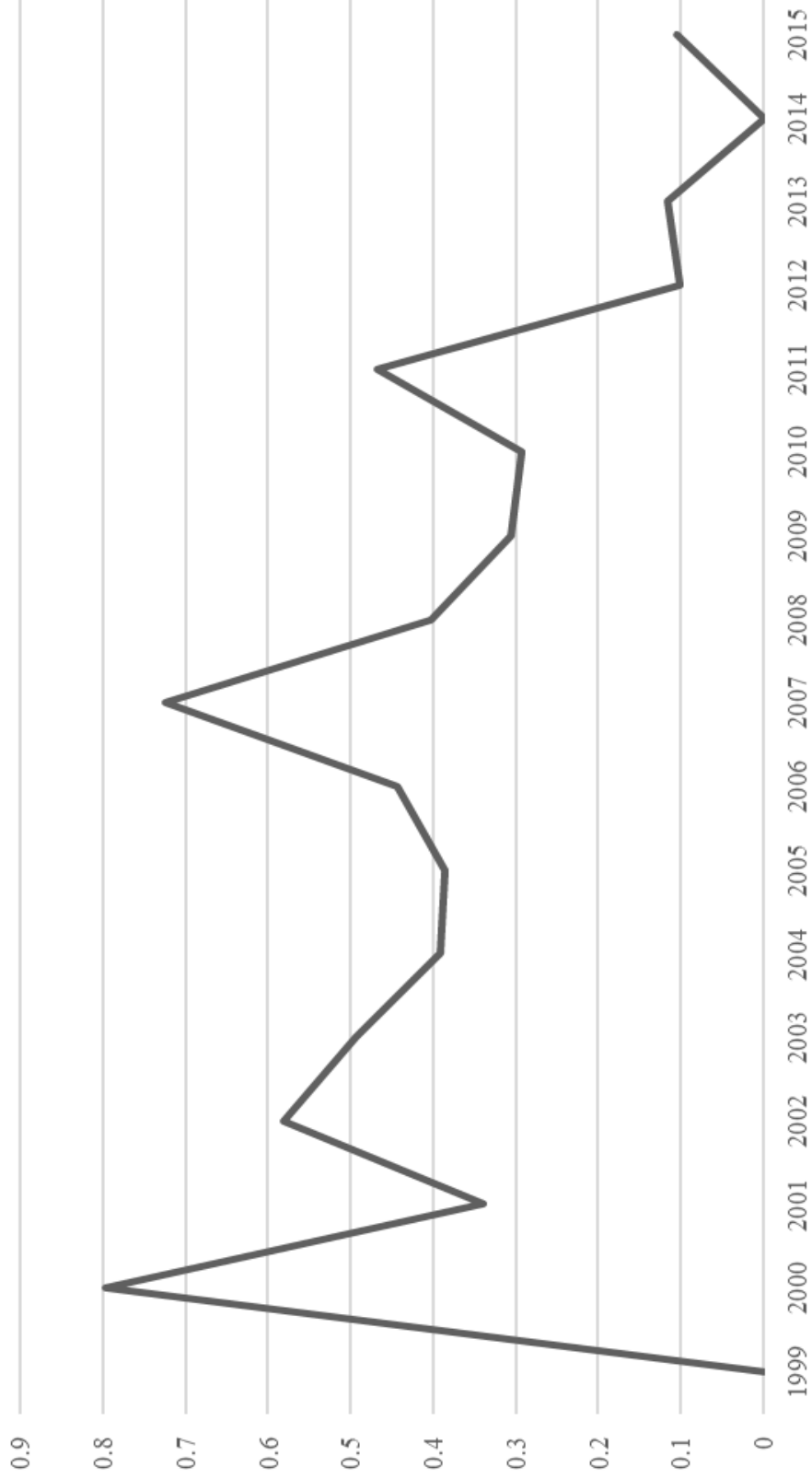
Table 4. Percentage of Total Revenue Consisting of Government Grants

Government spending on social welfare decreased to 2.3% annually during this period (Salamon, 2015).

These findings suggest that throughout the years reported, the number of government grants awarded consistently affected the total revenue of Hmong mutual assistance associations as well as the non-profit sector in general. In the years where total revenue was highest, government grants represented 70% to 80% of total revenue. In subsequent years, total revenue is lower, as is the proportion of government grants in relation to total revenue. Further analysis of the financial filings is limited due to an absence of data for certain years and because total revenues are aggregated. Regardless, these trends indicate that overall total revenue of the organizations decreased. The resulting impact on the organizations is illustrated in their accounts about the difficulties serving the needs of their community. As interviewee noted:

> Right now, we only have one service available. We didn't have the funding, so we eliminated two programs earlier this year. We are losing a lot of funding. There is still a lot of need for interpreting services. We try to make sure my staff is here at all times to serve such needs. For other various questions we try to redirect them.

How each organization responded to the decline in revenue over the years is directly influenced by their financial capacity. All six of the interviewees have engaged in one or more strategies related to eliminating programs, reducing the number of staff members, and procuring new sources of revenue. Two interviewees expressed their belief that the government has underestimated the needs of the Hmong population. These interviewees reported that the older Hmong population and the refugees that arrived after 2000 continue to utilize their services and will require more government support to address their needs. Even as Hmong refugees assimilate into American society, one interviewee mentioned, "Whether we are refugees or not, I think the needs are still the same." Another interviewee echoed that sentiment:

> I think, definitely we are no longer refugees. But we know there is still a lot of need in our community for those later arrivals who do not know how to speak English well, the families that are still considered limited English speakers.

Consequently, two views emerge among the interviewees when determining the current needs of the Hmong population. Five interviewees believe that the needs of the Hmong refugees have changed, and some have already begun to adapt their services and programs to a new target population. One interviewee believes that there is no longer a need for services because of the social, economic, and political advancements of the Hmong over the years. Any unmet needs can be addressed by other non-profit organizations serving the general population.

To gain government acknowledgement and recognition of the ongoing needs of the Hmong population, three interviewees aspire to develop a new joint leadership force that can generate the clout necessary to gain political and financial support. Earlier efforts included the creation of the Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations (WUCMAA) in 1986 to serve as the voice for Hmong refugees in Wisconsin and the MAAs that provide services to them. WUCMAA's objectives included efforts to increase new funding sources, share resources, network, advocate, and provide leadership training for MAA staff and board members. Although WUCMAA is still operating, four of the interviewees consider it to have shortcomings and to provide minimal benefits to members. Two interviewees observed:

> WUCMAA isn't doing much for me, for this organization, because it's supposed to be an umbrella to help all the Hmong organizations in Wisconsin. But the little bit of money, $120 (tobacco prevention grant) a month isn't going to help do anything really.

> I think the coalition lacks leadership and has limited grant dollars. We are not dependent whatsoever on the coalition.

As a result, three organizations have disassociated themselves from the coalition. These organizations also shed their status as MAAs in order to pursue a new agenda and new funding

resources. In general, these three organizations are hesitant about their involvement with

WUCMAA in the future. However, one interviewee will consider rejoining WUCMAA after

stabilizing their own financial and human resources.

The Need for More Discretionary Funding

Two of the interviewees noticed that funders prefer to finance particular programs,

projects, or events versus providing operational funds for an entire organization. Additionally,

the interviewees believe that grants go towards organizations that are more narrowly focused and

can serve the general population.

> It is really difficult getting funding from anybody because with any non-profit, not just
> the Hmong organizations, nobody wants to fund an organization anymore. They want to
> fund a program that we are doing. If they feel that program has some impact on the
> community, then they will fund it. Or if it fits with their goals and vision and what they
> want to do, they will fund it. They do not want to fund an organization that provides
> social services.

