ARTICLES

Exploring Strategy and Board Structure in Nonprofit Organizations

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This research explores how nonprofit managers conceptualize their organization's strategic orientation toward products and services and in what way the governing board is structured to match that orientation. Using the Miles and Snow typology of strategy and a survey of 132 nonprofit organizations, organizations were categorized into four strategic types (e.g., defenders, prospectors, analyzers, or reactors), and distinctive structural patterns in board committees and composition were found. Prospectors had broader, more inclusive structures, whereas defenders tended to have tighter, more focused structures. Although some patterns appeared muted, through in-depth interviews with selected exemplars, several characteristics were found that helped define and clarify nonprofit strategy. This included the use of mission statements to help communicate the organization's strategic orientation.

Keywords: *organizational strategy; nonprofit organizations; governance; organizational structure*

Managers of nonprofit organizations make choices that seek to improve the performance of their organization. These decisions involve interpreting and framing the environment, developing and implementing programs and services, and creating processes and structures to monitor and control resources for optimal impact. Organizations that systematically address these challenges have been associated with improved performance (Ketchen et al., 1997; Miles, Snow, Mathews, Miles, & Coleman, 1997). Based upon perceptions of

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the environment and organizational attributes (e.g., values and capabilities), managers can structure their organizations in an attempt to improve performance and meet their goals. Organizational structure has been linked to performance improvements (Harris & Ruefli, 2000; Kushner & Poole, 1996) as well as organizational decline (Galaskiewicz & Bielefeld, 1998). In addition, theory suggests that the variety and number of structural patterns are not infinite but are limited by tendencies of organizational attributes to develop coherent patterns (e.g., hierarchical control). These attributes develop patterns because they are interrelated such that organizational forms can be classified and identified (Meyer, Tsui, & Hinings, 1993).

This article analyzes the relationship between strategy and structure in nonprofits by classifying organizations according to the Miles and Snow (1978) typology of strategy. We propose that organizations that seek to serve a broader community and expand services to new areas will have more board-level committees and more stakeholder involvement in those committees. Similarly, organizations that focus on a clearly defined service niche will exhibit more centralized and restricted governance structures. Boards are the focus of structural analysis, because they engage volunteers as a mechanism to decentralize decision making and can perform a critical role to help interpret market opportunities. This was explored through a regional survey of nonprofits and nine focused interviews with exemplar organizations.

NONPROFIT STRATEGY

Conceptual understanding of strategy in nonprofit organizations is becoming more sophisticated to better reflect the unique character of nonprofit organizations (e.g., Backman, Grossman, & Rangan, 2000). For example, nonprofits need to consider multiple stakeholders in resource development, the potential for collaborations, and the mixed influences of market forces. These factors can lead to challenging considerations when nonprofits attempt to develop and define product and service strategies. Strategy encompasses interpreting environmental conditions and designing systems to foster success. According to Miles and Snow (1978),

> The effectiveness of organizational adaptation hinges on the dominant coalition's perceptions of environmental conditions and the decisions it makes concerning how well the organization will cope with these conditions. (p. 21)

Based on this definition, successful strategy is contingent on appropriate interpretation of environmental conditions and organizational response to those conditions.

Stone, Bigelow, and Crittenden (1999) developed an extensive review of empirical studies addressing strategy in nonprofit organizations and concluded that "few explicit connections have been made among research studies,

contributing to fragmentation in the field" (p. 378). Similarly, Ketchen et al. (1997) conducted a meta-analysis of 40 empirical studies that examined strategy, structure, and performance and concluded that future research should focus on existing theories such as Miles and Snow (1978). Ketchen et al. recommended that future research should "replicate existing configurations-performance relationships in multiple contexts" (1997, p. 234). The lack of uniformed consideration of strategic factors has lead to confusion and contradictory results associated with strategy and its impact on performance (Stone et al., 1999).

What both literature reviews suggest is that, rather than starting anew with factors that might influence strategy formulation, content, or implementation, it is best to consider existing theories and explore their application to multiple contexts and, if possible, to each other. Nevertheless, even with that recognition, the choices of strategic theories are extensive. For example, Frumkin and Andre-Clark (2000) recognized the work of Porter (1996) as particularly informative to nonprofits. Ketchen and colleagues (1997) identified four or five potentially promising models (e.g., Mintzberg, 1979), but the most extensively investigated was the Miles and Snow typology (1978), which was the focus of five studies in their review. These studies showed promise because they consistently showed support for the principle that strategic alignment (as suggested in the model) could be identified and that alignment was reflective of better performing organizations (Doty, Glick, & Huber, 1993).

Miles and Snow (1978) broke down the process of understanding strategy into how organizations interpret and respond to three problems: entrepreneurial, engineering, and administrative. The entrepreneurial problem addresses how the organization defines its "product or service and target market" (Miles & Snow, 1978, p. 21). For nonprofit organizations, this could include how broadly they conceptualize their community responsibility, which influences what services they provide; who they partner with; and who they serve. The engineering problem is developing an operational solution to delivering the services of the organization. This includes selection of a service delivery method (i.e., technology; Hasenfeld, 1983) and alignment of information and communication linkages necessary for effective operation. For nonprofits, that includes consideration of how volunteers are used in providing services. The administrative problem considers structures and processes to direct and monitor operations. The primary objective is to reduce uncertainty about organizational operations. However, the ideal organization has systems that ensure efficiency and reduce uncertainty while simultaneously allowing appropriate innovation. For nonprofit organizations, governance structures will often serve to monitor and ensure organizational consistency while watching environmental factors to consider strategic innovation opportunities and resource availability.

