A Situational and Cultural Analysis on Australian Sports Commission Based on a Module Framework of Sport Organization Theory

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Abstract: To critically analyse the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and its environment, sport organization theory must apply. The purpose of this report is to briefly present a situational and cultural analysis on the ASC based on a six-modules framework of Sport Organization Theory. According predominantly to Slack and Parent (2007)'s work on sport organization theory, learning the importance of sport unique features and critical thinking skills, this paper identifies the goals, effectiveness, and structure of the ASC and how does it resolve competing goals and achieve competitive advantages under given scarce resources. Strategy of two dimensions including corporate level strategy and business level strategy of the ASC are studied. In the context of sport organizations and change, the characteristics of coercive, normative and mimetic pressures are illustrated with examples drawn from the ASC. Types of organizational changes and how they influence by the paradox of change are discussed. Besides, Power, politics and conflict in the organization are explained and influence these factors may have on decision making and organizational culture has also been demonstrated. The essence of this paper concentrates on proposing three possible recommendations to the ASC in guiding it toward achieving its goals in the next three years.

1. Introduction

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) is Australia's primary national sports administration and advisory agency, being recognized as a world leader in the development of elite sport and all sport participation (The ASC, n.d.). On behalf of the Australian Government, the ASC is the focal point for the development and operation of the Australian sports system, delivery of sport programs and services, and providing leadership, coordination and support for the sport sector (Shilbury & Kellett, 2011, the ASC, n.d.). Although the ASC has reached such success so far, everything it achieved was obtained through continuous exploration and updating. It is known that the Sydney Olympics and Paralympics have provided the ASC a unique chance to reach even higher levels of sporting achievement and further enhancement of the sport systems. However, the sport industry, in which the ASC is existing is rather unique and complex, which determines the ASC needs to constantly update and improve to adapt to the changing environment. The organizational structure of the ASC has undergone several changes, and its strategy and plans have also been rewritten several times.

Although numbers of research in recent years have expanded the scope of the sport organization theory, there is little research take the ASC as a research object. The aim of this paper is to research the ASC through various information sources on its achievements and inadequacies, and apply critical thinking and analysis to existing observations. A six-modules framework underpins the structure of this paper, provides a theoretical basis for presenting practical recommendations to the ASC. The six modules include: Organizational Theory and Research; Goals, Effectiveness and Structure; Strategy and Strategic Alliances; Sport Organizations and Change; Power, politics and conflict in sport; and Organizational Culture and Decision Making: The leadership imperative. It is expected through this paper to critically reflect on the ASC, further presents three feasible

recommendations with supplementary rationales and implications to the ASC board of directors and senior management, who have the potential capability to guide the ASC toward its goals.

2. Analysis and Discussions

2.1 Module 1 - Organizational Theory and Research

Since this paper is mainly based on the critical analysis of a sport organization, it is necessary that the first step is to clarify the nature of the case organization. According to the definition cited in Slack and Parent (2007)'s book, a sport organization is defined as 'a social entity involved in the sport industry; it is goal-directed, with a consciously structured activity system and a relative deniable boundary'. It is clearly described that a sport organization is existing for a purpose and is necessary to have a relatively identifiable boundary that differs its members from nonmembers. The author believes her case organization the ASC is a sport organization because it satisfies all the key elements in the definition. The ASC is a social entity consists groups of people working together towards a purpose of 'strengthen Australian sport – to enable more people to play sport and Australian athletes to succeed on the world stage (the ASC, n.d.)'. Especially it involves in sport industry by offering consciously structured financial assistance and services to sport programs (Shilbury & Kellett, 2011). Employers hired by the ASC identified themselves as managers and directors, which allow them to distinguish from other public sectors in sport.

The way of thinking that supports this paper is critical thinking. In sport management, as well as a bunch of other disciplines, critical thinking is recognized as a central competency of university graduates (Sotiriadou & Hill, 2015). Critical thinking is defined as a reflective practical activity focuses on deciding on what to believe or do (Vieira, Tenreiro-Vieira & Martins, 2011). Through following the correct process of it, critical thinking gives people a way to investigate different aspects of a problem and gather extending information for further research. Besides, the author uses several interdisciplinary approaches to facilitate the process of critical thinking. In light of Keestra (2016), interdisciplinary research requires an individual investor or a team of investors from two or more disciplines to work together toward an advance fundamental understanding or to solve common problems. Nite and Bernard (2017) presented that although research techniques and approaches may be vastly different, sport management scholars could utilize cross-disciplinary insights to explain complex problems in different fields. From the author's perspective, using an interdisciplinary approach allows her to see alternative view of the subject hence facilitate gathering information for critical thinking. In case of studying the ASC, research from different disciplines such as economics sociology, strategic management, political science and organization theory lead to greater creativity and insights into addressing problems.

