

Application of the archetype theory to the Australian Rugby Union: The espousal of a new national competition

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Abstract 130**

Over the last decade, there has been a radical change in how Australian national sport organizations (NSOs) are organized and managed, yet both sport literature and practice has not gained significantly from the empirical research conducted in other fields. Although a well-established body of literature exists in relation to organizational and cultural change within Canadian and British NSOs (Kikulis, Slack & Hinings 1992; 1995; Macintosh & Whitson, 1990; O'Brien & Slack, 1999; 2004; Stevens, 2006), there is a notable gap in the number and scope of studies that consider the process and effect of change in Australian sport organizations. Sport and sport related management is unique because of its multiplicity as a discipline. As a hybrid field of study, sport organizations are grounded in the traditions of generic management, but, unique aspects specific to how NSOs are organized and managed need to be considered.

The response to organizational change has become an increasingly important managerial task and thus the study of transitions in sport organizations has become a necessary topic for academic research. As a result, this case study examined the structural changes taking place within Australian Rugby Union (ARU) as it proposed and developed a new national competition. In order for the ARU and the sport of rugby to be successful and produce long-term sustainable competitiveness, a review of the current competition structure was needed. The examination of the movement between design archetypes (i.e., Kitchen Table, Boardroom and Executive Office), or 'ideal types' (Kikulis et al., 1992), involves the concepts of change management and strategic change. Therefore, the archetype constructs and the decision by the ARU to introduce the Australian Rugby Championships (ARC; new national competition) creates the relationship between theory and practice for this research.

The ARU has evolved from an amateur sport organization with historical beginnings in 1864 to a professional sport organization in the mid-1990s. The inception of rugby union in Australia saw the athletes themselves serving as administrators, organizing teams and arranging matches for regional competition (i.e., Tier 4 competition) - the Kitchen Table archetype. However, as rugby union matured in Australia, an appointed board of directors formalized coach and athlete development, paid professional staff, commercialized the sport and arranged participation in international competitions (i.e., Tier 1 competition) - the Boardroom archetype. During the modern era, the newly formed ARU appointed its first CEO and joined the SANZAR Ltd. conglomeration to produce and participate in the Super 14 and Tri-Nations international competitions (i.e., Tier 2 competition) - the Executive Office archetype.

However, the overall international success of the Australian national rugby team has been in steady decline with the 2005 national team only winning a third of their Tier 1 competition matches against other top ranked nations. There is a similar result in the Tier 2 competition of Super 14 rugby with the 4-Australian teams only winning half their matches against the 5-South African and 5-New Zealand teams. This may be a consequence of NSOs such as New Zealand Rugby Union and South Africa Rugby Union developing and improving their national competition structures and athletes from the grassroots level to the professional level. These performance indicators establish the need for the ARU to introduce a new national competition (i.e., Tier 3 competition) and this is known as change management, adopting a new concept or behavior for the organization to produce significant modifications to its culture, structure, technology and/or product (Chelladurai & Madella, 2006).

The objective of this case study was to identify the organizational characteristics of the ARU according to the archetype designs established by Kikulis and her colleagues (1992; 1995) in their research on Canadian NSOs. In specific, this study examined the impact of the ARC as a catalyst for organizational change within the ARU. The study aimed to answer the following 3-research questions: 1) What are the historical, modern and emergent archetype designs of the ARU?; 2) Is there a need for structural change within the ARU competition framework?; and 3) What type of change has been initiated within the ARU to produce a competitively attractive and commercially viable Tier 3 competition? A mixed method approach collected data from secondary sources, interviews and a survey to document organizational change and to detail the movement of the ARU along the archetype continuum. Analysis of the secondary data and interviews involved isolating and cross-referencing the themes and ideas and establishing links to organizational theory. The participants (n=7) qualitative and quantitative responses were coded and reported in a logical order to communicate an impartial board perceptive.

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The results of the study indicate that the ARU has entered a professional era, much later than the other football codes in Australia, in regards to establishing rules and regulations, day-to-day operations, number of professional staff, decentralized decision making, commercial operations and sponsorship, and athlete development. However, the results also point to 'conflicting' archetype designs co-existing within the competition structure of the ARU and that the source of these conflicts may stem from the governance and decision making structures in place. It is clear that the Tier 1 competition aligns best with the Executive Office archetype regarding specialization, standardization and centralization while the Tier 2 and 3 competitions parallel the Boardroom archetype and the Tier 4 competition lines up with the Kitchen Table archetype. These 'conflicting' archetype designs with the ARU indicate a lack of archetype coherence.

The objective of the ARC was to provide a level of elite competition that fills the gap between the Tier 2 and 4 competitions and prepare coaches and athletes for Tier 1 competition. However, the co-existence of archetype designs within the ARU competition structure has produced archetype incoherence and this process of change has occurred as a result of sedimentation - one archetype has been layered upon another (Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood & Brown, 1996). It is important to note that the co-existing archetype designs are not competing because the objective throughout the competition structure is athlete development. However, organizations that demonstrate competitive commitments to two or more archetype designs are more likely to experience organizational instability and reduced performance (Cooper et al., 1996). This is best describe as a process where the ARU takes two steps forward and one step back, which results in the back and forth movement along the archetype continuum. For example, the implementation of the ARC was two steps forward in athlete development; however, 12-months later, the resignation of the CEO was one step backwards centralizing the decision making. Therefore, the success of the ARC relies on the aptitude of the ARU to transition the four competition tiers coherently to some form of the Executive Office archetype design.