Miles and Snow (1978) developed a typology of four different strategic perspectives, which are idealized forms grounded in different approaches of management. The four strategic styles are defender, prospector, analyzer, and

reactor. Defenders are organizations that have a set service area (i.e., niche), do not look for new opportunities, and seldom make major changes in customers. Prospectors "are organizations which almost continually search for market opportunities, and they regularly experiment with potential responses to emerging environmental trends" (Miles & Snow, 1978, p. 29). Analyzer organizations are defenders during more stable environments but in turbulent environments analyze their competitors and then rapidly adopt the most hopeful of the new ideas (similar to being a temporary prospector). Reactors "lack a consistent strategy-structure relationship" (Miles & Snow, 1978, p. 29). Instead, these organizations make adjustments because they feel constrained by environmental pressures. The distinctions between categories make the Miles and Snow typology suitable for analysis of organizations at an aggregate level.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND STRATEGIC STYLE

According to Miles and Snow (1978) the implementation of a strategy is enacted in the structures and processes of the organization, and as Van de Ven and Ferry (1980) stated, "The structure and functioning of organizations are the result of strategic choices made either implicitly or explicitly by coalitions of people both within and outside the organization" (p. 90). Organizational structure has been defined as "the overall organizational pattern" (McPhee & Poole, 2001, p. 505), and three areas are typically the focus of investigations to understand the implications of strategy on structure. First is the configuration of existing patterns that includes the division of labor (i.e., horizontal differentiation) and chain of command (i.e., vertical hierarchy). Second is the use of rules and procedures and the degree to which they are formalized or codified in writing (i.e., formalization). Third is the placement of decision-making authority. This is reflected in the degree of centralization or diffusion. Centralized decision making is restricted to top-level decision making, whereas decentralization decision making is disbursed to others (geographically or hierarchically) in the organization (Mintzberg, 1979).

Given that consistent structural configurations should exist in similarly oriented organizations (Meyer et al., 1993) and that the design of an organization is influenced by managerial decisions (Perlmutter & Gummer, 1994), the structural features exhibited should be reflective of its strategic purposes. The challenge is to consider which features in nonprofit organizations will be reflective of the strategic orientations suggested by Miles and Snow (1978). In one of the few studies that analyzed elements of structure for nonprofit organizations, Kushner and Poole (1996) found that the inclusion of volunteers in the organization and the sharing of decision-making power with those volunteers are unique elements of nonprofit organizations.

Kushner and Poole (1996) examined "the distribution of influence, which organizations can keep clustered or distribute widely" (p. 121), and argued that, because many nonprofits are small and cannot subdivide into separate

units, which is the traditional view of decentralizing, nonprofits can distribute influence among volunteers. Specifically, they looked at the existence of committees and the composition of those committees to reflect the tendency to centralize decision making (fewer committees) or decentralize decision making by developing more committees and including more types of people on those committees (e.g., board members, staff members, and other volunteers). The inclusion of volunteers potentially opens the decision making of the organization beyond centralized decision makers. They found that various configurations were deemed effective, but structural dysfunctions (i.e., areas of nonalignment) were associated with failure.

Boards and board committees engage volunteers in strategic purposes, and broader, more inclusive structures decentralize decision making. The dominant coalition should align board structures that reinforce the market perspective of the organization, because boards are recognized as instrumental mechanisms to improve organizational performance (Herman & Renz, 1999). A resource dependency view suggests that boards are crucial resource streams either politically (i.e., network connections) or intellectually (i.e., informed decision making) and that this can lead to improved performance (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Consequently, effective alignment of structures at the board level should reinforce the strategic purposes of the organization. In particular, when considering market opportunities, the board is potentially an effective mechanism to interpret and frame the environment. A specific example is research conducted by Siciliano (1997) who found that organizations that relegated planning to a board committee were inclined to perform better.

Furthermore, Carver (1997) suggested that boards should act as the "market" to determine services by setting mission and policies, because nonprofits operate in a "muted market" (p. 5). There is no automatic consumer judgment because of price supports and limited competition. Consequently, boards perform a critical function to monitor environmental trends that might affect organizational performance (Duca, 1996). The board and its committees are one mechanism to be sensitive and aware of constituent interest and environmental opportunities. A misinterpretation of the environment could result in errant policies and programs. Consequently, boards must have mechanisms in place to insure understanding of critical environmental trends (Alkhafaji, 1989; Duca, 1996; Wood, 1996). This would include funding resource dependencies, multiplicity of constituent interests, and interorganizational alliances (Stone & Bryson, 2000). The spread of environmental awareness is guided by the strategic purpose of the organization (i.e., innovation, growth, depth of service), and consequently, the structures in place should reflect those purposes.

Using the Miles and Snow (1978) typology as our guide, defender organizations are focused on a more refined service niche. They tend to be more internally focused on organizational issues of efficiency and less concerned with environmental pressures perceived to be beyond the focus of the organization. Prospectors, however, look for new opportunities with an eye on the external

environment for potential market opportunities. These two types provide contrasting strategic orientations that should be reflected in a broader pattern of structure for the prospectors, because innovating and looking for new service opportunities require attention to more environmental factors (e.g., current and potential customers). Additionally, more centralization should be possible in defender organizations because of the focus on efficiency and tighter control of existing processes. Consequently, two key features were explored: the existence of board-level committees and their composition. Together, committee existence and committee membership form organizational patterns that can be compared and analyzed among a large number of organizations. Obviously, such an analysis has limitations. Other aspects of the organization could potentially perform these market-determining roles, whether volunteers or staff, and differing organizational attributes (e.g., age, stage of development, or industry) might, as well, influence the existence of these structural features. However, the monumental task of analyzing all potentially significant structural features throughout an organization does not necessarily guarantee a unified picture of structural alignment, because certain portions of the organization may be more or less reflective of the strategic position expressed by the executive. This is certainly an interesting task to compare and contrast structural features within one organization, but is outside the bounds of this article. The board consequently is a viable mechanism to compare structural features as they relate to market strategies identified by the organization.