2.2 Module 2 - Goals, Effectiveness and Structure

Generally, the goals of the ASC are divided into two parts, the first part is achieving the highest level of performance in Australia elite sport, the second part is improving the quantity and quality of community participation in sport and physical activities (The Australian Sports Commission: beyond 2000, 1999). These two goals represent core business of the ASC, and are philosophically linked but operationally separate. The significance of the goals reflects in the responsibilities of the ASC, which are identified as making sure that the cooperative national sporting system is served by an effective national sports infrastructure equipped with appropriate resources (Horton, 2015). By acting in a manner to reach the goals, the ASC identifies the needs and interests of sport stakeholders. Goals could reduce uncertainty for future movement and facilitate the ASC to align with wider sport community. In summary, the importance of the goals lying behind leading the ASC to attain the capacity to improve their efficiency and effectiveness and its overall contribution to the national sport delivery system.

However, resources are scarce; it means that the ASC must improve both the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization to resolve competing goals. Effectiveness highlights goal achievement while efficiency focuses on productivity of producing desired output (Slack & Parent,

2007). Concerning the ASC, the effectiveness is witnessed as how well it reached its goals while efficiency is viewed through how it used funding and other resources to perform. On the one hand, the author attempts to use goal attainment approach, strategic constituencies approach and systems resources approach to evaluate the effectiveness of the ASC. The author believes the ASC was effective in 2016-2017 because it has helped Australian sport reached outstanding success in 2016 Olympic Games, 2016 Paralympic Game and world champions (The ASC, 2017). The ASC has made dominant progress towards developing elite sport, which contributed a high effectiveness to the organization. According to Slack and Parent (2007), the high extent to which the strategic constituents satisfy with the organization determines relatively high effectiveness of the organization. On the other hand, because the ASC is a non-profit organization, in this situation, organizations do not operate in competitive output markets, measures such as net income and rates of return cannot provide useful indicators of measuring efficiency (Nunamaker, 1985). The author then adopts Data Envelopment Analysis (DEA) to measure the efficiency of the ASC and found that its efficiency was built on the distribution of its budgets to support its two major goals.

As a statutory corporation, the ASC's structure and governance arrangements are largely determined by its enabling statute (Freeburn, 2010). The three key divisions include the Australian Institute of Sport, Participation and Sustainable Sport, and Corporate Operations which all take part in the core business of sport delivery through direct communication with national sporting organizations and athletes. The ASC has a flat structure with a high level of horizontal differentiation and relatively wide span of control. It is also seen that the ASC has a high degree of complexity. The general work is divided into four routine departments and each department manager has a wide span of control with the managers and directors.

2.3 Module 3 - Strategy and Strategic Alliances

In terms of adopting strategies in given competitive environment, the ASC has established a clear strategic plan designed to achieve its goals. The ASC's 'corporate plan 2015-2019' lists four strategies to support its mission, both in corporate level and in business level (Shilbury, Phillips, Karg & Rowe, 2017). In corporate level, the ASC commits to reach international success and organizational excellence, which requires the ASC to complete as a whole unit and operate within numbers of industries. The ASC also has two strategies based on business level that address problems within each, which are increasing participation and developing sustainable sport. In doing so, the ASC has used population level data, market segmentation, future forecasting and some industry insights to predict demand for sport and consumption trends (Girginov, Toohey & Willem, 2015). Based on Thibault, Slack and Hinings (1993)'s analysis on the strategy of Nonprofit Sport Organizations, strategies implemented by the ASC are classified into Enhancer type because the ASC scores high on program attractiveness and have strong competitive positions of domestic sport programs.

