

Session: **Research for management and marketing IV.**

Abstract nr: **EASM-0164**

Using structural analysis to identify barriers to functioning: An agenda of strategic issues for NGBs

A. Karg¹, P. Turner¹, D. Shilbury¹

¹*Deakin University, School of Management and Marketing, Melbourne, Australia*

adam.karg@deakin.edu.au

Using Structural Analysis to Identify Barriers to Functioning: An Agenda of Strategic Issues for NGBs

Background and Objectives

Among the performance objectives of National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs) is an 'organisational' dimension relating to the efficient operation of federal sport systems measured by NGB functioning and reactivity (Bayle & Madella, 2002). In order to achieve organisational functioning and other broader performance objectives, modern NGBs are challenged to design structures that integrate administrative, sporting and marketing/communications functions. Further, an ability to identify and react to strategic issues within the organisation and their wider environment are paramount in order to manage and satisfy multiple constituents and outcomes.

The use of a configurational research approach permits a theoretical framework under which complex organisations such as NGBs and their functioning can be assessed. When investigating structure using a configurational approach, structural variables are defined as differentiation and integration (Dow, 1988; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). The current research seeks to explore these variables and their relationship within NGBs. In addition, the research seeks to identify strategic issues which arise from the interplay of differentiation and integration. Strategic issues are defined as events, trends and developments that influence an organisations ability to achieve a desired future or organisational objective (Nutt & Backoff, 1993). Such issues are not strategically planned for or scripted by organisations, but rather emerge as operational tensions (Nutt & Backoff, 1993) that require reactive attention or resources. Identifying such issues, and taking measures to control them can guide effective strategy and aid the development of functional NGBs. Overall, the research seeks to investigate three research questions:

- *What sources of differentiation and integration exist in NGBs?*
- *What strategic and structural issues emerge as barriers to functional NGBs?*
- *What integration mechanisms can be used to overcome such barriers to NGB functioning?*

Methods

Data was collected from three detailed case studies of Australian NGBs. Participant NGBs were drawn from a sample (n=12) defined as Corporate Sport NGBs (Shilbury, Deane, & Kellett, 2006). These 12 represented the largest and most structurally complex of the 56 NGBs meeting the criteria to be funded and supported by the Australian Sports Commission. Documentation such as organisational charts, strategic plans and annual reports were first collected and analysed to provide background for each case. A total of 35 in depth interviews were then conducted with presidents, board members, CEOs, general managers and operational staff within each NGB. These were complemented with a series of short ranking tools to measure differentiation and integration which were developed and adapted from prior studies (Ketokivi, Schroeder, & Turkulainen, 2006; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). In-depth exploration of the interplay of differentiation and integration led to the discovery of strategic issues and integration mechanisms used to manage each based on interview data collected from the NGBs.

Results

In line with past research, sources of differentiation between NSO functions were found to be structural, cognitive and behavioural (Sinha & Van de Ven, 2005). These included differentiation in levels of formal structure, goal orientation, interpersonal style and operating environments of each subunit (in line with Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967), as well as in geographic positioning and perceptions of role and responsibilities within the organisation. The need for integration was seen to be present at three levels; cross functional and hierarchical levels within the NGB and lastly, a need for integration across the federal system, most prominently between the NGB and its various regional or state bodies.

Given sources of difference and the need for integration, various strategic issues were identified, primarily at cross functional and intra system levels. These issues were either currently present in the organisation or were previously active issues which had impacted functioning. Issues were classified broadly as strategy and governance, structural (e.g., change, role clarity), conflict (e.g., goal, interpersonal, resources), information and knowledge issues and finally, culture and people issues. In each case, respondents gave examples of the origin (source of differentiation) of the strategic issue and where possible, examples of integration mechanisms that had been successful in removing or subduing the issue or tension in the organisation. Some examples of integration mechanisms included formal and informal communications, strategic planning, value development and the creating of cross functional teams. NGBs showed examples of such integration mechanisms that, when implemented, demonstrated positive effects on the functioning of the organisation.

Conclusion/Application to practice

Results suggest differentiation and integration are both present within NGBs and provide effective variables for identifying and responding to strategic issues. The findings add to the

performance framework identified by Bayle and Robinson (2007) which presented facilitators and inhibitors of NGB performance. Practically, the identification of issues, either current or potentially inhibiting, can aid the adaptation of strategy and structural design of NGBs. Globally, NGBs are relatively homogenous in their structures and operations given their links to international sport federations and comparable roles in promoting a sport within national boundaries. As such, the issues identified here are likely to be transferable to other federal systems, or other types of organisations. The identification of such issues in a transferable contexts seeks to encourage a more proactive approach to organisational design and related strategic issues for sport organisations.