Specifically, we hypothesize that organizational structure should be configured to reflect the organization's strategy as follows:

Hypothesis 1a: Organizations that employ prospector strategies will possess a broader structural pattern than defenders.

Hypothesis 1b: Defender organizations will be less diffuse in committee composition than prospector organizations.

In addition, extensive research has shown an association between strategy and performance. Specifically, Miles and Snow (1978) and others (Doty et al., 1993; Ketchen et. al., 1997) have shown that organizations that employ prospector, defender, or analyzer strategies will perform better than organizations that are more reactive in nature. This research seeks to support that contention in nonprofit organizations. Specifically, Hypothesis 2 states,

Hypothesis 2: Organizations that operate as reactors will report poorer performance when compared to the other strategic styles.

Furthermore, to expand our understanding of nonprofit strategy and the application of the Miles and Snow (1978) typology to nonprofits, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with executives in selected organizations to

better understand how they conceptualized and used structural components of their organization.

METHOD

Questionnaires were sent to executives in 324 nonprofit organizations in a metropolitan area of the Southwest. Organizations were identified through existing mailing lists compiled by a regional center of nonprofit organizations. This was a convenience sample of predominately youth and human service nonprofits, which accounted for about 70% of the sample. The remaining organizations were scattered across several areas including arts, heath care (clinics not hospitals), environment, and public benefit. A modified Dillman (1999) mail survey method was used and encompassed an initial mailing, a reminder postcard, and a second survey mailing to nonrespondents. A total of 132 usable responses were received—a 41% response rate. Respondents reflected the characteristics of the broader sample, and there appears to be no systematic response bias within particular industries. However, some industry samples were quite small, and the ability to interpret bias was limited. Executives were surveyed because they are in the most likely position to express the overall strategic philosophy of the organization. Quinn (1989) and others (Bryson, 1995; Porter, 1996) recognized the executive as instrumental in defining and building the strategic position of the organization. The perspective of others (e.g., board members and staff) are clearly of value, but are beyond the scope of this analysis, as we seek to unearth the articulation of strategy using the Miles and Snow (1978) typology and the concurrent structural features.

Measurement concerns and conflicting results in previous studies (Brown, 2000) suggest that allowing executives to explain their organization's strategic orientation might further enlighten understanding of nonprofit strategy. Nine exemplar organizations that most typify prospector and defender strategies were selected to highlight differences, if they exist, between these two strategic styles. The organizations were selected based upon their strength of association with the defender and prospector orientation. Four defender organizations were chosen because of a high rating on the Defender Scale as well as a low rating on the Prospector Scale. The five exemplar prospectors were those organizations that exhibited the most prospector-type responses. They scored high on the Prospector Scale, lower on the Defender Scale, and self-identified as prospectors. In this way, these organizations do not represent the typical organizations but, rather, exemplars of each strategic orientation. These organizations were "ideal and exceptional" for highlighting the differences between defenders and prospectors (Kvale, 1996). See Table 3 in the analysis section for a brief profile of these organizations.

Interviews were conducted with executives as moderately structured (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992) interactions with nine preestablished ques-

tions with freedom to probe each area further. For this interview, the terms *strategy* and *structure* were vague but central to this study. To create shared meaning, *structure* was not used but, instead, the constituent components of structure (e.g., board and committees) were always named specifically. To frame the meaning of strategy, each interview began with a verbal briefing (Kvale, 1996). This involved reviewing four statements that reflected the strategic orientations of prospector, analyzer, defender, and reactor (see the appendix) and discussing how these statements did and did not fit the executive director's perception of the organization's strategy. This developed a common language and understanding of the organization's (i.e., executives) strategic orientation (Fontana & Frey, 2000). The interview continued with a series of open-ended questions regarding strategic orientation and the association, if any, to committee and board structure.

MEASUREMENT

Governance structure. Governance structure was measured through board committee existence and composition. Respondents were asked whether each of nine typical board committees (and a 10th "other" category) exist in the organization. If those committees existed, respondents specified who participated on those committees by selecting up to five categories of organizational stakeholders (i.e., staff, board member, client, community member, and other). This measures the diffusion element of structure. Three computations were used in the analysis: total number of committees present, the average number of stakeholder participants per committee, and a composite that summed the total number of committees and stakeholder groups. This third measure is obviously highly correlated to number of committees ($r = .86$, $p < .001$) and the average number of members ($r = .76$, $p < .001$), but it can be used to explore differences between organizations on a combined measure of structure and diffusion.

Strategy. Two techniques allowed respondents to self-type their organizations according to the Miles and Snow (1978) typology. First, a scale assessed the extent to which organizations reported characteristics of a prospector and a defender. Prospector and defender styles were the focus of these questions because of the distinctive character of both styles. Questions were based on the work of Doty et al. (1993) and drawn from their technical report. According to this report, prospectors would score higher on the Prospector Scale and lower on the Defender Scale. Conversely, defenders would score just the opposite, whereas analyzers should score high or moderately high on both and reactors should score lower on both scales. Questions were modified and added to reflect the nature of nonprofit organizations. This resulted in 12 questions: a Defender Scale with 7 questions (alpha = .85) and a Prospector Scale with 5 questions (alpha = .76).

The second technique asked respondents to rank on a Likert-type, 5-item scale (1 = *not similar* to 5 = *very similar*) how similar their organization was to

short descriptions of the four strategic styles of prospector, defender, analyzer, and reactor (see the appendix for actual descriptions). This question was also adapted from Doty et al. (1993). Respondents were allowed to mark more than one description as highly similar to their organization. This second measure was used to provide convergent validity on judgments of strategic type. For instance, there was a negative correlation between the defender profile and the prospector profile ($r = -.40$, $p < .001$). Similarly, there was a positive correlation between the Prospector Scale and the prospector profile description ($r = .50$, $p < .001$). Surprisingly, there was a weak, positive correlation between the prospector profile and the Defender Scale ($r = .27$, $p < .01$).

