A comparison of gender in rugby national governing bodies using „intra-design archetypes"

Authors: Ben Corbett (1), Prof. James Skinner (1), A/Prof. Danny O'Brien (2), Professor Chris Auld (3)

Institutions:

1. Loughborough University London, UK

2. Bond University, Australia

3. International College of Management, Sydney, Australia

E-mail: b.d.corbett@lboro.ac.uk

Aim of paper

During the bid process to gain inclusion, the International Olympic Committee demanded rugby's international federation, World Rugby, to increase attention and resources for women. In fact, World Rugby came very close in 2005 (shortlisted) to inclusion in the 2012 Olympic Games, but failed due to the lack of a women's game, and, to a lesser extent, the argument that only a handful of countries are genuinely competitive. In response, World Rugby introduced the women's Rugby World Cup Sevens in 2009. Eighty nations competed in the qualifying rounds to earn one of the 16 spots at the event. Seven months later, the IOC announced that Sevens Rugby would have its Olympic debut in 2016. The impact on women's rugby has been immense, with World Rugby touting rugby as the fastest growing women's sport in the world during 2012-2016. The World Rugby Development Department stated 25% of rugby participants were female in 2016 compared to 7% in 2009.

With the growth of women's rugby and its presence in the Olympic Games, pressure increased for rugby national governing bodies to change the way it values and structures women programs, as rugby was always known as a 'gentleman's game.' Many nations did not field a women's national team, operate domestic women's competitions, or hire many (or any) women in leadership positions. The 2009 Olympic inclusion announcement instigated changes, and this research examined those changes during the period of 2012 to 2015 coinciding with the beginning of the 2016 Olympic cycle. The research set forth to answer the following research question: how did rugby NGBs re-organise in response to Olympic pressure for gender equity, and what differences still exist within those NGBs?

Theoretical background

This study extends the work of the Canadian national sport organisation research conducted from 1992 to 2004 by Greenwood, Kikulis, Slack, Hinings, Amis, and Thibault. The basis for examining design archetypes began with the Kikulis, Slack, and Hinings (1992) paper titled Institutionally Specific Design Archetypes: A Framework for Understanding Change in National Sport Organizations. Kikulis et.al described that an organisation constitutes three types of values (i.e. criteria of effectiveness, domain, and orientation) and three types of structures (i.e. specialisation, standardisation, and centralisation), and the combination of these form the organisation's design archetype. Their research often categorised and examined the overarching design archetype of NSOs, but never dissected and discussed each NSO in terms of 'intra-design archetypes,' a concept derived during the analysis of rugby NGBs.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

This research followed Pettigrew (1990) case study method which relies on planned opportunism for case selection. Four case studies were selected: Australia, United States, South Africa, and Kenya. Australia and the United States were chosen for their strong men's and women's Sevens rugby national teams and the perceived domestic pressures that national Olympic committees might be placing on gender equality. In contrast, South Africa and Kenya have strong men's Sevens rugby programs and significantly weaker women's programs, and there were signals that those NGBs were under relatively little pressure for gender equality. Data collected and analysed with the assistance of NVivo, consisted of archive records (302 items), organisational documents (88), survey responses from NGB staff (53), NGB leaders' public addresses (12), and semi-structured interviews with NGB staff (45).

Results, discussion and implications

Similar to findings of Thibault and Babiak (2005), organisational changes in rugby NGBs were driven by an athlete-centred approach, particularly evidenced with the development of new high performance regimes for women in three of the case studies (United States, Australia, South Africa). Examination of the data resulted in the identification of some similarities and differences in the way the case study rugby NGBs valued and structured the men's and women's rugby programs. In general, the design archetypes were quite similar on the macro level, and it was the deeper investigation of intra-design archetypes on the micro level that identified distinctions and enabled comparison within and across cases. The implications are two-fold. First, the concept of intra-design archetyping can assist future academics and practitioners in identifying, comparing, and discussing differences or similarities among divisions within focal organisations. For example, gender was examined in this paper, however other divisions in the NGBs were also uncovered in the process of intra-design archetyping, including mass participation versus elite performance and the different codes of Sevens and Fifteen-aside rugby. Second, more empirical evidence of the specific areas (values and structures) of gender inequality is needed in academic and mainstream outlets to help close the gender gap. Intra-design archetyping may provide a framework to examine and expose those specific areas.

References

- Amis, J., Slack, T., & Hinings, C.R. (2004). "Strategic change and the role of interests, power and organizational capacity." Journal of Sport Management 18(2): 158-198.

- Greenwood, R. & Hinings, C. R. (1993). "Understanding strategic change: The contribution of archetypes." Academy of Management Journal 36(5): 1052-1081.

- Kikulis, L. M., Slack, T., & Hinings, B. (1992). Institutionally Specific Design Archetypes: A Framework for Understanding Change in National Sport Organizations. International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 27(4), 343-368.

- Pettigrew, A. M. (1990). Longitudinal field research on change: theory and practice. Organization science, 1(3), 267-292.

- Thibault, L. and K. Babiak (2005). "Organizational Changes in Canada's Sport System: Toward an Athlete-Centred Approach 1." European Sport Management Quartely 5(2): 105-132.