
INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBER PERFORMANCE EXAMINED THROUGH THE SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION

Governance research, within sport or other sectors, has predominantly used the board of directors as the unit-of-analysis with a focus on identifying different factors that contribute to board performance as well as a link between board performance and organisational performance. This has led to the development of a model that highlights the relationships between individual factors, board factors, organisational factors, environmental factors, board performance and organisational performance (Hoye & Doherty, 2011). One area that has not received as much attention in the growing governance literature is that of the individual board member. Research on the individual board member has tended to focus on establishing the influence of a single factor (e.g., board cohesion, individual tenure, or role ambiguity) on individual board member performance. This study, therefore, shifts the unit of analysis from the board as a whole to the individual board member, and particularly, individual board member performance. It specifically aims to investigate the role of social identification as a contributing factor to individual board member performance. Through better understanding of factors contributing to individual board member performance, this research may provide insight into board composition and the role of “insiders” and “outsiders” on the board.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The social identity approach provides an appropriate lens for the analysis of individual board member performance as it describes the interaction between an individual (e.g., the individual board member) and the group (e.g., the whole board). This influence occurs through an individual's social identity. A social identity is defined as an individual's “knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). However, social identification can occur at multiple levels. Board members of a sport organisation may

identify as being a board member, a member of the organisation, as well as an individual or personal identity. These levels are not exclusive and can be nested within each other, meaning that board members may identify at each level.

Furthermore, the social identity approach suggests that group membership contributes to an individual's self-esteem. Therefore, individuals seek to increase the standing of the group in order to boost their self-esteem (Haslam, 2004). This aspect of the social identity approach potentially provides a theoretical explanation for variation in individual board member performance. That is, individual board members who value their membership as board member more than others (i.e., a higher social identification) would be more motivated to contribute to the board and would, therefore, have an increased level of individual performance.

Using the social identity approach, research into job performance has identified that individual performance can also occur at different levels and within different roles. Furthermore, individual performance consists of three distinct behaviours; adaptive, task-related, and proactive (Griffin, Neal, & Parker, 2007). These different behaviours are identified as being particularly relevant in uncertain and interdependent work systems. Board members also frequently work in uncertain and interdependent systems making the approach to job performance theoretically appropriate for analysing board member performance.

Therefore, the research question for this study is: "What is the nature of the relationship between social identification and individual board member performance?"

METHODOLOGY

This research will adopt a quantitative approach to the research issues through a survey of board members of state sport organisations during June and July of 2014. Participants will be asked to fill in an online questionnaire to capture information regarding individual board member performance using a measure adopted from Griffin and colleagues (2007); social identification using a measure adopted from Ashforth and Mael (1989) and other commonly captured measures such as demographic information, tenure, and board role.

Analysis will include regression and ANOVAs using individual board member performance as the dependent variable.

RESULTS/DISCUSSION

Results of this study are not available at the time of submission but preliminary results are expected to be available at the time of presentation.

Previous research has examined how social identification affects performance in employees but this has not yet moved to the nonprofit governance research. The increasing attention to sport governance in both practice and research justifies an inquiry into the contributing factors of individual board member performance. Particularly, there is a growing interest in whether board members should be "outsiders" or "insiders". The examination of the relationship between social identification and

individual board member performance can provide insight into this consideration for board composition; an important concept in both theory and practice.

References

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