A hierarchical cluster analysis using the furthest neighbor method was used to group respondents according to responses on the 16 items described above. A cluster analysis provides a viable mechanism to easily group respondents and is recognized by Zahra and Pearce (1990) as one of several possible strategies to create groups for classification. However, research has been inconsistent to the extent that all four types appear in every industry. Consequently, analysis was done for a variety of potential grouping patterns (i.e., 2 to 6 groups). Ideal types are inherently difficult to identify, and consequently, the labels were applied consistent with the predominate tendency exhibited within and between the groups. The internal consistency within clustered groups was considered by calculating mean and standard deviation scores across ideal descriptions and strategy scales for each potential configuration group (see Table 1). The standard deviation within groups was compared to variance across the total sample. A consistent pattern was readily apparent that resulted in three stable groups accounting for 96% of the respondents ($n = 127$). The remaining five organizations were rather idiosyncratic in their response patterns. Reduction of grouping options (i.e., 3, 4, 5) forced these respondents into two of the other groups, save two holdouts. Consequently, four groups appeared as the most internally consistent and identifiable.

Labels were assigned by comparing mean scores across groups on the different strategy scales. The first group, containing 67 organizations, was labeled as defenders. They exhibited the highest score on the Defender Scale ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.60$) and self-identified themselves as defenders ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.25$). The second group containing 45 organizations was labeled as prospectors; they scored highest on the Prospector Scale ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.44$) and self-identified as prospectors ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.68$). The third group was labeled as analyzers with moderate scores on both the Defender ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 0.54$) and Prospector Scales ($M = 3.45$, $SD = 0.40$), and among the four groups, this cluster scored highest on the analyzer description ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.92$). The final group containing only two members was classified as reactors. They scored significantly lower on all strategic measures. The remaining analysis was conducted on these four grouping patterns.

Organizational performance. Respondents were asked to rank their level of success across seven questions that related to organizational performance. The questions addressed issues of perceived outcome performance, goal

Table 1. Clustering Respondents by Strategic Orientation

		Strategic Orientation				
Variable	*Total* N = *132* M (SD)	*Defender* n = *67* M (SD)	*Prospector* n = *45* M (SD)	*Analyzers* n = *18* M (SD)	*Reactors* n = *2* M (SD)	F *Value* df = *3,128*
Defender Scale	4.09 (0.69)	4.11 (0.60)	4.45 (0.42)	3.32 (0.54)	1.93 (0.51)	29.99***
Prospector Scale	3.80 (0.75)	3.56 (0.69)	4.39 (0.44)	3.45 (0.40)	1.70 (0.14)	31.06***
Prospector	3.29 (1.32)	2.60 (1.17)	4.38 (0.68)	3.39 (1.09)	1.00 (0.00)	31.42***
Defender	2.98 (1.32)	3.72 (1.25)	2.02 (0.84)	2.83 (0.79)	1.00 (0.00)	25.24***
Analyzer	2.85 (1.22)	2.96 (1.32)	2.52 (1.09)	3.39 (0.92)	2.00 (1.41)	2.85*
Reactor	1.96 (1.10)	2.00 (1.13)	1.78 (1.04)	2.39 (1.09)	1.00 (0.00)	1.90

*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

attainment, quality of services, and growth. Responses were indicated on a 5-point scale with 5 being a high level of success and 1 being a low level of success. The alpha coefficient for the seven items was .79. To assess the validity of these judgments, mean outcome scores were compared across organizations that operated at a net financial loss, surplus, or balance (revenue equal to expenses) during the last fiscal year. An analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant difference between these scores, $F = 6.99$, $df = 2$, $p < .01$, and that organizations with a surplus reported the highest level of performance ($n = 73$, $M = 4.48$). Those with balanced financials reported the next highest level of performance ($n = 27$, $M = 4.25$), and those that operated at a net financial loss indicated the lowest level of performance ($n = 26$, $M = 4.10$). Although the limitations of self-report judgments cannot be fully overcome, the association with financial performance provides a degree of convergent validity.

FINDINGS

Hypothesis 1 proposed a relationship between strategy and committee structure. Specifically, Hypothesis 1 states organizations that employ prospector-type strategies will possess a broader structure (pattern and diffusion) than defenders. An analysis of variance revealed that there was a significant difference in the number of committees an organization uses and the average number of constituents on those committees across strategic styles (see Table 2). Prospector organizations have more committees ($M = 7.0$, $SD = 1.98$) and on average more constituents per committee ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.61$) than defenders ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 2.57$; $M = 1.93$, $SD = 0.64$, respectively). This analysis demonstrated support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2 stated that organizations that operate with prospector, defender, or analyzer styles will perform better than reactors. There was a significant difference on self-reported outcome performance across strategic ori-

Table 2. Mean Scores for Selected Variables Across Strategic Orientations

		Strategic Orientation				
	Total	*Defender*	*Prospector*	*Analyzers*	*Reactors*	
	N = *132*	n = *67*	n = *45*	n = *18*	n = *2*	F *Value*
Variable	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*	M *(SD)*	df = *3,128*
Number of committees	5.96 (2.47)	5.74 (2.57)	7.00 (1.98)	4.67 (2.09)	1.50 (0.71)	7.62***
Member groups per committee	2.03 (0.64)	1.93 (0.64)	2.25 (0.61)	1.87 (0.56)	1.75 (1.06)	2.78*
Committees & member groups	12.80 (7.38)	11.98 (7.45)	15.93 (6.73)	9.00 (5.62)	3.00 (2.83)	6.45***
Outcome Scale	4.34 (0.49)	4.33 (0.51)	4.56 (0.37)	3.88 (0.51)	4.06 (0.32)	10.48***

*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

entations, $F = 10.48$, $df = 3,128$, $p < .001$. Both prospector ($M = 4.56$, $SD = 0.37$) and defender ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.51$) organizations reported, on average, higher levels of performance than reactors ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.32$) and analyzer organizations ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 0.51$). This analysis partially supported Hypothesis 2 (see Table 2).

