
STRATEGISING PRACTICES IN THE PRIVATISATION OF SAUDI SPORT CLUBS

Abstract ID: EASM-2015-326/R1 - (861)

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Date submitted: 2015-03-28

Date accepted: 2015-05-26

Type: Scientific

Keywords: STRATEGY, STRATEGISING, SPORT, CLUBS, PRIVATISATION, SAUDI

Category: 12: Sport Policy

Synopsis:

INTRODUCTION

For more than a decade, the Saudi government has been actively promoting a strategy for the privatisation of Saudi sport clubs. This privatisation initiative is part of ongoing wider government policies (what is known as the consecutive five-year national development plans), aimed at stimulating the Saudi economy through the privatisation of various economic sectors. Other 'declared' underlying objectives of the privatisation plan include reducing direct government spending, diversifying sources of income and increasing efficiency through greater involvement of the private sector in the field of sport. However, despite multi-millions of investments and years of political rhetoric, the progress made to-date has been very limited.

Abstract:

AIM

This study, and through an holistic, embedded multiple-case study research design, aims to address the relationship between strategy and strategising as two distinctive sides of the policy process concerned with all phases of policy and strategy making and implementation. In particular, the study aims to understand how strategising practices are manifested in the strategizing work around the privatisation of Saudi sport clubs. A related research objective is to understand and evaluate the various strategising actors' roles at macro, meso and micro levels in shaping and implementing the privatisation strategy. The deployment of the strategy-as-practice research agenda is relatively recent and rather limited in the field of sport management research, combined with a notable lack of 'empirical' studies. Hence, on a theoretical level, this study makes a modest, yet significant, contribution towards addressing this existing gap. On a practical level, this study promises to generate original recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl (2007) suggests that from a strategy-as-practice perspective, “strategy is conceptualized as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity” (p7). Strategizing regards strategy work as a pattern in a stream of goal-directed activity over time, consisting of various goal-directed activities. The main premise of the strategising research agenda is towards better understanding of how organizational strategy is formulated through a focus on daily processes, interactions and practices across different organizational levels. This approach can therefore contribute towards a better understanding of how daily behavior within the organization can be responsible for creating strategic choices, consequences and outcomes (see, for example, Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003). Accordingly, the main theoretical framework adopted in this research is based on the three key domains of strategising (the 3Ps), as first proposed by Whittington (2006), namely practitioners, practices and praxis. Practitioners are the actors who do the work of strategy formulation. Practices as the tools through which strategising is carried out, while praxis is the flow of strategising activity(ies) (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). The 3P are closely interconnected whereby praxis forms practitioners and successful practices are carried out by influential practitioners, all in the context of intra-organizational praxis being marked by extra-organizational practices (Whittington, 2006). Strategizing ultimately occurs at the nexus between these three domains.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an holistic, embedded multiple-case study research design (see, for example, Yin, 2009), comprising a sample of 18 organizations (or strategising actors). The sampling method used a combination of stratified and random sampling techniques. Primary data were collected using mainly semi-structured interviews, augmented by a rich set of secondary data. Data analysis used a combination of analytical techniques content analysis, thematic analysis and cross-case synthesis. Additionally, these methodological choices, combined with the replication feature of the multiple-case study design, allowed the generation of key common strategising themes across the three levels of strategy praxis and across the sample cases.

RESULTS

The main findings from this study are reported along two broad levels, firstly in terms of the three domains of strategizing and secondly with regards to the key patterns of strategizing.

Consistent with the predictions of theoretical framework, overall research findings provide strong evidence for the key role played by the three domains of strategizing and their strong interconnectedness within the overall dynamics of the strategising activity system (Whittington, 2006). Many observed strategizing practices included elements of inertia, persistence, and high levels of inferred structural legitimacy, but also a noticeable lack of continuity and stability. Additionally, the study reveals more serious deficiencies in the overall strategizing work in terms of the sense of ambiguity and uncertainty around the sport club privatisation policy vision and objectives. The second level of findings documents the strong prevalence and dominance of the procedural type of strategizing. . Procedural strategising is mainly enacted through the widespread use of long-established formal administrative practices that came to typify centralized policymaking in Saudi Arabia. This finding is not surprising

and is indeed entirely consistent with existing evidence (see, for example, Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006) when considering the high levels of 'embeddedness' and 'persistence' of this type of strategizing within the wider functioning and organisational culture of these entities. Hence, various aspects and implications of this prevailing situation could be seen as a the major obstacle in the face of any attempt to successfully introduce new ways of organizing and strategizing within the Saudi sport sector in general, and the sport club privatisation policy in particular.

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