
WHAT SERVICE INNOVATION TYPES ARE IMPLEMENTED BY SPORT FEDERATIONS?

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Abstract

Aim

Organisations within the non-profit sport sector face competitive challenges to attract members and resources (Winand et al., 2013). They need to mobilize funds, individuals' knowledge and skills to innovate. Yet, little is known on innovation in non-profit sport organisations (NPSOs), their attitude towards newness and the type of innovations they adopt. The present study aims to identify innovation types within NPSOs, such as sport federations, and to highlight preferences in knowledge creation/appropriation according to organisational characteristics. The following research questions are addressed: What types of innovation do sport federations implement? Are there innovation types favoured by specific sport federations? Do sport federations' staff favour newness, and does it impact innovativeness?

Background

Innovation refers to the adoption of an idea or behaviour that is new for the organisation (Crossan & Apaydin, 2010). Its process requires the creation or appropriation of new knowledge leading to new products, services or processes (Damanpour, 1991). At early stage, attitude of staff towards newness is crucial to knowledge creation/appropriation (Damanpour & Aravind, 2012) and might guide innovation type preferences.

However, knowledge creation/appropriation in non-profits is constrained by external and internal control mechanisms which limit the range of innovations they are able to develop (Damanpour 1996; Hull & Lio, 2006). The type of innovation refers to the aspect of the organisation to which the innovation is most relevant. Since the core activity of NPSOs is oriented to the delivery of sport services, they would develop service innovations as opposed to product innovations (Newell & Swan, 1995; Winand et al., 2013). Sport federations would hence introduce new

services for their members and staff, though no study has yet showed what types they choose to implement.

Method

An online survey was developed in 2010 and sent to all 144 regional sport federations in Belgium in order to evaluate the number and type of service innovations implemented. Key strategic individuals were asked to describe services their sport federation had implemented for the first time during the last four years, according to a list of general categories of services. Furthermore, their attitude towards newness was measured by 4 items on a 5pt Likert scale, reduced to one dimension according to PCA and Cronbach's alpha ($>.7$).

Content analysis of the description of service innovations was used to filtered and allocate them into categories. Paired sample t-test has been used to determine significant difference between categories. ANOVA was used to show significant differences in innovation types between groups of size (small: <2390 members; medium: >2390 and <10740 members; large: >10740 members), of sports (Olympic vs non-Olympic), and of staff attitudes towards newness (indifferent: 3.5 or fewer vs positive: over 3.5). One hundred and one respondents answer the survey (70% response rate) showing reliable representation in term of size and sports.

Results

Results showed that sport federations have implemented an average of 4.53 (SD=3.32) service innovations in the last four years preceding the survey. On average sport federations have implemented a significant higher number of non-sport innovations (M=1.78; SE=0.17) than sport innovations (M=2.75; SE=0.21). Sport innovations include new sport activities for all affiliated members, leisure sport activities for youth people, for adults and competitive sport events for participants. Non-sport innovations include training programmes for officials, elite sport services, online services, sport promotion, club management support, and sport material services.

Results showed that sport federations surveyed have, on average, a positive attitude towards newness (M=3.81; SD=0.6). Two-thirds of them have average scores over 3.5. These sport federations implement significantly ($p<.05$) more service innovations in general ($ip=5.03\pm 3.27$). Small size sport federations implement significantly less sport club management support innovations ($ms=0.06\pm 0.25$) and less new online services ($os=0.32\pm 0.54$). Olympic sport federations implement significantly higher number of training programmes ($to=0.97\pm 0.92$) and elite sport services ($eo=1.11 \pm 1.18$) than non-Olympic ($tno=0.59\pm 0.84$; $eno=0.33\pm 0.69$), but significantly lower number of new sport activities for all ($so=0.31 \pm 0.68$ vs $sno=0.71\pm 1.03$).

Implications

Sport federations show high level of attitude towards newness which

favours knowledge creation and/or appropriation, and innovativeness. Innovation types and preferences have been identified for sport federations. They develop more non-sport service innovations. Further research could investigate why these preferences occurs. As suggested by Hull and Lio (2006), sport federations might be constrained by external and internal factors in applying new knowledge. Further study could investigate what are these constraints and what influence attitude towards newness. Results have implications for managers as it highlights the importance of attitude towards newness in applying new knowledge and the different types of innovation in NPSOs.

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