EXPLORING STRATEGY AND STRUCTURE IN EXEMPLAR ORGANIZATIONS

Interview transcripts were analyzed using a thematic analysis (Kvale, 1996). Through this method, meanings are condensed into statements and then related to the larger research questions. This method preserves the individuality of the answers per organization yet allows the flexibility to interrelate the answers to the concepts of strategy and structure. Although this lacks strict uniformity, the flexibility of analysis is useful when attempting to synthesize potentially different uses of varied structures. Table 3 provides a brief description of the nine organizations that were included in the in-depth interviews. Five prospector organizations were selected to accentuate any differences that might exist between them and four defender organizations. Fictitious names were created for each organization to maintain confidentiality and facilitate discussion.

The results of this analysis are described in three steps. First, the discussion about the four strategic types (i.e., prospectors, analyzers, defenders, and reactors) and how the organization's strategic orientation does and does not fit those descriptions is presented. Responses provide useful insight into the validity of the Miles and Snow (1978) typology for nonprofits. Second is an analysis of the organizations' enactment of their perceived environment. One of the distinctions between prospectors and defenders is how they perceive and respond to environmental opportunities and constraints. Defenders and

Table 3. Brief Description of Exemplar Organizations

Prospector-Type Organizations	
Food Bank	Self-described "strategy board" with a small number of permanent committees and extensive use of ad hoc committees. Maintains stable programs and quickly responds to community need through collaborative and noncompetitive relationships.
Arts Center	Altered the structure of the board to align with three major divisions. This facilitated decentralized decision making by division heads who used the associated committees to support and grow their division.
Hunger Awareness Organization	Board represents the partnering nature of the organization with subcommittees that come and go as needed to support extensive relationships that often required custom responses from the organization.
Adult Day Center	Traditional board structure that keeps executives in line. Willing to brainstorm ideas to develop creative opportunities for primary customers by collaborating broadly with various organizations in the community.
Prevention Services	A founder's board that is moving to more functional committees with consent agendas. Lagging structure reflects an attempt to shift culture to a broader vision of prevention.
Defender-Type Organizations	
Cancer Support	Founder-led organization with a stable, consistent board and no real committees. All-volunteer organization seeks to continue stable, focused services.
Child Care Network	Focused and clear mission guides board in fairly traditional functions. Board does not do a lot with directing programming. Executive and board work to ensure consistency and stability.
Crisis Hotline	Board works to stabilize and expand organizational infrastructure to ensure continued provision of existing service.
Domestic Violence Shelter	Active board that partners with the organization to accomplish objectives. Works to maintain quality in times of growth and expand resources. For example, initiated organizational self-assessment.

prospectors expressed clear differences about their role in the community, opportunities for collaboration, and how they use their mission statements to frame environmental opportunities. Finally, governance structures and processes were analyzed. The varied use of innovation and board structures provided insight into understanding nonprofit strategy.

SELF-DESCRIPTION OF STRATEGY

Overall, executive directors did describe their organizations in a manner consistent with the earlier survey results. Defender organizations were concerned with stability and consistency of services, whereas prospectors tended to monitor broader environmental trends and consistently identified initiatives to expand service delivery opportunities. However, the executive directors did not accept the descriptions completely. In talking through the

descriptions, executive directors would take exception with one or two of the statements.

The prospectors ranked themselves highest on the prospector description. However, these organizations did show signs of stability and niche development. Specifically, multiple executive directors expressed disagreement with the last sentence referring to maintaining quality and superiority:

> I have an argument with your last sentence, "Given it's innovation orientation does not try to maintain . . ." That's absolutely not true, it isn't enough just to be innovative but [also] to be superior, excellent in what we do. (Prevention Services)

All four defender organizations did see their strategic orientation as emphasizing efficiency and remaining in their own niche. Three of the four defender organizations, however, did take issue with the notion of a lack of innovation. As stated by the Crisis Hotline Director, "I think that we do attempt to work in a specific niche really focusing on teen services, and the thing that we do that is unique is we utilize teens in the delivery of the services." Participants described their emphasis on innovation as highly contained within a limited range. The executive director of the Domestic Violence Shelter described her reaction as follows:

> The one [description] that is more like us is working within a niche, but why I didn't really feel comfortable with that one, is because it talks about that we really didn't see ourselves as being at the forefront of service innovations where I see [our organization] as an innovator in a narrow field.

Overall, the defenders and prospectors described themselves as having a strategic orientation that was reflected in the Miles and Snow (1978) categories, but the descriptions needed minor adjustments. For defenders, the description should focus on niche but allow for innovation within that niche to improve delivery, procedures, and so forth. This is perhaps less of a change for the Miles and Snow typology and more of a reflection that even defenders are looking for improvement and work to maintain stability within a perceived narrower environment. It also potentially reflects a weakness with the measurement strategy, which insufficiently defined different types of innovation. The change for prospectors should reflect a balance between mission focus and entrepreneurial initiatives of the organizations and how the mission is conceptualized to allow for an expanded perception of their environment.

In summary, executives were able to recognize their organizations within one of the four organizational types suggested by Miles and Snow (1978) by taking into account the modifications suggested above. The next section presents an analysis of the executives' comments related to environmental opportunities and challenges. Distinctions between defenders and prospectors were

seen in how the executives described their organization's role in the community, in how they sought collaborative arrangements, and how they used their mission statements to frame environmental opportunities.

ENACTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

One of the distinctions between prospectors and defenders is how they describe and respond to their perceived environment. Defenders talked about the importance of consistency. The emphasis for defenders is on solidarity and reliability. As stated by the executive of Child Care Network, "I think we're stable, we're solid, people count on us to be there." One organization noted a substantial change of focus in the 1970s but none since then. All four did emphasize that they have grown substantially over time through fundraising and general expansion but have remained consistent in what they do as an organization. Conversely, prospectors expressed a keen awareness of their environment that extended beyond their particular service area. They tended to recognize competitors not as just similar service organizations but anything that drew attention away from their issue. For example, the Arts Center stated, "We are in a competitive environment. The competition is not necessarily just other arts groups . . . it's time, you know. . . . We compete for people's time." Prospectors scan the environment broadly looking for threats and opportunities.

This difference was further exemplified when discussing collaboration. Prospectors tended to look for partnerships in a wide variety of places. For example, the Adult Day Center talked about collaborations with schools, youth centers, and city and health care organizations all predominately outside of their direct service area. In an attempt to innovate and expand their services, they monitored and collaborated with various organizations. As stated by the director, "I truly believe that, if I am in the community, I'm a part of the community." Prospectors sought extensive collaborative relationships that expanded their capabilities but also potentially required customized response by the organization. It demonstrates a wider conception of their environment—a willingness to investigate potential partnerships and seek broader solutions to problems confronted by the organization. This was in contrast to the defender organizations that rarely spoke of collaboration, but when they did, they tended to insist on a more direct connection to their perceived service area.

Differences were also revealed in how prospectors and defenders talked about their mission statements. Prospectors tended to view their mission statement as a starting point for innovation that required constant rethinking. Some looked to add new programs and expand in multiple ways. Others wanted to develop fresh approaches to the same problem (such as hunger). Defenders tended to view the mission statement as the boundary of services to be provided. One prospector (Prevention Services), for example, was struggling with the transition to a broader conception of their mission. This is how the director stated it:

> I asked them [board members], "What's your mission? Is your mission to provide services in the school? That's the total mission? What is your mission?" And, of course, their *mission is much more global* [italics added] than that. It is to reduce substance abuse and improve the mental health and well being of children and families. . . . Your mission doesn't change.

This attempt to think broadly about the mission is in contrast to the more narrow focus expressed by the defender organizations. For example, consider this discussion with the director of the Childcare Network organization:

> Once in a while, people [board members] will come up with ideas, and we'll have to backtrack and say, "No, we don't do that. You know, if you want to look at us changing our mission, we could look at that." But I think they usually come to the resolution that it's better to stay that way. So far it's been really successful for us to stay the way we are, and the people that we have on staff are really childcare people.

Part of what drove Prevention Services to think more broadly was the threat of losing a major contract with the school. Hence, their refined service niche was in threat, and the executive had to say, "We are more than just services to schools. We provide prevention services to everyone in the community, which includes families, and we may need to go where they are" (e.g., community centers). Similarly, the director of the Childcare Network said, "We are successful, our service niche is secure, and we should not change."

PROCEDURAL AND STRUCTURAL RESPONSES

Given the distinctive conceptions of the environment expressed by defenders and prospectors, we analyzed the use of innovation and board governance structures. Almost all the organizations talked about innovation. A careful analysis, however, revealed clear distinctions between what they innovated and who innovated. Consider this discussion with the executive director of the Domestic Violence Shelter (a defender) who stated, "We are pretty focused . . . within that niche, but we want to be an innovator, a leader, a challenger of the system."

This sounds very similar to a prospector, but some key differences exist. When asked about the types of innovations implemented, the interviewee listed evaluation systems, procedures, and policies. The emphasis was on how to "operationalize that concept into specific procedures, specific policies, specific approaches that we can make it concrete so that line staff know how to do it." This is a classic description of defender-style innovation. In addition, defenders indicated few board-driven initiatives. Instead, innovations (for the three who indicated any type of innovation) primarily emerged from staff. This is not surprising, because the focus of defenders is to maintain a particular focus.

For prospectors, innovation was communicated as having purpose and direction. In this sense, nonprofit organizations may differ from some prospector organizations in the for-profit world. It is conceivable that a nonprofit would be willing to go out and simply do good, including any good it can find, and compete with any current provider to take their market share; however, such a model is unlikely. For most nonprofit organizations, this differentiation in the nature of entrepreneurial spirit is commonly understood. It is recognized that social needs tend to outstrip any organization's capabilities, and as a result, many nonprofits seek collaborations that allow for innovation without infringing on another's service area. Although certain service recipients might be conceptualized as more desirable (e.g., easier to serve), an organization's mission influences strategic choices that are only partially directed by market demands. As stated by the executive director of the Food Bank, "It's essential for us to practice the very best of business principles that would apply to us as a nonprofit organization without losing the heart of what we do." Here is another example of how innovation was expressed by one of the prospector organizations:

> We certainly like to be in the forefront of innovation and like to "think out of the box," because I think, especially with hunger, it's very easy to get apathetic. . . . So we really need to continue to be innovative in the way that we explain the problem and let people know what's going on. (Hunger Awareness)

The distinction between prospectors and defenders was further revealed in what their boards do, who participated, and how committees were used. Overall, defenders maintained stable and generally smaller boards and committees, whereas the prospectors had more variety in structure and utilization of structure. In some prospector organizations, the structural fit to strategic orientation was evident, whereas in others, the structure seemed to lag behind the strategic changes in the organization.

For defenders, some boards focused on maintaining a supervisory role—overseeing and verifying new services and expansion of services to new regions. The Childcare Network expressed these sentiments very clearly:

> The board doesn't do a whole lot in terms of deciding what programs we operate in, coming up with ideas for new programs, [the] more I'll go to them and say, "This is what we're going to be doing." You know, we've just started this new program. We're going to be applying for funding, and they usually say, "Fine." They just want to know what we're doing, but they're not usually the innovators of new programs.