The interviewees also indicated that further restrictions have been imposed on how funding can

be applied within their programs. Most of the available programs and services offered by the

Hmong MAAs are restricted by age, gender, and income. Specific programs related to youth, the

elderly and voter registration are age-specific. Domestic abuse and sexual violence services serve

more women than men. Other programs related to affordable housing, food insecurity and

business development are restricted to low-income individuals and families. Because of these

restrictions on how organizations can spend program funding, all the interviewees reported

seeking unrestricted funds to pay for overhead costs. For example, two organizations use revenue

earned from interpretation service fees to pay for office supplies and miscellaneous items. Three

organizations use fundraising income to pay for the upkeep of the facility and employee

compensation. To create a larger and more consistent stream of revenue, one interviewee described:

> We have an affordable housing program where we own our rental units and then we rent at a reduced rate to low-income families, so that brings in unrestricted income that goes back into supporting the work we do.

As another means to compensate for the loss of government funding and to increase their discretionary funding, a significant trend among the organizations is a growing dependence on revenue-generating activities. Organizations engaged in three main types of commercial activities: charging membership fees, contracting translation services to local healthcare clinics, and commodifying and marketing their cultural events (e.g. New Year celebrations and summer festivals). Two interviewees reported collecting membership fees. In both organizations, membership allows for the right to vote on organizational decisions and utilize existing services and facilities (e.g., funerals and weddings). One depended on membership fees to fund daily facility operations and services, while the other indicated little to no dependence on membership fees. Two of the six organizations contracted out their translation services to health institutions for a fee. Fee revenue is a preferred source of income because money can be utilized at the organizations' discretion. All six organizations engaged in fundraising by commodifying and marketing Hmong New Year celebrations and summer festivals. These interviewees explained that they were still achieving their goals of cultural preservation and social bonding by holding the festivals; the only change was that they were now redirecting the earned revenue into general operations. Three organizations depend more on the funds generated from these cultural events than others; however, the fact that all the organizations engaged in this strategy is significant in understanding their financial capacity.

One organization that demonstrated heavy reliance on the profits generated from festivals closed its physical facility in 2009. The organization no longer has staff members or services available as well. Another Hmong MAA reported less reliance on the profits generated from the Hmong festivals because of the diversification of its other federal, state, and local funding resources. However, one organization in particular has discovered a new means of generating revenue via Hmong festivals. This organization was recently given a state grant to increase tourism into Wisconsin and attendance at the Hmong festivals. Although struggling to stay afloat before the state funds were granted, this grant has provided some financial stability for the organization to continue hosting the annual Hmong festivals. Given that Hmong MAAs have been engaging in revenue-generating activities for over four decades, these activities are not new to the Hmong MAAs in Wisconsin, however their growing dependency on it is. The Hmong New Year and summer festivals were reported by five of the interviewees as an ongoing and vital source of income for the organization and for the Hmong community. Whether the Hmong festivals will generate sufficient revenue to ensure their long-term survival remains a concern for three of the interviewees. Four of the interviewees have expressed their desire to move away from revenue-generating activities and toward procuring more private funding.

The Need for Sustainable Funding

All interviewees indicated difficulties associated with finding and successfully procuring long-term financial support. Sustainable private donations and grants are needed to fill the gap left by decreased government funding. Five interviewees reported that their ability to successfully procure private funding was hindered by their limited human resources capacity in terms of the knowledge, skills, and networks needed to find and build relationships with private

donors. Similar to the findings in existing research, when the organizations were successful in obtaining private funding, the funding was restricted to a single project, program, or event (Hall et al., 2003; Lopez-Rodriguez, 2010; Ranard, 1990), For example, private funding has been restricted to educational scholarships for youth, cultural festivals, and the acquisition of physical office buildings for the Hmong MAAs. In organizations that received government financial support, funding was awarded via a rotating competitive process that required periodic renewal, thus making consistent funding difficult to achieve.

To overcome the barriers to obtaining sustainable funding, four interviewees expressed the desire to bring on local business or corporate leaders as board members. They believed that this will increase the probability of receiving funding from affiliated businesses and attract new private donors by capitalizing on these individuals. Business board members were also thought to be beneficial to organizations because of their skills and knowledge in accessing other financial resources.

The need for funding has led all the organizations to continuously search for funding opportunities. When asked what their daily routine was like, all the interviewees indicated that searching for funding, applying for grants, and keeping funders up-to-date took a large portion of their day. As one interviewee mentioned:

> Mostly, I manage the grants. I make sure that I manage the financials. We have an accountant that does all the accounting, but I still need to make sure that we are not over- or under-spending. And then I manage the grants, making sure we are on top of it, doing what we are supposed to be doing, and managing the deadlines for the different grants we have.

Among organizations in which the majority of their revenue previously came from consistent government grants, most have found it difficult to adapt in recent years. Five interviewees indicated that the lack of sustainable funding specific to their targeted groups and services has

made their organization vulnerable to closure. Three organizations already changed their mission

and service populations in order to attract new funders and public support.

> Initially, our purpose was to help Southeast Asian families to assimilate into the
> American culture and try to overcome barriers like language, economic, social, and
> others. Pretty much just try to sustain themselves and adapt to the American culture.
> Now, we changed our vision and mission because the need is different. Obviously, a lot
> of the people that originally came here, they had kids and their kids are all grown up. Our
> community has different needs, so we are shifting focus to them. Instead of language
> barriers, we want to enhance job placement and give different opportunities to the Hmong
> people.

The benefits to changing their missions and target service population is still unknown. Out of the

three organizations that have changed their mission, two are still struggling to evaluate the

current needs of the community and how to address them. The third organization is advancing

into new service areas such as affordable housing and a food pantry in the hopes that they are

able to acquire new sources of financial support. More on the changing of organizational

missions is discussed chapter 6 under structural capacity challenges.

Three interviewees also suggested that funding opportunities are also dependent on the

size of the city where they operate. One of those interviewees believed that its fundraising

performance has been good because of its city's small population and good location, which

offered more opportunities to source financial support.

> We are fortunate enough to be at this location and to have a community where we are
> able to fundraise to help the organization continue, whereas others are not that fortunate.
> If you look at places like Green Bay, and Appleton, Wausau, they have a much bigger
> organization than we do. But when funding stopped completely, they had nowhere to turn
> to for fundraising. But we are a small community, and we have good facility and a good
> location to be able to survive.

Similarly, another interviewee noticed differences in financial opportunities between smaller and

larger cities.

> Being a small town, the community is smaller. It's not like the Twin Cities (MN), which
> is huge, and there are so many other opportunities for grants up there.

These interviewees noted that larger-sized cities and communities led to more grant opportunities. However, specifically in Wisconsin, other Hmong organizations in larger cities such as Madison have stopped operating over the years. This indicates that a larger city alone does not necessarily lead to more success, regardless of the number of grant opportunities. One possible explanation for this phenomenon is the existence of competition for resources. As more non-profit organizations developed along with an increase in the demand for public services, the limited growth in resources to sustain these organizations increased competition (Bose, 2015).

Five of the interviewees noted the increase in competition among non-profits as a contributor to their financial problems. They believe this competition has resulted in their loss of government funding and their ability to build private donor relationships.

> I subscribe to a grant station, which is a database that tells me where all the grants are and what the requirements are, and I look for a lot of grant opportunities. But there are a million and one non-profit organizations out there that are doing the same thing, and it is so competitive that I think the success rate is less than 20% when you apply for a grant.

Competition was also reported to limit the duration of grants received.

> It's a competitive process. And we live in a smaller city, and so like everyone else, the local housing authority which provides the home dollars only gives so much out every year, and so we received from them three years ago, and we completed two projects. But again, it's a competitive process, so every year now they give it to somebody else. So, we haven't received in the last three years. Hopefully in two years we will receive again.

Competition is also viewed as having increased over the years because the organizations were not able to distinguish themselves from other non-profit organizations when applying for financial resources. When asked what sets them apart from other non-profits, three interviewees mentioned that they were just like other organizations because they provided similar if not the same services.

Four of the interviewees reported that the ability to effectively optimize in other dimensions of capacity was also negatively affected by the lack of financial support. In terms of their human resources capacity, five of the interviewees mentioned that they were unable to compensate and hire more experienced and knowledgeable staff members to procure new avenues of financial resources. The lack of experienced staff members also left little room to create new networks with access to more resources. Without the capacity to determine the needs of the Hmong population and the needs or demands of new funders, the state of each organization varied. When considering all six organizations in this study, only two organizations were prepared to operate effectively and well into the future, while the other four organizations were at a critical state of financial hardship.