It is evident that in the past few years, digital revolution was changing Australians' sport experiences rapidly, hence, the ASC needs to fundamentally transform sport itself by leveraging new and emerging technology to change the way it does business to continue to make life easier for consumers. It is advised that a whole-of-sport digital strategy need to be developed to improve both the physically and digitally engagement and interaction of consumers with sport. The ASC may select a platform strategy to bring together producers and consumers. Sport Cloud is the central idea of the new strategy. The Sport Cloud aims at providing an open source industry cloud platform to digitally connect the industry and offering the shared platform to enable sport organizations and sport technology pioneers and start-ups to innovate (The ASC, 2017). Platform strategy benefits organizations with external interactions, and from increasing customer value to maximizing ecosystem value (Alstyne, Parker & Choudary, 2016).

The next stage of implementing the ASC's strategy could be built on forming strategic alliances with other organizations. Differentiated from partnerships, strategic alliances are based on organizational learning, and are formed in response to an important opportunity or threat in the environment (Slack & Parent, 2007). The author lists three potential strategic allies for the ASC to

consider, they are IMG Australia; Australian Sports Technologies Network (ASTN); and International University Sport Federation (IUSF).

Before entering alliances with the above organizations, considerations should be made to make reasonable choices. On one side, considering at what level the strategic fit is between the ASC and the alliance is vital. The assets, capabilities, and resources of the potential alliance need to be different from the ASC. Because the ASC can only be benefited from compatible or complementary goods provided by the alliance. On the other side, cultural fit between the alliance and the ASC plays a significant role in sustaining and strengthening the relationship. Routines, power systems, structures, employee orientation, and custom orientation need to be taking into account. Cultures do not perform in the same way, however, conditions to compromise cultural differences are necessary for both organizations.

2.4 Module 4 - Sport Organizations and Change

It is no doubt that environment in which an organization operates influences its structure and process (Shadid, 2018). Sometimes, for the purpose of maintaining legitimacy, an organization's structure is likely to adjust to the institutional pressure imposed on it by its environment (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). In the context of the ASC, using DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) coercive, normative and mimetic pressures can explain some of the changes and strategies of the organization. Normative pressures emerge when professional and associations share education and information under same social 'norms'. For instance, the ASC needs to address issues on anti-harassment in sport guidelines and racial vilification laws through participating seminars and forums with the professions. Mimetic processes are described in situations where an organization mimics industry pioneers within an institutional environment. The ASC has led the world in sports development in recent decades, which caused its systems, and programs being copied around the world (The Australian Sports Commission: beyond 2000, 1999). Therefore, the ASC should improve and update its delivery system from time to time.

Apart from the foregoing institutional pressure that to some extent changed the ASC, some other areas of change also cause organizational change and are potentially showing as organizational structure change. Comparing the structure of the ASC in 2009 (Shilbury & Kellett, 2011) and in 2017, it is obtained that technological change, products and services change, and structures and systems changes have all influenced the ASC partly. For an example, over the past decade, technological changes such as technological advances in communication approaches and in computer data management and analysis have prompted the ASC to introduce a new division in its structure – digital information and technology. However, organizational change such as the ASC is going through can be influenced by the paradox of change in terms of its pace, sequence and linearity. Slack and Parent (2007) found in their study that the paradox of change occurs once organizations attempt to decrease uncertainty by creating a stable workplace, competitive and ever change environment compels organizations to further change to adapt and survive. It leads some changes occur radically in a relatively fast pace that may reduce the effectiveness of change (Amis, Slack & Hinings, 2004).

2.5 Module 5 - Power, politics and conflict in sport

Power and politics pervade in every sport organizations (Slack & Parent, 2007). Sources of individual power are commonly referred to French and Raven's five types of power, including reward, coercive, legitimate, expert, and referent power (Steven, 2008). The ASC has leveraged several organizational sources of power to reach designed outcomes. For instances, the ASC has the power of acquisition and controlling resources such as money and legitimacy to influence sport across the country; its sub-units and individual members can gain power when decisions are made through a vertical organizational structure. The author believes that all the power mentioned above are legitimized within the ASC because the individual power is a result of holding positions of authority or personal qualities while the organizational power is a result of a way in which the organization is designed (Slack & Parent, 2007).

Nevertheless, political activities within organizations are seen both helpful and harmful. In the

context of the ASC, subordinates are advised to increase their political power by building coalitions and network of contacts with others. AIS Winning Pathways Workshops has proved to be an effective way for sport relating organizations and institutes to share information and practical solutions in the areas of developing national sport (The ASC, 2017). By participating in the workshop, the ASC is expected to gain power from people inside or outside of the organization. In addition, the ASC can promote its power by controlling information. For example, the ASC could use participation data acquired by AusPlay Survey to better understand the participation landscape and identify strategies to grow participation in the future (The ASC, 2017).