Others maintained a defender stance with high involvement of the board, but the board focused on efficiency or internal operations of the organization. For example, the Domestic Violence Shelter implemented an evaluation system,

"which interestingly enough was actually . . . driven by the board." In either case, the board did reflect a smaller size, fewer external constituencies, and a lack of market prospecting.

Structure in prospector organizations was slightly more complex. Three of the organizations developed boards with committees that reflected their organizational strategy. They tended to have fluctuating committee structures that fit well with their prospector strategic orientation. Two organizations exhibited lagging structural patterns with the executive pulling the board along. Prospectors with governance structures that reflected their strategy tended to be more inclusive and flexible. Typically this was instituted with ad hoc committees or subcommittees. In addition, these boards were encouraged to provide programmatic innovation.

Two examples of governance structures that supported the prospector orientation illustrate the point. The Food Bank has developed a fairly consistent board, but despite a stable board and set of core committees, the organization has a revolving set of ad hoc committees. The director stated,

> The board has a small number of permanent committees, and then it has ad hoc committees for projects and short-term kinds of stuff when we have some particular need, perhaps relative to facilities, board performance committee, an ad hoc board committee, which includes also advisors from out in the community. We have an advisory council bring their skills into this or even outside volunteers into this ad hoc committee, get that job done, disband the committee.

The willingness to create a large set of committees and then eliminate them illuminates functionality for a diverse, prospecting style. Additionally, bringing in community members for a broader community perspective is also reflective of the prospector strategy. It informs the organization of opportunities that otherwise might be overlooked, because they are willing to look beyond their specific service niche.

The second example reflects the willingness and desire to have these committees involved in creating innovative programming. The Arts Center changed the board and committees from a standard set of committees to a new configuration that reflected the program divisions of the organization. The change developed out of a frustration that the standard committees were not responsive to the organization's divisions. Each part of the organization has the flexibility to do new things, and thus, the new committees "were more in line with trying to work with the [division] directors . . . on some of their overall decision making and trying to achieve their goals, and both board members and nonboard members could sit on this." This structural change facilitated innovation by fostering a dynamic interchange of ideas from a variety of stakeholders thereby decentralizing decision making to division directors and volunteers. As stated by the executive director,

> It's not that they [division directors] ask for a vote to say, "Yeah, we [the board] approve of your plan," but [division] directors take ideas to them [the board committee], and vice versa, the board and/or committee members will take ideas to the directors.

The last two prospectors did not have boards and committees that reflected their prospector strategy. Interestingly, the Adult Day Center and Prevention Services have shifted into being prospectors with the current executive director. Both talk about the board as a conservative (defender) element that must be "brought along" for approval of the prospector strategy. Both indicated the boards were content with the status quo, wondering, "Why do you want to change anything?" (Prevention Services). The directors were the forces of change, which was more easily translated to the staff. As a result, the boards were not seen as innovation driven: "I'm not going to be, like paint a rosy picture that's it's the board that's created. It's coming from management. It's coming from staff up, and it's filtering in" (Adult Day Center). The board/executive director relationship can be strained, and both directors expressed difficulty in getting the board to adjust to a new form of strategy.

Overall, the defenders did have a structure that reflected their strategy more clearly than prospectors. This makes sense, because the prospectors' creation and elimination of ad hoc committees as well as the restructuring of the board and committees require intentional change. Defenders would have little incentive to undergo radical revision, because the defender strategy focuses on maintaining a strong presence in a niche. This is not to say that change in structure would never be needed for a defender; rather, the nature of defending would require something like an environmental pressure to necessitate structural change.

Prospectors utilize a variety of structures. In some organizations, the structure does reflect the strategic orientation of the organization. In others, the structure is at odds with strategy. The structure lags behind the change in strategy. The difficulty for those directors is to persuade the board to agree to change (not unique to prospectors) without a committee (Arts Center), subcommittee (Hunger Awareness), or ad hoc committee (Food Bank) structure to investigate, support, and recommend change from within the governance structure. Although the Adult Center and Prevention Services indicate some appreciation for the checks and balances offered by their defender governance, we contend that those same types of double-checks and rethinking could emerge along with the policy recommendations that an ad hoc committee or other form of congruent structure would produce.

CONCLUSION

This study supports and extends previous literature on the strategy structure relationship. It demonstrated that strategically different nonprofit orga-

nizations (prospectors and defenders) exhibited predictable structural patterns. Organizations classified as prospectors tended to emphasize innovative programs and encouraged staff experimentation. Those organizations also had broader committee structures and on average tended to include more than two constituent groups per committee (e.g., board members, staff members, *and* community representatives). Defender organizations used fewer prospecting strategies, emphasized efficiency, and focused on maintaining well-defined services. On average, defenders had fewer committees and fewer members per committee. These categorical groupings were not without some contradictions. For instance, prospectors scored high on the Defender Scale thereby suggesting that, in addition to seeking new services, they felt compelled to secure their base, although these individuals did not conceptualize themselves as analyzers. Those organizations that clustered as analyzers appeared to be less strategic than either prospectors or defenders, and this is not how analyzers are typically conceptualized. In addition, this study supports that prospectors and defenders reported effective performance and consistently better performance than reactors (Miles & Snow, 1978; Wernet, 1995). Additional research is necessary to substantiate this finding because of the low number of reactor organizations in the sample and the subjective measure of performance that was used.

The most significant contribution of this study is to link strategic orientation to board-level structures. Prospectors seek expansive and inclusive boards that consistently involve nonboard members into board-level committees. Numerous questions remain about what exactly those committees do and how influential different participants are, but questions about the role of the board in facilitating the objectives of the organization are partially explained by this analysis. Some organizations actively seek to structure their governance committees to facilitate strategic philosophies of the organization. Executives readily explained how they had worked to link strategy to board processes and structures. Those that had achieved some alignment seemed more pleased with their governing boards than those who recognized lagging structural patterns. Each organization must adapt their structures to their unique circumstance but should consider how governance structures are enabling and/or preventing implementation of the desired strategy.