Increased competition and decreased government funding limit the ability of organizations to diversify their revenue stream, which is crucial to their financial well-being. In this study, the organization that had the least diverse forms of funding also had the fewest available services. With no staff members, the organization was operated by board members. This organization's only source of revenue was through fundraising and offered no services at the time of interview. In contrast, another organization offered over eight different services to its community and prided itself on its diverse funding sources. This organization obtained funding from the Department of Justice, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Department of Children and Families, donations, fundraisers, service fees, the United Way, Emergency Food and Shelter, Farmers Education, and the United States Department of Agriculture. When comparing all the organizations, the findings showed each depended on different sources of funds. One organization's revenue came from donations from the local community, corporations, and from other organizations. Another organization received funding

from donations, fundraising, state grants, one foundation, and service fees. Another organization received most of its funding from membership dues, state and federal grants, fundraising, and donations from various local sources. Another organization received most of its funding from donations, interpretation service fees, and the United Way.

Even though the need for funding was high for most of the organizations, two were concerned with losing their identity when searching for new financial resources.

> We have talked about that here, trying to get more funding, but our elders, the board of advisors, they really do not want that yet because when that happens, eventually it won't be a Hmong organization anymore. They are still pretty proud and very traditional. This is their organization and they do not want to give it up.

The other four organizations were less reluctant to seek new financial support. As mentioned earlier, a diversity of funding sources was seen as a strength in all the organizations, although not all have the capacity to follow through with intentions to establish a variety of funding sources.

Summary

The findings indicate that the Hmong MAAs in this study are encountering financial challenges that critically affect their ability to meet goals and sustain themselves. The interviewees frequently emphasized how government retrenchment of funds has drastically lowered total revenue over the years. As a result, they find it difficult to procure new financial resources that are sustainable and unrestricted. In addition, the competition for resources and funders' emphasis on collaboration has created more challenges to an already difficult situation. The lack of government support in addressing the needs of Hmong communities continues to be a problem. The overall decreases in total revenue created an increased dependence on revenue-generating activities including charging membership dues and hosting cultural festivities. In their long-term outlook, all of the interviewees expressed that they would like to pursue more

sustainable private funding resources. The next chapter will discuss the challenges pertaining to

the organizations' human resources capacity.

Chapter 5: Human Resources Capacity Challenges

The Need for More Knowledgeable and Skilled Staff and Board Members

Organizational knowledge and experience play a critical role in determining how Hmong MAAs are able to navigate and acquire local resources. The interviewees identified several key strengths and challenges, although only two interviewees attributed organizational success to their human resources capacity. The other four interviewees mentioned that the Hmong clan structure and the lack of funding were the greatest obstacles to enhancing their human resources capacity.

Of the two of the interviewees that mentioned the importance of their staff and board members to their organizational success, one did not have any staff members and depended solely on their board members for all operational activities.

> I am thankful that I have a few board members that are educated, that they have some kind of degree. They are understandable. They are helpful. I have a couple of board members who are very strong. That keeps me going too. That's kind of like why I ended up with my success.

The other interviewee attributed the success of the organization to the synchronized leadership of the staff and board members.

> …we have to be able to agree on what we disagree. After that, move on to what benefits the organization and community. We have to speak the same language. We have to see the same thing. We have to believe the same thing.

Both interviewees also mentioned the importance of community support to the success of the organization. Trust between the organization and the community is a recurring value reported by all the interviewees in this study. They believed their financial and human resources capacity increases to some extent with gaining the trust of the community.

Obstacles to increasing the human resources capacity of the Hmong MAAs were linked to how the Hmong clan structure operates. Typically, in these organizations the staff and board

members are elected from the local community without regard for their level of education attained, their level of expertise, or previous job experiences. Instead, elected administrators are selected based on clan representation and their level of prestige within their local Hmong community. These elected community members are oftentimes individuals who utilize the organization's services and have lower levels of educational achievement. As one interviewee mentioned:

> Our board consists of people who we actually provide services for. A lot of our board members do not really read or write English well. They do not have an education beyond high school. In order for our board to be successful, they need to be able to connect us to money and we do not have that.

The election system of the organization was also a challenge.

> Relying on the community to elect the next person is biased because if I know I'm going to run, I'm going to tell my whole family to come, and if my clan is large and I tell all of my clan to come, then I'm elected. It's meant to be a democratic process, but it ends up not being.

As a result of these challenges, three of the interviewees indicated a need to hire outside of the rules of the clan system so that individuals with more knowledge and education could take a role.

> In the past, the Hmong association was organized based on the clan system, your clan leadership. It's time to move beyond. We have to change, incorporate, or add something. We have to slowly get rid of the clan structure. We want people that have the knowledge. We want people not just serving because they belong to my clan.

> Stable financial support notwithstanding, three interviewees felt they were unable to pursue new opportunities and implement new programs because they lacked the skills to transition ideas into action. As part of the resettlement process, many refugees learned how to read, write, and speak English. This skillset was beneficial when establishing the Hmong MAAs in the United States. In all the organizations, the leaders speak both Hmong and English. However, the language skillset required to successfully procure resources through grant writing and other opportunities is more difficult for some organizations than others, particularly when

seeking to understand the needs and requirements of funders. Three of the interviewees attributed this to the lack of experience among their leadership as well as the lack of funding to hire staff with the necessary skillsets. None of the organizations in this study had a designated grant writer position. Instead, the grant writing was a responsibility of the executive directors and board presidents. These challenges place Hmong MAAs at a disadvantage as existing research has found that highly skilled and knowledgeable board members are linked to effective management, planning, and oversight (Ingram, 2008; Tysiac, 2018). While recruiting board members, organizations should keep in mind the expertise needed. An emphasis on diversifying the expertise of the board is also important as it allows for multiple perspectives for developing solutions to organizational problems (Tysiac, 2018).

The lack of funding also helps to explain the inadequate number of staff members and the high turnover rates within these organizations. In the past, all the organizations were said to be thriving and operating with sufficient numbers of employees. At the time this research was conducted, one organization had no employees. Another organization had just one staff member, two organizations had two staff members, and one organization had seven staff members. The organization with the highest number of employees had three full-time and four part-time staff members, one intern, and one individual under a work-study program. Another consequence of limited funding was the organizations' inability to hire additional staff to help identify other sources of funding. The extent of this situation varied by organization. Only two interviewees indicated having plans and the capacity to hire more staff members in the future. Even though one of those organizations was without an executive director and was led by the facility manager, the organization planned to hire a new executive director and other staff members once the organization had determined its new purpose. The other organization planned on hiring more

staff members as their services expanded upon the development of a new physical facility. As for the other four organizations, each reported that they are not likely to hire an executive director due to financial constraints.

The Need to Retain Staff and Board Members

Another challenge facing the organizations is their inability to retain staff and leadership members. In lieu of an executive director, four organizations were managed by either the board president or the facility administrator. Three of the interviewees shared that a lack of funding explains the missing vital leadership positions. One interviewee explained that their executive director resigned for personal reasons. In organizations where board presidents have taken over the responsibilities of the executive director position, all reported that the board presidents work on a voluntary basis and have full-time positions outside of their respective organization. These board presidents, then, also have responsibilities to manage staff and everyday activities. With greater responsibilities, the board presidents play a more visible role in the day-to-day decision-making operation that is typically associated with the role of the executive director and staff members.

> I have to pretty much be the executive director for this staff. A lot of questions, I am getting pulled into the operations piece a lot more than 10 years ago. So, a lot of the times I have to make decisions when it comes to staffing, and when it comes to some of the services.

