

DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE FRENCH FEDERATION OF RUGBY (FFR) AND THE NATIONAL RUGBY LEAGUE (NRL): COMPETITION, COOPERATION OR COOPETITION?

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Abstract

Introduction

In 1995, the International Board pushed up the French Rugby sports in the professional sphere while giving up officially the amateurism status of rugby players. This move induced a deep change : formal boundaries between the sector of elite, professional, commercial rugby and the sector of amateur players, casual and non-commercial rugby. Since then, two entities manage jointly the whole French rugby sector : the French federation of Rugby on the first hand and the National League of Rugby on the other hand.

The role of the first association is focused on the management of the amateur sector whereas the role of the second one is more about the professional rugby. However as pointed out by Nier and Chantelat (2007), "if the law envisages the autonomy of the league in the marketing of the rights of exploitation of the competitions, the league remains dependant on the federation and, indirectly on the Ministry of Sport". Thus the professionalisation has impacted the structure of the network while influencing the nature of the members and their relationships as well. At the same time new economical issues has appeared. The media become more important and more powerful. The mediatization phenomenon challenged the members of the network in terms of value creation but also in terms of value appropriation.

Theoretical background

Traditional approaches to strategic management consider competition and cooperation as mutually exclusive and opposed. But, the succession of cooperative and competitive strategies creates many dysfunctions. The introduction of the neologism 'coopetition', a contraction of cooperation and competition, opens a new research field

to analyze relationships simultaneously cooperative and competitive. Brandenburger and Nalebuff (1996) define the coopetition as "a bringing together of interests between complementors when cooperation and competition occur simultaneously".

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the interest of using a strategic and dialectical framework such as coopetition to understand the emerging relationships between the FFR and the NRL.

In a strategic network, co-opetitive strategies are not only emerging ones. A third actor called "broker" also can induce them. The network broker can play different roles: architect, lead operator and caretaker (Snow et al. 1992).

This framework is particularly interesting to question the role of the French government within the network and more precisely in the dyadic relationship between both associations.

Research questions

First, what are the strategies developed by the LNR and the FFR? Second, Are they competitors, partners or simultaneously both?

Since the French Government defines the missions of the associations, the question of its influence on the relationships between both associations can be asked. Does the French government have an architectural capability in the definition of their strategies? Does it act like a broker in the network? If so, in which terms i.e. architect, lead operator, caretaker or all of them?

Methodology

In order to provide relevant insights to our questions, the research is carried out starting from a qualitative method of a standard case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). The level of analysis is the social network of the French rugby sector focusing on the dyad of FFR and LNR.

The data collection is still processing. Until now, we have analyzed secondary Data. A second step of our study consisting in conducting semi-structured interviews with the directors of both associations is already planned. Such an approach will allow us to compare the perceptions of both institutions and to reveal possible asymmetries. Data gathered from the interviews were analyzed using NVivo Software.

Main findings and contributions

The first results confirm the emergence of strategies simultaneously competitive and cooperative within the sector of french rugby. These strategies appear to respond to an important environmental change : the professionalization of the sector.

The coopetitive framework help us to understand the dimensions of each relationship. The LNR and the FFR become partners to schedule the games in the season and they also lend players between each other. At the same time, they remain direct competitors to organize major sports events.

They cooperate in order to create value but they compete to gain more value (financial incentives because of the mediatization). Both associations try to get advantages from two dynamics and benefit from its.

This result encourages considering sport associations in

the same way as firms. They define proactive strategies in order to improve their economical performance.

Further research could investigate the same phenomenon at a micro level in clubs. We assume that the duality observed at a macro level between professional and amateur rugby would also appear in the governance structure of clubs.

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