

(SP) CORPORATE GOVERNANCE IN NATIONAL GOVERNING BODIES

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Context

A key feature of modern sport is the level of change which has occurred. Kew (1997) notes that there are two interdependent levels (a) changes to sports processes and (b) changes to sports world i.e. the organizational context of sports practice. While the former refers to changes of the actual instances of playing or participating in sports, the latter refers to changes among the network of people who have a function in 'producing' sports processes. Sports associations to-day are complex bureaucratic organizations as evidenced in the division of functions and delegated power to oversee the disparate elements of the organizations' work. Down through the years many sports bodies/associations embraced the ideology of amateurism and resisted full blown professionalism for as long as possible. Cashmore (1991) asserts that the term amateur is now almost a pejorative word meaning 'lack of refinement'. Sports processes have become more rationalized and increasingly draw on many technical and scientific core and support services. When governance is discussed in the business context, reference is made to the separation of ownership and control and the main theories used to inform practice are principal-agent theory and stakeholder theory (Wearing, 2005). Sports bodies are mainly trusts – for them, ownership is difficult to define. According to Hums and MacLean (2003) sport governance is the exercise of power and authority in sport organizations, including policy making, to determine organizational mission, membership, eligibility and regulatory power, with the organization's appropriate local, national or international scope. Forster (2006) maintains that sport is now an important part of global culture and an industry worth billions of dollars, where accusations of corruption are common. In the business world, various codes and regulations have been introduced to improve corporate governance (Wearing, 2005). There are 62 national governing bodies [NGBs] in Ireland (www.irishsportscouncil.ie) for some, jurisdiction is the island of Ireland (Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU), Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA)) while for others (Football Association of Ireland (FAI); Tennis Ireland) it is the 26 counties only (Republic of Ireland).

Methods

This research project reviews governance practice within three national sports governing bodies in Ireland: the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), the Football Association of Ireland (FAI) and the Irish Rugby Football Union (IRFU). More specifically the *research objectives* are to (i) compare and contrast the mission and governance structure of each NGB, (ii) examine the extent to which roles and responsibilities of various parties/committees are delineated within the organizations under review and (iii) ascertain the main governance changes which have been occurred in these bodies during the past six years. Both secondary and primary data were used in the study. Secondary source material included journals, annual reports, web pages, newspaper articles and a recently completed study by Irish Sports Council. Primary data were collected by way of semi structured interviews, and purposive sampling was used to select the 12 interviewees. Interviewees were drawn from the three NGBs; the Irish Sports Council; the Department of Arts, Culture and Sport; the Federation of Irish Sport and club members affiliated to each body. Interviews took place in March and April 2006, at a convenient location for each participant, and were

of one hour duration. The questions were designed to gain insights on strategic issues for each body, and the mechanisms in place to assist them achieve their mission or goals.

Results

Each association has a very different history, origin, culture and goals. The GAA could be considered a Global Sports Organisations (GSO) as defined by Forester (2006), while the other two are affiliates of International Bodies [or GSOs]. The organizational structure of the GAA has changed little over the years - Annual Congress continues to be the main decision making forum [www.gaa.ie]. A management team covers the Association's day to day activities/operations. The structure of the FAI [www.fai.ie] has been reviewed by Genesis Consulting (post World Cup 2002) and several changes were made to make its operation more efficient. The IRFU [www.irfu.ie] has a board and committee structure with individual roles clearly defined. The specific mission of each National Governing body [NGB] in promoting mass participation in its sport/s and the creation of excellence in sport are communicated via the web pages. Each of the selected NGBs have distinct governance styles due mainly to its origin, history and culture. In recent years, the GAA has adopted various governance specifications (audit committee, presentation of annual accounts), while the FAI has generally made changes when required to by Government. All interviewees accepted the fact that the criteria set out by the Irish Sports Council re Core and Challenge Funding have contributed to better governance arrangements within the organizations. Better communication exists between board members and members of the each sport's body, and the board agrees and documents policies. However, our research findings point to some gaps, such as the lack of clear delineation of governance roles; board performance is not regularly assessed; there is no effective board and individual director development program in place.

Discussion

Originally amateur, these sports organizations [GAA; FAI; IRFU] have been unable to avoid embracing commerce, and governance issues have intensified due to this. The availability of funds from various sources (including government) has led to many management/governance changes. Ryan (2002) sets out five principles of good governance, while there is evidence of some of these being applied by our case participants; there is still much to be achieved.

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