To alleviate some of this additional workload, three of the organizations have increased staff responsibilities. In one organization, the board president controls every aspect of day-to-day operations because there are no staff members. In another organization, the executive director position was filled, but they had not been compensated for the past six months. Nevertheless,

they believed the organization would still be operational for five to ten more years. Their own optimism was met with a dose of skepticism. They admitted:

> If we don't have funding for my position, the executive director, I mean I've been operating the last six months, almost six months now without getting paid. I'm supposed to get paid, and I just don't pay myself; otherwise, I just can't pay my bills. I just pay my two employees, and I don't pay myself.

They are expecting to resign from their position within the next six months or however long they could continue filling the role without being compensated. Only one organization in this study had consistent leadership. The organization has been operated by the same executive director for the past six years. Their involvement with the organization dates back far into their teenage years when they started as a volunteer. They had very little experience directly related to operating a non-profit organization. However, they attributed her success to gaining experience from trial and error over time.

The Need for Diversified Leadership

All the interviewees reported challenges to diversifying leadership positions by including more women. Reflecting on their history, all the interviewees stated that a majority of leadership positions had been and continue to be held by Hmong men. The tendency for men to be selected for these positions was attributed to the patriarchal system of the Hmong clan structure. One organization made efforts to include women in leadership positions by developing a club specifically promoting Hmong women. However, the club was said to be less active than it used to be. All of the interviewees reported that the opportunity for women to run for leadership positions was available, however one interviewee claimed women decide not to apply because they lack the initiative.

I think traditionally women, especially in the Hmong community, don't take on that role, not that they don't want to, maybe some do, that's why the Hmong Women Society came out because they want to promote leadership within the community for women. We do have some that want to take on that responsibility, but when it comes to it, do you really want to go for it? You have some people who just back out of it. It's not like we don't promote it, it's not like we are biased. I think it's just that the initiative isn't coming.

This particular organization has had one female board president since its establishment.

Similarly, in the other five organizations the number of women in leadership positions has been minimal since the establishment of the organizations. Two interviewees believed that the general Hmong community has deterred women from leadership positions because of their traditionalist views on the responsibilities of Hmong women within the clan.

In recent years, the trend toward including Hmong women in leadership positions has been slowly changing and challenging the status quo. Among organizations with females in leadership positions, there was a belief that issues of gender bias were still apparent. These interviewees reported that many individuals in the general Hmong community still oppose and question their abilities, decisions, and capacity to lead.

I think being a Hmong woman, it's really hard to work with the clan leaders. I think that's a challenge I have, where the things I say will not necessarily be considered things of value, what I do will not be seriously considered just because I don't wear pants. That's been a challenge for me, and I think with our organization, I am the first Hmong woman to lead it, and so it's just different. The community is adjusting, and they are adjusting well. But there are some that just don't like it.

Along the same line, another interviewee mentioned:

The first thing I encountered the most is that being a female leader in our Hmong community is not easy. There is still a lot of opposition, even locally, in my own community, and in general. Normally, it's always males that are dominant; as a female leader you come into the arena and not everybody is accepting of you. We have allowed male leaders to dominate for generations. We haven't seen a lot of changes. I feel it is time for somebody like me and other courageous women to come out and start leading the Hmong people, and start leading the community because I feel we are as capable as any male leader.

To overcome these challenges, women focused on the goals and objectives of the organization rather than how they are perceived by the community. Their success and continual reappointment by the community indicated a shift in gender bias in the Hmong community.

Another challenge among four of the Hmong MAAs is the difficulty in recruiting individuals from younger generations–those associated with the second generation of Hmong born within the United States–to fill board member seats and executive director positions. As previously mentioned, the interviewees attributed this challenge to the fact that each generation values the role of the organizations differently. In three of the organizations, planned efforts were made to recruit the younger generations, although each had their own recruitment strategy. In particular, one organization focused on empowering the youth by providing opportunities for their involvement in fundraising events and by dedicating the monies raised to scholarships for the youth. The purpose of this strategy was to provide support for youth education in hopes that they would return at a later time and serve within the organization. Another organization invested in its future by implementing various youth programs while placing an emphasis on filling current at-large board member seats with young professionals. Two interviewees indicated that their continued survival in the next five to ten years was highly dependent on recruiting the younger generations.

The Need for Broader Community Involvement

In order to be granted federal funds for providing social services to refugees, MAAs must be legal non-profit organizations. In addition, at least 51% of the board of directors must be refugees or former refugees (Department of Health and Human Services, 1984). The interviewees reported that these government requirements, in combination with Hmong clan

structure, created both benefits and challenges for maintaining and strengthening their human resources capacity. Two interviewees indicated that continuous involvement of the Hmong refugee community in the decision-making process of the organization was a benefit of the requirements since it is assumed that Hmong refugees and local community members know best how to address and resolve problems specific to Hmong refugees. Another positive aspect reported by interviewees was the trust built between refugees, MAAs and the general community. Because they are living in a new environment with a new culture and language, Hmong refugees might be more willing to trust those that are similar to themselves. Now that Hmong refugees have been in the United States for over four decades, the retrenchment of government funding and the differences in the priorities of younger and older generations have created difficulties for organizations trying to build their human resources capacity. More specifically, interviewees reported challenges attracting, hiring and retaining knowledgeable and qualified staff members from outside of the Hmong community as well as challenges recruiting volunteers. To overcome these difficulties, one organization, who reports that members lack the knowledge, experience, and connections needed to procure funding, has sought to integrate private corporate executives into their organization. Two other interviewees hoped to recruit from the younger, more educated Hmong population and mold them into future leaders.

Regardless of the organizations' intents to enhance their leadership by seeking staff and board members outside of the Hmong community, all the interviewees still emphasized that their success depends on them remaining involved with the Hmong community. Community support was thought all of the interviewees to create positive outcomes related to increased financial donations, increased numbers of volunteers, and the preservation of the Hmong identity and culture.

As with many non-profit organizations, volunteers are crucial to the human resources capacity of the organizations in this research. Three interviewees mentioned that their dependence on volunteers has grown while the number of volunteers has decreased. These organizations are heavily reliant on volunteers to support daily activities, events, and programs. One interviewee reported differences in who volunteers with them:

> It's more a generation thing, but in combination with that, you look at just involvement when it comes back to volunteering, helping out with the community. We see a lot more, let's say, young girls. I think they seem to have more drive in them to either volunteer or do the kinds of stuff that let's say the boys or the young men don't pay a lot of attention to.

Two interviewees also found that many young women come back and are very active volunteers before getting married. These interviewees believe that the responsibilities and expectations that come with marriage diminish women's availability for volunteer activities. The interviewees also found that unmarried men and women, after obtaining an education, often do not come back to help the organization because they have a different mentality than the older generation and that the younger generation seems less concerned with the collective community. Existing research suggests that it is much more complicated. Millennials between the ages 18 to 34 are more likely to volunteers within schools and non-profits (National Volunteer Week, 2018) than with other organizations. Individuals over the age of 55 are more likely to volunteer at churches. As to the reason why individuals volunteered, 65% wanted to positively impact their community. The fact that Hmong MAAs have yet to adapt and incorporate current recruitment strategies utilized by other non-profits may account for the differences between the findings of this study and existing research. As an example, many non-profits are appealing to millennials by emphasizing the value of life purpose in volunteering for their organization (National Volunteer Week, 2018). Others use social media to recruit and allow for virtual volunteering by individuals with young

children, limited time, and/or no transportation (National Volunteer Week, 2018). The

differences in findings can also be explained by research as to why volunteers leave a non-profit

organization (Eisner, Grimm Jr., Maynard, & Washburn, 2009). Reasons can include not

matching volunteers' skills with assignments, failing to recognize volunteers' contribution, and

failing to provide strong leadership (Eisner, Grimm Jr., Maynard, & Washburn, 2009).

Four interviewees also reported challenges in recruiting knowledgeable volunteers. These

interviewees believed they could not recruit from the elderly Hmong population because that

particular group lacked the experience and knowledge needed to carry out daily services.

However, existing research suggests that the senior population is a group from which non-profits

should recruit since in general, people tend to volunteer more as they get older (National

Volunteer Week, 2018). Additionally, older individuals tend to have more time available to

volunteer after exiting the workforce (Matthews, 2018). Only one interviewee reported that

volunteers were useful but not essential to their organization.

