
YOU NEED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR MISSION IS TO KNOW WHEN YOUR MISSION DRIFTS

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Abstract

AIM OF ABSTRACT, BACKGROUND & RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Mission drift is a well-acknowledged threat for nonprofit organizations, and in particular for sports organizations that are characterized by a plurality of objectives (Jones, 2007). Sports organizations, or formal collaborations between various sports organizations, often comprise simultaneously both nonprofit and for-profit objectives. In such cases, a balance needs to be achieved between various objectives, which include for example the creation of social impact among fans and sport-playing youngsters, but also the generation of profit and prestige by a successful professional team in order to satisfy commercial investors and sponsors. Otherwise, a mission drift might loom for the nonprofit elements of an organization's mission.

From a general research perspective, it remains unclear how profit goals and nonprofit (social) objectives can relate to each other within the common plurality of sports organizations. Social goals can be considered supportive for the profit goals, as for example a social interaction for fans might be a necessary condition for them to show up at games, which is in turn highly (financially) valued by club sponsors; Or profit goals, such as creating financial capacity, returns-on-investment and stable cash-flows, might be a supporting factors to finance youth training programs, maintain a fan club house, etc.

Against this background, our study seeks to analyze how the goals defined by two partners in a nonprofit and for-profit sports collaboration are considered in relation to each other, and eventually might be influenced by the opinion of a group of potential supporters.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As nonprofit goals (1) can be very distinct from each other, (2) are often highly subjective, and (3) are hard to quantify, it is inherently difficult to detect mission drift for such type of objectives. However, nonprofit organizations need legitimacy within their environment, meaning that

they need continuous approval from important stakeholder groups, such as fans, players, donors and social beneficiaries. Each of these stakeholders has their own preferences, interests and mindsets, which can substantially impede a straightforward and standardized approach. Hence, it is not only important how nonprofits define their goals themselves, but also what is externally perceived to be the goals they (should) pursue.

In addition, collaborations between nonprofit and for-profit sports teams are often observed, as it allows the creation of complementary advantages and larger scale impact (AL-Tabbaa, Leach, & March, 2013; Rowley, 1997); and/or mutual access to a broader range of resources (Austin, 2000). However, the combination and evolution of multiple stakeholder preferences, interests and mindsets form the base for the inherent social negotiation regarding the integration of goals. When in this negotiation nonprofit goals are abandoned or made inferior to profit goals, mission drift might occur.

Combining the literature on the inherent complex nature of nonprofit goals and the balancing process with profit goals in the plurality context of many sports organizations, sets the literature background to investigate and evaluate potential mission drift. In particular, we focus on how conditions and factors for this potential mission drift are shaped and influenced, through the collaboration process between different parties and their primary stakeholders.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis is based on two newly founded sports organizations. The first is a nonprofit organization that aims at creating sport opportunities for socially disadvantaged children. The second is a for-profit organization that seeks to establish a new high-league professional basketball team. Between the two organizations, a close connection exists and they share important resources (sports location, accommodation, sport material, etc.) As their collaboration is at its infancy, the evolvement of nonprofit and for-profit goals and their mutual dependency can be thoroughly analyzed.

In the first step of our analysis, we investigate the postulation of goals and how they are considered to relate to each other. For this we do in-depth interviews with executives of the organizations involved.

Subsequently, we do a quantitative assessment on the external perception of these goals, by asking students to indicate what they perceive as goals for the nonprofit club and for the for-profit professional team. In addition, through a mapping protocol students are asked to indicate the extent that they consider goal being supporting for other goals, or being final objectives. As we start from a real scenario, the executives of both sports organizations will in the third step be confronted with the results, and will be interviewed again about how such external perceptions strengthens their original evaluation, or changes their opinions. Argumentations recorded in these interviews are analyzed to get insight in the factors that cause or justify mission drift and/or

adjustment.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS

Our exploratory study gives insight in how sports organizations develop a balanced set of for-profit and nonprofit goals. In particular we look at how both types of goals are considered to be supportive for each other, and whether opinions on this from external stakeholders can lead to changes in executives' opinions, and why.

References

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