The political landscape of the ASC is represented in its Sports Governance Principles. The ASC leverages the principles to produce organizational outcomes. It is known that as a statutory corporation, the ASC does not directly possess any power of formal supervision or direction. Instead, its power of influence appears principally derived from its role as a funding agency (Freeburn, 2010). Within the Sports Governance Principles, it is clearly stated that the board has power to exercise all the powers of the ASC, except the power that the Act or Constitution requires to be exercised in general meeting (The ASC, n.d.). The principle stipulates the organizational structure should spread a distinctive separation of power and responsibilities between the board and management. By applying the principles, the board of the ASC has monitored the performance of its operation and staff, and has established effective systems that compile with legal and regulatory obligations.

2.6 Module 6 – Organizational Culture and Decision Making: The Leadership Imperative

Decision making can be understood as a process of deciding on choices between alternatives (Slack and Parent, 2006). Usually decisions are made under different conditions such as certainty, risk and uncertainty. When the ASC decided to create a digitally connected Australian sport system countrywide, the ASC made decision under uncertainty because there are no historical data or previous experience to influence the process, and the potential outcomes are unclear. In terms of individual decision making,

In light of Eskiler, Geri, Sertbas, and Calik (2016), the concept of organizational culture is showing as beliefs, attitudes, and values that are collectively shared in an organization. These elements constitute the emotional sides of the organization and are usually manifested as unwritten rules such as a number of symbols, rituals and myths. In the context of sport, Maitland, Hills and Rhind (2015) proposed that organizational culture is framed in every sports organization to reinforce conceptions of common managerial problems, and is used to explain a range of organizational features such as coaching behavior, leadership and organizational change. The organizational culture of the ASC manifests itself from rite, symbols, legend, communications and values. For examples, the ASC has held a series of planned activities and events such as Play.Sport.Australia. to deliver its cultural expressions, Club networks, meetings, noticeboards and newsletters are used as communication approaches between ASC and its clubs.

Drawing on Peter Drucker's quote of 'culture eats strategy for breakfast', the author agrees that culture influences effectiveness and efficiency of the ASC through the process of determining the strategy and plans. According to the magazine article 'Culture > strategy' (2018), it is believed that if organizations are acting in right culture, they are more easily to adapt to context and situation, thus could be more flexible in shifting strategy and responding to market conditions and events. Some other research has also revealed that organizational culture through influencing interpretative schemes and behavior of employees takes part in shaping other components of organization and management, such as leadership style, strategy and organizational structure (Janićijević, N, 2012). In light of the author, there is no big change should be conducted in terms of the ASC's organizational culture. the ASC has demonstrated the effectiveness of its organizational culture and the importance of maintaining it with its rapid development and brilliant achievements in recent years.

3. Recommendations, Rationale and Implications

1) According to aforementioned analysis, digital revolution is constantly changing Australian sport experiences, hence, the first recommendation is considered that the ASC could leverage new and emerging technology to change the way it does business to continue to make life easier for sport consumers and hence promote both elite sport and grassroots sport development. It is advised that a three-year digital strategy could be developed by the ASC to improve engagement and interaction of sport consumers both physically and digitally. The ASC may select a platform strategy to bring together producers and clients.

Sport Cloud is the central idea of the new strategy. Sport cloud system needs to support all kinds of mobile network terminals, and to be convenient and friendly for customers to use. It should offer fair access to sport related individuals and organizations to present their ideas under the supervision of the ASC. With the initiatives of developing Sport Cloud, the strategy is promising to improve the ASC's competitive advantage by (a) transition to a digital first organization that delivers operational efficiencies and a people centric culture; (b) focusing on becoming world's best in high value areas driving international performance outcomes; (c) having a greater understanding of the performance of the sport system through deeper digital measurement and insights (The ASC, 2017). (d) transformation of the ASC's business model, raising digital revenues and increasing sport fan profiles. However, Sport Cloud could have insufficient and defects in the first place during its operation. Building the Sport Cloud system would cost a lot of money, and the maintenance and operation costs would be significant as well. But initially the Cloud is not designed for direct gaining revenue, so how to measure the effectiveness of the new system would be a problem. In addition, how to encourage sports organizations and persons to share innovative results on the platform without a plagiarism on intellectual property would be a matter of consideration.