> It's nice to have volunteers, but they do not make the agency run. I think that's a nice
> thing. We can sustain ourselves, not having to rely on volunteers.

Four interviewees also found challenges recruiting long-term volunteers. They found

people typically volunteered for short-term social events, fundraising, and to fill summer hours,

leaving the organizations struggling to operate during other parts of the year. Two interviewees

explained that these challenges could be attributed to the fact that many parents have to work

opposite shifts in order to accommodate childcare needs, thus limiting their time available to

volunteer. These findings are consistent with existing literature that find limited time and prior

commitments as the most common reasons why individuals do not volunteer (Bott, 2018).

Where there was a high dependency on volunteers, three interviewees reported having difficulties recruiting because of the low number of staff members and their obligations elsewhere.

> We wish we had volunteers that would assist us. That would free me up to go do a lot more fundraising, but we do not. So, to be honest, the Hmong community do not volunteer as much as the broader community that I have seen.

In these organizations, the executive directors and/or board presidents also had full-time employment outside of the organization, thus further limiting the time available to recruit and manage volunteers. In one of the organizations that no longer had a physical facility nor staff members, their volunteers were usually extended family members of board members. Similarly, two other interviewees were cognizant that rather than a large number of volunteers sharing responsibilities, typically the same few individuals were actually driving the organization and helping with daily operations and support events. They also found that while some individuals do come back to help the organization at a later age, the lack of a dependable stream of volunteers can lead to gaps in the volunteer workforce and instability in organizations that depend on volunteers. Overall, four of the interviewees mentioned that more community support would help alleviate their workload.

Summary

Only two of the six Hmong mutual assistance associations considered their human resources capacity as their greatest strength. These interviewees reported that they value educated and supportive staff and board members and a leadership mentality that favors the best interests of the community and organization. They believed their most significant challenges were created because of the entrenchment of the clan system in their community coupled with a

lack of financial support. The traditions of the clan system resulted in selection of a less-skilled, less-educated staff as well as a preponderance of males selected for leadership positions. Due to a lack of financial resources, the organizations were faced with the inability to hire, recruit, and retain staff and board members. Organizations also found it challenging to recruit long-term and knowledgeable volunteers as the result of generational differences among the young and the old, work schedule conflicts and the need to provide childcare, and a shortage of skilled older volunteers. The next chapter will discuss the organizations' structural challenges.

Chapter 6: Structural Capacity Challenges

Planning and Development Capacity

The Need to Plan and Develop A New Mission

When it comes to planning and developing a new mission, organizations whose priorities, strategies, and status are in alignment with those of the local, state, and federal government are more likely to secure resources that are supportive of their programs and activities (Elwood and Ghose, 2001). All the interviewees noted that direct support of Hmong refugees from government at all levels has greatly diminished. With no new Hmong refugees in over a decade, previous efforts towards political, economic, and social assimilation have enabled many Hmong refugees to become self-sufficient. This transition symbolizes the successful assimilation into mainstream American society. With a new status and new achievements, the needs of the Hmong community have changed as well. Although no organization attributed their planning and development capacity to their success, five of the organizations in this study have recognized these changes and have made efforts towards implementing new programs and activities to address those needs. However, four of the organizations reported the lack of financial and human resources capacity as challenges to establishing new programs and services.

The missions and goals of the organizations in this research have stayed relatively unchanged for a few and changed for others. Three organizations reported challenges to developing a new mission as a result of the changes in the needs of their target populations, funding sources, and organizational leadership. In one case, the interviewee believed that the needs of its local Hmong community have not changed over the years. However, the interviewee also recognized that the organization's current mission and efforts need to focus more on the younger Hmong community members. In three of the organizations, the flexibility to change

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missions was seen as a strength and a result of the changing environment. Two of those

organizations have transitioned from a status exclusively as an MAA to a general non-profit

status. They reasoned that the transition enabled them to distinguish themselves and attract more

financial resources. A common theme among these three organizations was their decision to

expand their target population beyond Hmong refugees.

> I think for a long time our mission has really been to serve the refugee population, and when I came in 2010, I made a strategic plan: we are no longer going to be serving the refugee population because we are no longer considered refugees according to the Office of Refugee Resettlement. So that means, as an agency that relies on refugee dollars, our organization stopped receiving those dollars that provide the services. We realized we need to transition to be an agency that services more folks in our community and not to solely target our refugees because the population will not always be there for us to serve.

However, even though their services are now offered to every member of the community, the

majority of service users are still Hmong. The same trend was found in the other two

organizations.

Many organizations in this study noted changes in the needs of the Southeast Asian

community but reported challenges to developing the strategies to determine what their current

needs are and how to address them. For example, one organization was struggling to identify the

needs of the community while also trying to convince its leadership to adapt to those needs. The

decision to change the organization's mission and goals had not yet happened because of a lack

of consensus among the leadership. The interviewee believed that the Hmong community had

gained social and economic independence and that the organization should change its target

population in order to attract other funders and remain operational. However, by changing its

target population, the leadership was concerned about losing the organization's identity and

moving away from its original purpose. Faced with multiple barriers and little control, the

interviewee hoped to keep the Hmong language and culture alive by transitioning the

organization into a space for cultural preservation. In two other organizations, the lack of

capacity to discover those needs drives them to focus more on short-term organizational survival.

The Need to Plan and Develop New Programs

All of the interviewees agreed that the needs of their target populations also influence the

planning and development of the programs the offer. When asked what distinguished their

organizations from other Hmong MAAs, two of the interviewees indicated that there was no

distinction because they offered the same services. However, four interviewees indicated a lack

of financial means as the greatest challenge to creating and maintaining new programs.

> Limited in funding we do not have a lot to offer because federal funding pretty much
> dried up, federal and state. So, we only have three programs that are funded by local
> resources.

Current programs that are supported by government funding includes domestic violence and

sexual assault prevention/response services, elderly and youth programs, tobacco education,

health education, food security programs, economic development, affordable housing, hunter

safety, garden projects, and emergency rental programs. Two organizations offer domestic

violence support programs, although one organization does not publicize this service on their

website. One organization offers a program to address sexual violence. Two organizations offer

programs for seniors. Four organizations offer youth programs. Three organizations offer the

tobacco education program that is dependent on being a member of WUCMAA. Only one

organization offers affordable housing assistance. One organization offers the hunter safety

program. Two organizations offer garden project programs. Lastly, the emergency rental

program is offered by one organization. The most utilized programs among the organizations

related to domestic violence, sexual assault, youth, the elderly, interpretation, and food security.

Despite the variety of services offered, there are still other areas of need not covered by the Hmong MAAs. The collected demographic data on the potential service users in the corresponding metro areas can be used to determine whether organizational programs do anything to address the immediate situations of the local Hmong populations. Although the metro areas where the organizations in this study are located varies, overall trends can be seen. With a majority of the Hmong population under the age of 19 (United States Census Bureau, 2010), these organizations seemed aware of the importance of offering programs that targeted youth. However, since the available programs are specifically directed towards youth (18 years old or younger) and the elderly (over the age of 50), the generations in between are excluded.

> Right now, [in] a lot of our programs that we do, there is more [emphasis put] towards the youth and the elderly. But the middle-aged people, [that] is where a lot of the problems have been, because they are losing their jobs, losing their houses, and there is no service for them here. I think that is one of the key areas we have to address.

The lack of programs for the middle-aged Hmong population may serve to emphasize the differences between generations and push specific generations to search for social, political, and economic support at other organizations. Three interviewees said they tended to refer individuals to other local non-profits if they were unable to provide the requested services.

In the area of U.S. citizenship, only two of the organizations provided support for individuals navigating the citizenship application process, not including citizenship training courses. Four interviewees reported that the need for citizenship classes is low, even though half the population of Hmong refugees that arrived in Wisconsin between 1980 and 1999 are not U.S. citizens. The 2010 census data also indicates that the metro areas included in this study show half of the Hmong population were born in the United States, while the other half were foreign-born, indicating that a large portion of the Hmong population may still need citizenship services.

