

## Adopting Innovative Technology in a Non-profit Sport Organization: A Case Study on Strategic Decision Making

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**Session 30: Organizational Theory  
Presentation (25-minute)**

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Strategic decisions involve a diversity of interests, have significant consequences on the organization and key stakeholders, and require substantial investment of time and capital from the organization (Hickson et al., 1986). Changing the structure of the organization, initiating capital improvements or incorporating new technology into their business operations are some examples of strategic decisions made by sport organizations.

Local non-profit sport organizations face special challenges when it comes to making strategic decisions. Due to their limited organizational capacity (Hall et al., 2003), particularly with respect to finances, many focus their energies on fundraising or developing partnerships to better deliver programs or services (Froelich, 1999; Scott, 2003). They often fail to engage in strategic decisions that affect other aspects of their operations.

The difficulties in making strategic decisions become especially acute when the decision involves the use of innovative technology. Even when there is a strong business case for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization (Child, 1984), the relatively high cost of technology projects along with uncertainty among decision makers with respect to new technology (Bagozzi et al., 1992) contribute to the difficulty in making such strategic decisions. Considering innovative ways to use technology to support the operations of the organization can also be challenging if the sport organization is resistant to change.

Often, many local non-profit sport organizations are hesitant to make strategic decisions regarding the use of innovative technology. However, there are some instances where organizations have been able to move beyond the status quo and initiate new technology projects to improve their efficiency and provide more effective services to their members. In this research, we studied one such example with the focus of understanding the factors that contributed to the organization's ability to make such a decision.

The organization studied in this research is a local non-profit adult soccer association (175 teams; 2500 players). In the fall of 2006, they began using a handheld computer system for tracking game-time information, including player rosters, scores, and penalties. Referees use the handheld computer to swipe player ID cards, which automatically activates them in their team roster. At the end of each game, the final information is logged in the handheld computer, which uses a wireless network to upload the game data to the web site, providing up-to-date game statistics. The software on the handheld computers, as well as the web site software for game statistics, were custom developed by a local technology company.

The case study involved interviews, focus groups, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews with the president and executive director of the sport organization, and key personnel from the technology company were conducted, along with a focus group of the board members of the sport organization. Individuals were asked about the impetus to adopt technology, the problems that technology would address, who was involved in the decision, and the factors and information that contributed to making the final decision. Minutes of board meetings were collected and analyzed to provide details regarding timelines and potential concerns. The interviews and focus groups were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. The data were analyzed using content analysis, coding, and theme analysis.

The primary issues within the organization that contributed to pursuing a technology-based solution for managing game data were the amount of staff time devoted to post-game data entry, addressing data entry errors, enforcing rules, and improving player access to game information. The main factor that contributed to allowing this organization to make the strategic decision regarding this technology solution was that they had an idea champion (Daft, 1992) who held a significant position within the organization. Other contributing factors included having a young and technology-savvy board, the strong financial situation of the organization, and the positive working relationship with a local technology company. One implication of this research is that local non-profit sport organizations require human and financial capacity to make a decision to adopt innovative technology in their business practices.

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A secondary situation that existed which made the decision making process easier was the prior relationship with the local technology company selected to pursue this project. Two key employees of this company were players in the soccer association. The company had previously donated the time to build an online scoreboard and statistics package for the soccer association's web site. This previous work gave the organization a preview of what was possible with technology, and provided them with a level of comfort with respect to the adoption of new technology solutions. A second implication of this research is that an existing relationship between a local sport organization and a technology company helps to alleviate uncertainties associated with new technology projects (Bagozzi et al., 1992).

In this presentation, we will discuss the problems that were present in the organization in more detail and provide an overview of the technology solution that was adopted to address these problems. We will elaborate on the factors that contributed to the board making the decision to pursue this technological solution, and will discuss the implications of this research with respect to empowering local non-profit sport organizations to make strategic decisions with respect to technology use. Although Amis et al. (2004) identified leadership and organizational capacity as key components in facilitating strategic decisions for national sport organizations, this research found these features to also be important in a local, non-profit sport organization.