2) In earlier analysis, the author has recommended the ASC to form a strategic alliance with IMG Australia to expand influence and further promote sport participation across the country. Suggestion is that the ASC could select IMG Australia as its media alliance starting from signing an three-year contract with a common goal of expanding media coverage and publicity.

In the context of IMG Australia, it has been stated that the company has strong media technique and capability over distributing sports and entertainment programming, and a diverse range of sponsorship marketing programs designed for sport, these all represent the company has a good strategic fit with the ASC. Additionally, IMG Australia has a strong cultural fit with the ASC due to its efforts on convening network specializes in sport training and league development, and focuses on delivering experience for both professional sport and grassroots sport participation. On one hand, forming a strategic alliance with the IMG Australia could have implications that are mutually beneficial both to the ASC and the sport industry. On a professional level, the ASC can employ this tactical alliance to gain public support for their athletes, coaches, officials and programs. This type of alliance would enable the ASC to develop its relationship with stakeholders, such as sponsors and customers, to add value to its product or service. On the other hand, entering the alliance could potentially cause problems regarding media rights and sponsorship strategy. Conflicts may occur when multiple media organizations want to report same activities or athletic achievements in different ways. How to balance the sponsorship rights and manage the performance of the respective organizations should be considered as well.

3) The third recommendation is drawn from the topic studied above on which the ASC is inevitable to confront some conflicts during its operation. It is important for the ASC to establish a conflict resolution program with a long-term plan to anticipate and manage conflict during the process of achieving overall organization strategy.

Within the program, there should be capacity and skills training, identification of types of conflicts, possible and available resolutions to conflicts, and regularly reviewing and feedback on conflicts. The capacity and skills training focuses on preparing managers and subordinates the required code of conduct and technic when conflicts manifest in the organizations. In response to different types of conflicts sourced from receiving a financial interest, personal or business relationships, and a member, official or representative of an outside organization, the program needs

to build corresponding procedures to cope with them. Meanwhile, the program should have included regularly surveys and reviews to detect behavior that may cause conflict and take precautions in advance. The possible implications based on establishing conflict resolution program are considered to have more advantages than disadvantages. It is anticipated that the ASC could increase employee job satisfaction, organizational performance and goals attainment by foreseeing manage conflicts. The appropriate conflict resolution would also contribute to maintaining harmony relationship with stakeholders as well as associates organization. However, applying this program requires managers to have more skills and capabilities to cope with disputes and adopt harsher decision-making process when necessary. This may potentially initiate contradiction between employers and managers.

4. Conclusion

Through researching and analyzing, a situational and cultural analysis of the Australian Sports Commission is presented based majorly on Slack and Parent (2007)'s work on sport organization theory. The adopting of a six-modules framework supports the author to briefly analyze various aspects of the ASC and its environment through a sport organization theory point of view.

The main findings are, the distinguishing features of sport have influenced largely on the development of the ASC's goals and structures. A high level of effectiveness and efficiency of the ASC has been evaluated according to data retrieved from its certain program performance. A high level of complexity and a machine bureaucracy is found within the ASC. In achieving competitive advantages, the ASC has designed and combined both strategies in corporate level and business level. Becoming an enhancer type of NSOs allows the ASC to promote its new programs with adequate resources but little risk. Areas of change such as technological change caused organizational change, which may appear in a paradox and consequently being influenced on the pace, sequence and linearity. Sports Governance Principles represents the power landscape of the ASC and is constantly monitoring the performance of the ASC's operation and staffs. Organizational culture of the ASC manifests itself from rite, symbols, legend, communications and values. It is argued that culture influences the effectiveness and efficiency of the ASC through the process of determining the strategy and plans.

Findings in the meantime reveals that, there are certain areas the ASC could consider to improve and develop in order to better achieving its existing goals. Since digital revolution is constantly changing Australian sport experiences, the ASC could leverage new and emerging technology to change the way it does business to continue to make life easier for sport consumers and hence promote both elite sport and grassroots sport development. While next stage of the ASC on expanding influence and promoting sport participation would facilitate by forming strategic alliances with other organizations. Last but not least, because the ASC is inevitable to confront some conflicts during its operation in the future, it is significant for the ASC to establish a conflict resolution program with a long-term plan to anticipate and manage conflict during the process of achieving overall organization strategy.

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