Trends in education levels of the Hmong population show that as age increases, the level of education decreases. Four organizations offered programs related to education. Household language trends show that a majority of the Hmong population has someone who speaks English within their household. None of the organizations offered English courses, but most were willing to help interpret upon request, particularly important to those households indicating that no one over the age of 14 speaks English fluently.

Poverty and household income levels in the metro areas showed the most variability. Only one organization offers programs that are directed toward disadvantaged individuals and families. The majority of the Hmong population in the metro areas included in this study have occupations in production, transportation, and material moving. However, the percentage of Wisconsin Hmong civilians employed in 2010 was 63%, indicating an area of potential need not currently addressed by the Hmong MAAs. None of the organizations offer programs related to job services.

The Need to Plan and Develop Awareness

Three of the interviewees reported challenges in creating a public awareness for their organization and services. They attributed this challenge to a lack of staff available to perform outreach activities and a lack of interest from the Hmong community. Two of the interviewees reported that the ability to generate community and financial support was hampered by negative perceptions of Hmong MAAs. They were concerned that the public perceived them as inefficient, lacking in leadership, and full of corruption and dishonesty.

> Within the Hmong community itself, our programs go relatively unknown and unrecognized by what we do here. Within the Hmong community, they do not see what we have done for the kids. It goes without much recognition.

Three of the interviewees attributed the negative perception to lower numbers of volunteers among the younger generations and their unwillingness to provide financial donations.

Three of the interviewees mentioned that the community members are holding them to higher standards of financial accountability which creates additional challenges. New accountability measures have restricted how funds accumulated by the Hmong community can be utilized by the organizations.

> We serve the community culturally by helping with the New Year's celebration. However, the funds belong to the Hmong community where all clans have contributed since 1994.

As a result, the organizations have found it difficult to cover the operating costs of facilities and programs. Two interviewees believed the increased demand for financial accountability was brought on by now-settled legal issues that involved previous staff and board members. One of them mentioned multiple accounts of financial embezzlement that have continued to negatively influence how the organizations are viewed and have reduced overall community interactions with the organizations. The other interviewee mentioned legal issues following the misappropriation of funds in relations to membership fees that diminished the trust between the organization and the local Hmong community.

> Yeah, not too long ago we had some tension between the agency and the community members because some of the members got kicked out because they weren't helping pay for the debt and I think at the time we still owed $600,000 to $700,000 and it was to the point this place almost got foreclosed because we don't have any money to pay for the building. The leaders at that time came up with the idea to get financing for the building by having each member pitch in a little bit of money to help pay for the loan and some members did not agree to pay for the debt that we owed. I guess, the leaders kicked them out, if you are not paying for it, we are probably going to kick you out of your membership, and that's when everything turned into chaos with the federal lawsuit and all that stuff.

To overcome negative community perceptions, the organizations prioritized rebuilding the trust of the community and maintaining it over time. One interviewee stated:

> We have to maintain the level of trust and confidence from the members. If we do not have this, we just go nowhere. It is not about how much we know, or how much money we have right now, it is about the people. The hardest part is maintaining their trust level.

Two interviewees emphasized the need to have the right leadership in place to maintain community trust. With the right leadership, they believed financial and community support would increase over time. One interviewee believed that the trust of the community would increase if they were willing to provide some of their services for free.

> But the little things, I think makes the community trust us because whatever they need, big or small, we can help them. We do not turn them away. So, things like calling the phone company can be tedious and time consuming, but a lot of the time we call and request a Hmong interpreter for them. We get them through the automatic system. That is very helpful for a lot of people.

To explain the lack of interest by the Hmong community, all the interviewees indicated the tension between the younger Hmong generation (those born in the United States) and older Hmong generations (those that arrived into the United States as refugees), particularly regarding their views on what role the organizations play in their lives. The interviewees believed that younger generations do not see the organizations as important and make little, if any, effort to address the needs of the younger generation.

> I see that there is a gap, the generations that grew up here or born here, there is a disconnect between how they feel about the Hmong community versus how the elders feel about the Hmong community. The younger generation do not feel like the organization is for them, they feel the organization is for the older generations.

Similarly, another interviewee agreed that there is a generational rift among the Hmong community.

> For many years, we have these big festivals throughout the state and elsewhere and we always look upon the older generations. We never involve our youth. We never even respect them. We never look at them as future leaders, and then we eventually lose them. And when we lose them, it's their fault. But technically, it's our fault. We did not get them involved enough. We did not respect them enough, we did not pull them into the community enough, and they felt useless among us. So, they went elsewhere to work for the general community. And when they did that, it's their fault; they graduate with a

degree and they leave the Hmong community. That's crazy! Really, we are the one who is crazy here.

Three of the organizations have already made an effort to integrate the younger generations by employing them as staff and board members as well as by developing relevant programs to address their needs.

Infrastructure and Process Capacity

One contributor to the stability and success that all organizations mentioned was the ability to procure the financial means to purchase physical facilities. At one point in time, all six organizations owned the facility in which they operated. One organization no longer had a physical building and was managed from their personal home. The interviewees reported difficulty in financing the purchase of facilities and their ongoing maintenance. All the organizations had been able to use a combination of funding from the state, local donations, and revenue-generating activities to pay off their mortgages over time. One interviewee reported challenges stemming from legal issues, which resulted in community members refusing to contribute, as mentioned earlier.

Three of the interviewees expressed that ownership of their facilities lowered overhead costs. One interviewee reported, "Yes, we own this facility. We do not owe any money on it, so that is a good thing. It keeps our operating cost down." These organizations also found it beneficial to own their facilities since funders prefer to fund programs over providing comprehensive organizational support. As mentioned earlier, most organizations reported challenges to procuring unrestricted discretionary income. Only one organization planned to purchase a new facility in the near future.

Two of the interviewees indicated that building ownership allowed for greater autonomy in their decision-making process. One interviewee mentioned, "We make our own decisions. Nobody comes to tell you what to do or who to serve. We are kind of like a self-governing organization." Greater autonomy also extended to the community in deciding what the organization does and how they operate. Facility ownership was perceived by many of the organization leaders to mean that the building was community-owned and, as such, an organizational asset. All the interviewees felt that the building also serves as a place of social interaction and events and gives a sense of pride, community ownership, and solidarity.

Relationship and Network Capacity

The Need to Find and Develop Quality Relationships

Five of the interviewees reported challenges to developing relationships that could help sustain their current programs and services. Interviewees attributed the difficulties to their existing staff and board members' lack of a broader business network, a lack of knowledge and skills to find and develop relationships, and that developing network ties only brought short-term gains. In all the organizations in this study, the leadership and staff had long-term ties to the local community. Many of them who grew up and worked in the community stayed to support the organizations; a few of these individuals utilized the services available at one point in their life. Through their experience with the local community, they were able to develop a network of relationships with individuals, agencies, and public and private institutions.

It is also necessary for organizations to find and develop quality relationships not only in order to collaborate but also in order to meet funder requirements. Collaboration was thought to reduce expenses associated with carrying out the same mission while maximizing efficiency.

One interviewee mentioned, "We have to go out to get local corporations and other organizations to collaborate and work with us and create programs that they can help fund." None of the interviewees mentioned collaborating and sharing resources with each other. Two of the interviewees reported that because they are located in different areas throughout the state and are community-operated and already limited in their human and financial capacities, collaboration between MAAs is difficult and unappealing. For example, a funder in one location across the state is less likely to provide funding for programs taking place elsewhere. Competition for limited resources further reduces any chances of collaboration.

Of the organizations in this study, one significantly had the fewest network ties. Dependent on fundraising and with no employees, the organization had no formal ties with other organizations, institutions, or individuals. Support for the organization came through informal networks that consisted of family and friends that provided support on a voluntary basis. The interviewee expressed that its challenges with developing network ties was largely due to a lack of human resources capacity.

