Oceania Football Confederation: The Impact of Affiliate Disaffiliation on the Inter-organizational Dynamics of a Federated Network

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The purpose of the research was to examine the impact of member disaffiliation on the inter-organizational dynamics of a network. On January 1, 2006, the governing body of football in Australia completed their quest for a greater and more lucrative market by affiliating to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC). For this movement to occur, Australia first had to disaffiliate from the Oceania Football Confederation (OFC). In football, a Confederation is a continental specific coordinator of football activities who operate under the auspices of the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA). At a theoretical level, this is a unique context to explore the impact of disaffiliation on the inter-organizational dynamics of a network.

The research is based on a single case study approach, and involved 12 semi-structured interviews that were conducted with informants from within the OFC network, with secondary data being organizational documents and popular media sources. The informants were either the President or General Secretary of the members affiliated to the OFC. The theoretical framework of an environmental disturbance (Zakus & Skinner, 2008), such as member disaffiliation, on an involuntary mandated federation (Provan, 1983) was examined in this research. Dynamics that were explored included the impact on the legitimacy of the network, financial implications, and how the distribution of power has changed. Network power (Dickson, Arnold, & Chalip, 2005) is strongly linked to the centrality of the individual members and the political stability of the country in which they are located. Findings also suggest that full disaffiliation from a network does not occur, with the disaffiliating members maintaining strong linkages with their previous network. Findings indicate that for now, the perception is that the network is still legitimate. However, if the Confederation does not improve from both a playing and administrative perspective, it may well become illegitimate. The redistribution of power within the network has shifted strongly in favour of the two French speaking Pacific Island nations who were both previously considered minor players within the network. It is unclear if this is due to their connection with France. The key conclusion from this research is that disaffiliation provides a ‘wake-up call’ to the remaining members, and forces them to stand on their own two feet and take responsibility for their actions. Recommendations for further studies involve focusing on the post-disaffiliation actions of the member leaving the network, and whether they achieve their desired outcomes. Further, studies involving the concept of power within a network could explore the relationship between the power holders and any external connections they have.