This study also identifies how mission statements remain constant in all discussions of nonprofit strategy. However, its use is quite different for those organizations that express prospector philosophies and those that are more defender oriented. Is the mission a basis for multiple opportunities, or is it a box to define limitations of the organization's service area? If social needs go on and on, many nonprofits prefer to see limitations in their mission. They use it as a device to ensure consistency and stability of services. Different perceptions of organizational mission statements indicate that mission statements are not deterministic but are instead interpreted through a frame of understanding that includes strategic orientation. The influence of strategic orientation on interpreting mission may offer some explanation regarding conflicting

views of organizational purposes. Presumably, two people of differing strategic orientations may look at the same mission statement as providing very different directions for the organization. Recognizing this can help managers in considering how they use the mission statement to secure the base or expand into new areas. Realizing that language about the mission frames many discussions about the future direction of an organization, managers and board members should take the time to understand their strategic orientation overall and within the various components of the organization and how that orientation can provide some overarching guidance and sense of direction to the mix of daily activities.

There were some concerns related to the applicability of the Miles and Snow (1978) typology to nonprofits. For instance, the connection between product or service output and financial well-being does not necessarily apply to nonprofit organizations. Moore (2000) discussed that nonprofits must manage markets both upstream (donors and legitimacy) and downstream (clients and services). Strategy in only one direction (toward services and customers) does not fully capture the complexity of nonprofit management. For example, donor and constituent management is inherently an analyzer task. Organizations nurture and secure a base of support (e.g., annual campaigns) while seeking innovation and new funders (e.g., foundation grants). This brings to question, how prevalent are pure prospectors in nonprofit human-service organizations? Can nonprofit organizations be exploratory and entrepreneurial without securing a base of services or support?

In addition, for many nonprofits, the concept of competition is quickly rejected because their service market far outstrips organizational and, in many instances, social capabilities. That was certainly the case for most of the organizations that were the focus of our in-depth analysis. Given this reality, it is not surprising that many organizations feel that their service niche is secure (i.e., the poor will always be with us). As a result, prospector organizations often perceived collaboration as the desired mechanism to expand and innovate services. They sought these connections to remain sensitive to changes in the environment and realized their limitations to be purely entrepreneurial in providing services.

These findings raise more research questions, which need to be explored to understand the structural and strategic advantages for nonprofit organizations. Future research needs an analysis of various types of structures that fall within each strategic orientation such as an analysis of how staff, volunteers, donors, and other stakeholders are used in the organization. Perhaps organizations that do not have a governance structure that reflects strategy compensate through other elements. Additionally, research should examine what happens within the structure. Who are the people on each committee, and what is their level of knowledge (Miles et al., 1997; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000)? Informal networks of decision making are not visible within formal structure patterns (Kogut, 2000) and can be unearthed through a more detailed investigation.

Finally, this analysis was from the perspective of the executive director and was relatively context free. Multiple internal (e.g., age, life stage) and external (e.g., funding constraints) factors influence strategic choices. Further research could seek to understand how organizational context informs these choices. This could be accomplished though research that is focused within an industry classification or market. This would allow a more refined understanding of strategy by controlling some of the potential influences experienced by nonprofit managers. Investigating organizations with similar market services might reveal different strategic perspectives and structural alignment (or lack thereof), which is reflected in organizational indicators such as diversity of services provided. Although the ability to effectively rule out all significant factors (e.g., executive turnover) becomes overwhelming, a slightly more focused study might reveal subtleties not identified in this study. Nevertheless, a strength of this study comes from the heterogeneity of the sample and speaks well of the theory to predict structural patterns.

In addition, other individuals within the organization may provide different insights into how strategy is enacted either through or despite the formal structures in place. Additional leadership voices could validate or contradict proclamations by senior executives and might, as well, inform contradictions in structural pattern and performance. Despite these limitations, understanding how executives described their strategic orientation was useful. Identifying structural differences between defenders and prospectors offered insight into how structures reflected organizational strategy and suggest the importance of actively attending to governance patterns that reinforce the strategic direction of the organization.

Appendix

The following descriptions characterize four different, but equally effective, strategies that organizations can use to position themselves in providing services. Please read all four before responding.

To what extent do each of the four descriptions characterize the strategy of your organization?

a. This organization does not attempt to maintain a specific service niche or be a leader in service innovation. When other organizations provide similar services in the same area, we prefer to conserve resources and eliminate offerings rather than attempt to defend our service area. Although the organization tries to avoid the risks associated with new programs or services, it occasionally develops new offerings to keep up with other providers and funders. Generally, the organization responds to environmental pressures rather than elaborating and implementing a single strategic thrust.

High degree			Low degree	
5	4	3	2	1

b. This organization attempts to locate and maintain a secure niche in a relatively stable service area. The organization tends to offer a more limited range of products or services, but those it does offer are unique in quality and type. The organization is not at the forefront in service innovations; it tends to ignore changes that have no direct influence on current operations but concentrates instead on doing the best job possible in its service area.

High degree Low degree
5 4 3 2 1

c. This organization typically operates within a broad service area to meet the needs of a variety of customers. In addition, our service areas undergo periodic redefinition. The organization values innovation and regularly experiments with new service strategies. The organization responds rapidly to early signs concerning new opportunities for funding and program development. Given its innovative orientation, this organization does not try to maintain superiority in all the areas it serves.

High degree Low degree
5 4 3 2 1

d. This organization attempts to maintain a stable, limited set of services while at the same time moving quickly to follow a carefully selected set of promising developments in our service area. The organization is seldom an innovator of services or strategies but regularly adopts new services or strategies from others and modifies those strategies to meet customer needs.

High degree Low degree
5 4 3 2 1

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