Another interviewee reported having ties with local leaders, former mayors, former board members, and former individuals in different school districts and superintendents. With such ties, the organization was able to accumulate enough funding to purchase the facility out of which they currently operate. Although these ties were useful, the benefits were limited to short-term gains. When provided with a single cause at a specific time of need, benefactors were able to follow through with assistance. For longer-term support, those benefactors were reported to be less useful to the organization. More consistent support was found through federal and state grants for their domestic abuse and sexual assault programs. Daily operations and other overhead costs were offset by annual membership dues paid by community members. In cases where the

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organization was unable to provide services to community members, staff often referred individuals to other organizations, such as Catholic Charities. This relationship was not formal and did not provide any benefits to the organization itself.

Another organization had more links to businesses, corporations, and other organizations to support their programs. These links were reported to be the direct result of the executive director's position as a business owner. Again, these ties offered only limited support. Most of the money accrued from these business ties was earmarked for scholarships awarded once or twice a year. Their relationship with the United Way provided more consistent funding for their youth programs. The organization's limited ties were also associated with their board's weak network of relationships; many board members had little education, limited English, and were selected based on clan representation rather than network capacity.

Another organization had ties with a local organization, a state agency, and a foundation. Most of their programs were operated by volunteers and financed through fundraising during annual summer festivals. The interviewee reported that a lack of funding resulted in a reduction in staff. The reduction in staff then necessitated that the organization be operated by the board president, whose daily responsibilities restricted their ability to develop new ties.

In another organization without an executive director, its current ties were to the United Way, the Hmong Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce (HWCC), and private foundations. Because the organization only offered a youth program, the majority of its funding came from the United Way. The partnership with HWCC was in its infancy, and the benefits to the organization and the local community were yet to be determined. Recently, the organization was able to procure funds from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism and the Sports Authority (WDTSA). However, the

interviewee reported challenges with this funding source because funds were restricted and could only be used in support of their summer festivals.

The last organization had ties to federal, state, and local agencies, other non-profit organizations, and private institutions. The organization had the most diverse network of relationships among the MAAs included in this study. Their multiple sources of financial support and sustainability were attributed to the diversity in their network of relationships. The interviewee reported that their greatest challenge stemmed from network ties that are limited to program funding and provide little support for the everyday building operations.

Summary

The findings of this research regarding structural capacity show that Hmong MAAs value network ties at the local level, though none of the organizations mentioned their structural capacity as the key strength to achieving their goals. Because most of the organizations had similar local connections, they reported challenges in building more valuable relationships due to a lack of financial and human resources capacities, re-evaluating the needs of their targeted population, and refocusing their purpose to attract new financial resources. Beyond their past or present connections to the WUCMAA, none of the organizations in this study were in active conversation or mutually-beneficial relationships with each other.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

Summary of Findings

This chapter summarizes the study's findings as they relate to the existing literature on the challenges surrounding organizational human, financial, and structural capacity. Also included is a discussion linking this study to non-profit theory and practice. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this study was to identify the contextual variables surrounding Hmong MAAs and the challenges in their capacity to fulfill their mission. In this study, two fundamental questions related to the capacity of Hmong MAAs were addressed: What factors hinder the ability of Hmong community-based organizations from meeting their goals and objectives? What are the capacity constraints of Hmong community-based organizations?

When the interviewees were asked about their greatest challenges, most revealed finance-related shortfalls to be the greatest obstacle to reaching mission goals and objectives. Reoccurring themes included the decrease in government funding, lack of government acknowledgment, increase in competition, and the growing dependence on profit-generating activities. These themes agree with Hall et al.'s (2003) extensive analysis of the external environment of non-profit organizations in Canada. However, Hall et al. (2003) also found financial challenges relating to government funding policies and practices such as delays in receiving funds, difficulties in getting funding advances, and the lack of coordination in government programs that were not frequently reported as a challenge for Hmong MAAs. One reason for this difference could be that the total number of government grants for Hmong MAAs has declined over the past decade, creating less interaction with the federal government and thus the challenges in meeting their requirements.

Hall et al.'s (2003) findings also indicated that the government has decreased the funding for non-profit and volunteer organizations, and a similar trend was seen in the decreasing revenue of the six Hmong MAAs over the past decade. Interviewees reported that the lack of acknowledgement by the government to address the continual needs of the Hmong population relates to this decrease in funding, leading some to advocate for more political representation. Although the Hmong MAAs have established a coalition to represent their interest at the state level, the interviewees reported the coalition's shortfalls that include a lack of leadership, political clout, purpose, and resources. These same elements are necessary for coalition success and to have knowledgeable and skilled staff members and effective communication (Cohen, Baer, & Satterwhite, 2003; GEO, 2013; Foster-Fishman, Berkowitz, Lounsbury, Jacobson, & Allen, 2001). The findings suggest the Hmong MAAs were aware of the potential benefits of creating a coalition and were already engaging in capacity building efforts.

In other areas of capacity building efforts, existing literature suggests that many non-profit organizations have shifted towards profit-generating activities as a result of the decrease in government funding, how government funding can be applied, and the growing demand of services and programs (Alexander, 2000; Besel, 2001; Hall et al., 2003; McMurtry, Netting, & Kettner, 1991; Ryan, 1999; Skloot, 2000; Weisbrod, 2000). This study strengthens the existing literature by finding that many Hmong MAAs have adopted profit-generating activities to address challenges in their financial environment. One particular method evident in most of the Hmong MAAs is the use of the Hmong New Year and summer festivals to generate revenue. The cultural events continue to serve as a space for social bonding, cultural preservation and provide exposure to the mainstream society (Lynch, Detzner & Eicher, 1995; Vang, 2006; Yang, 2008). The revenue generated was used to compensate employee salary, facility overhead, office

supplies, scholarships, programs, services, and miscellaneous items. Because the Hmong New Year and summer festivals have been part of the Hmong culture and traditions before arriving into the United States (Vang, 2006; Yang, 2008), the findings of this study suggest that profit-generating activities through their cultural events are not new to the organizations; however, their mounting dependence on it is. Therefore, profit-generating activities may continue to be a strategy to help increase the short-term financial and human capacity of ethnic community-based organizations.

When asked about their human capacity, the interviewees reported this dimension to be less important to the perceived strength of the organizations. This is in contrast to Hall et al.'s (2003) and Misener (2009) findings that the human resource capacity was reported to be the most important for other non-profit organizations. The lack of financial support may help to explain these differences, as many of the organizations reported the lack of sustainable funding exacerbates their existing human capacity challenges and increases their dependence on volunteers. The recruitment of volunteers is additionally challenging because of their conflicting work schedules, childcare obligations, priority differences, negative perceptions of the organizations, and the inability of the older generation to volunteer due to their lack of skills and education. These findings support Hall et al.'s (2003) research that most of the non-profit organizations also reported challenges in their ability to hire paid skilled staff members and challenges to recruit and retain volunteers. Other research such as Hager & Brundney (2011) and Warbarton (2017) found similar results. The decline in volunteers is reported by the organizations in Hall et al.'s (2003) research to be as a result of changing values among the youth, increase in employer work requirements, changing priorities, and changing expectations. The overlaps in the challenges of human capacity between Hall et al.'s (2003) findings and of

this study indicate Hmong MAAs are encountering similar experiences as other non-profit organizations.

None of the interviewees reported structural capacity to be a strength, despite valuing network ties and the benefits that may be acquired by establishing sustainable connections. As a result, most of the organizations reported that the lack of human and financial capacity, made them unable to establish new connections. Similarly, other research reported the lack of financial and human resource capacity negatively impacted their ability to plan programming and establish and maintain relationships (Hall et al., 2003; Keys, Schwartz, Vidal & Bratt, 1996; Misener & Doherty, 2009; Strauss, 2011). To overcome these challenges, some of the Hmong MAAs are re-evaluating the needs of their targeted population and revising their mission and purpose to attract more funders. These strategies may serve as avenues to increase the structural capacity of other community-based organizations.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Theoretically, there is evidence of the connections between the dimensions of capacity throughout this study that further supports Hall et al.'s (2003) multidimensional approach to organizational capacity. It was apparent that the challenges related to the lack of human resources and network ties influenced the ability of the organizations to engage in financial planning and development. Seen in reverse, the lack of financial resources also affected the ability of organizations to hire the human resources necessary to develop financial plans and connect to resourceful ties. For example, two organizations did not have the personnel, skills, or time to pursue many grant opportunities, thus limiting their financial capacity. With their limited

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financial capacity, they were unable to hire knowledgeable and skilled staff members and recruit volunteers.

The results of this study can only slightly suggest that smaller non-profit organizations encounter similar capacity challenges when compared to larger community-based organizations. However, the extent of the challenges may be different and cannot be generalized by the small sample size of this study. Hall et al.'s (2003) theory may be a useful model to continue this debate by evaluating the capacities of more Hmong community-based organizations and smaller non-profit organizations.

Other theoretical implications of this study include the need to identify more influential external factors affecting non-profit organizational capacities. The diverging results of this study suggests one factor may have a greater impact on the dimensions of capacity than another. For example, the growing dependence on profit-generating activities in the Hmong community-based organizations was crucial to their financial capacity and adds another external variable not expanded on in the research of Hall et al (2003). A second example includes the growing incorporation of Hmong women into leadership positions within the Hmong MAAs. Although more Hmong women are being selected into leadership positions, gender issues are still a problem. Gender bias in hiring practices in the non-profit sector is not particularly new (Branche, Ford, Sloan, & Thomas, 2014; McNamee, 2018; Quak & Kleiner, 2004); however, the findings of this study present additional challenges to building human capacity in Hmong MAAs because there were no reported systems in place to hire more women into leadership positions. This study highlights the importance of addressing gender bias and proposes the expansion of Hall et al.'s (2003) framework to consider related challenges and how it affects the achievements of goals.

Practically, the results of this study identified strategies that help organizations to remain relevant to the needs of the Hmong population. As some of the organizations are doing well, there can be lessons learned and strategies which other organizations can emulate. Some of the Hmong MAAs are refocusing the structure of their organizations and changing their mission to accommodate the needs of their targeted population and to satisfy funder requirements. In a time where federal funding has reduced the total revenue of Hmong MAAs over the past decade, the strategies which increase financial and human capital are crucial to organizational survival and to continue helping disadvantaged populations. More specifically, this study serves as the initial phase of organizational evaluation and suggests areas of improvement in which ethnic organizations can focus to become more effective and responsive. These areas include:

1. Appealing to the values of the younger generations to recruit more volunteers, increase private donations, and attract future leaders.

2. Improving communication with the local community to increase awareness of the organizations' needs and outlining the benefits they provide to the community.

3. Improving communication with similar organizations to collaborate, learn from each other, and build mutually-beneficial relationships.

4. Creating and maintaining a positive public perception to attract private donors and gain public support.

5. Diversifying staff and board members to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to improve human capacity.

6. Evaluating the current needs of target populations to develop a course of action and remain relevant.

Following these recommendations may empower the leaders of the Hmong MAAs to make the necessary changes to enhance their various dimensions of capacity. According to Gooden, Evans, and Pang (2018), many ethnic community-based organizations do not get the exposure and visibility that they need in order to attract the attention of researchers, the government, and new members. The results of the study can be also beneficial for leaders of other small community-based organizations seeking to enhance their financial and human capacities without losing their identity and culture.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several findings of this study are in contrast to Hall's et al. (2003) results, which is to be expected as the context of each organization is different. One significant difference in Hall's et al. (2003) findings is that human resources were not identified as the most important dimension among the interviewees of this study. Most of the interviewees emphasized that financial capacity is the most important dimension. However, similar to Hall et al.'s (2003) findings, financial capacity is reported by the Hmong MAAs to be the most difficult to increase. A possible explanation for the different findings may be discovered with more research into the different life stages of more small non-profit organizations (Andersson et al., 2006). Andersson et al. (2006) suggested, non-profit organizations in different stages (i.e. start-up, growth, maturity, decline, and turnaround) can affect their capacity limitations, needs, and challenges. This is relevant to the Hmong MAAs because they can be categorized into the decline and turnaround life stages. The decline stage describes an organization where their services are no longer relevant. The turnaround stage describes an organization where their revenues have declined, and they are taking corrective actions to improve their situation. With more analysis in

this area, there can be a comprehensive, targeted approach to non-profit capacity building (Andersson et. al., 2006).

Conclusion

This study represents the initial examination of the different dimensions of capacity in the context of six Hmong MAAs. Instead of examining the Hmong MAAs from the perspective of a singular dimension, this study extends the body of research on small ethnic community-based organizations with a broader multidimensional focus. The multidimensional analysis of organizational capacity in the Hmong MAAs provides a comprehensive illustration of how each dimension is important to mission achievement. Overall, the findings of this study broadly support Hall's et al. (2003) multidimensionality framework of organizational capacity and its use for future research in the non-profit and voluntary sector. In addition, the findings of this study support the inclusion of external variables to explain the nuances of each organization and their ability and challenges to engage in capacity building efforts. External variables allow for further analysis to explain how the dimensions of capacity work and how to develop customized, sustainable capacity efforts that would be most beneficial to non-profit organizations.

The multidimensional approach also highlights the interconnectedness of each element of capacity and how each dimension can influence others negatively or positively. This study has demonstrated that the organizational dimensions of capacity are linked and have implications for Hmong MAAs that want to use the organizational capacity framework as a means to remain relevant and effective. Additionally, this study discovered similar challenges faced by larger non-profit organizations in other research, suggesting factors in capacity building efforts may be relevant to organizations of different sizes. However, before prescribing a holistic strategic plan

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for building capacity in Hmong MAAs, an evaluation of the current needs of their targeted

service populations is required. Some organizations have already started this, expanding their

targeted population to include disadvantaged individuals beyond the Hmong community and

changing their mission to attract new funders. Although Hmong MAAs continue as sites of

identity formation, solidarity, political voice, and social services, the ability of each organization

to engage in the capacity building evaluation process varies significantly. To discover the means

to enhance their capacities, the multidimensional approach may serve as the framework to

provide solutions to their current predicament and challenges.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Questions

1. What is your name, position, and the organization you belong to?

2. How long have you been in the position? Why have you chosen to be in that position?

3. What other positions have you held before this current position? What other positions have you held outside of this organization and other mutual assistance associations?

4. What are your goals, mission, and objectives for this organization?

5. Can you tell me more about the history of this organization? Leadership changes?

6. What services do you offer? How has this change over time? What services are the most popular and why?

7. What is your daily routine as an executive director or board president?

8. Who is involved in the everyday activities of the organization? Staff? Volunteers? What are their responsibilities?

9. How has the refugee experience changed and in what ways is the organization addressing it and staying relevant?

10. What challenges do you encounter and how do you adjust/adapt? Are these unique to Hmong mutual assistance associations? Competition? Network ties? Funding?

11. What has helped you to become successful? (Successful in this study is general and will be defined by the interviewee. This may include measures of funding accumulation, continual operations, services offered, seeing the pride and job of the Hmong community members, etc.)

12. Who can utilize your services? How many have you serviced and in what areas? Why is the organization located here? What are the demographic of the users? Is there a generational difference?

13. How is the organization funded? Do you have grant writers? Ties to local, state, and federal agencies?

14. What sets this organization apart from other Hmong mutual assistance associations? Services offered?

15. What sorts of programs and/or organizations at the national, state, and local level do you utilize? How have you used these resources? Give examples. Did you find them helpful?

16. Why do you think the other organizations have stop running? Funding? Leadership?

17. What does the organization need to ensure its existence?

18. Where do you see your organization in 5-10 years? What do you think the future holds for Hmong mutual assistance associations?

19. Why did you/did not join Wisconsin United Coalition of Mutual Assistance Associations, Inc. (WUCMASS)? What sorts of benefits does it provide?

20. In what other ways does this organization serve the Hmong community? Culturally? Politically?

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