Organizational theory/culture Thursday, May 24, 2012 4:30 PM 20-minute oral presentation (including questions) (East)

Abstract 2012-156

Colleges and universities that compete in intercollegiate athletics are experiencing major organizational changes; coaches are being hired and fired, stadia are being built, and there is a lot of movement in terms of who, where, and how athletic competition occurs. (Slack & Parent, 2006). Recently, intercollegiate athletics has experienced a unique type of change, at the associate and individual college and university level with schools changing athletic conferences and even associations. For example, the University of Nebraska recently changed from the Big 12 conference to the Big 10 conference, the University of Utah moved from the Mountain West Conference to the Pacific Athletic Conference. In addition, since 1980, more than 300 colleges and universities have changed athletic associations (i.e., NAIA to NCAA). Research focusing on organizational change within an intercollegiate athletics setting is timely due to the growing phenomenon of athletic departments moving conference and associational affiliations; the NCAA anticipates this trend to continue for the next several years (NCAA, 2011).

Organizational change has been a popular area of discussion for a number of decades. For example, Kimberley and Quinn (1984) reviewed organizational change through management style and the transition process of change. Billings, Milburn, and Schaalman (1980) examined decision maker’s perception to crisis prior to the possibility of organizational change. Meyer (1982) and Laughlin (1991) analyzed environmental disturbances that resulted in organizational change. In addition, recent literature specific to intercollegiate athletics used an organizational change perspective to understand a college’s reclassification efforts (NCAA Division II to NCAA Division I) by recognizing the opportunities and threats of stakeholder perceptions (i.e., positives and negatives) for schools reclassifying divisions (Dwyer et al., 2010). While these examples are similar to each other in that they focus on the elements during the transition process and the perceptions of organization change, minimal research has focused on the outcomes stemming from an organization making a change, especially those organizations changing associations.

One specific aspect of the organizational change literature is an identification of organizational archetypes. Hinings and Greenwood (1988) describe the term archetype as, “the beliefs and values that shape prevailing conceptions of what an organization should be doing, of how it should be doing it and how it should be judged, combined with structures and processes that serve to implement and reinforce those ideas,” (p. 295). Specifically related to organizational change and archetypes are organizational tracks, which play a significant role in the change process and this research project. Organizational tracks help map and justify the frequency and nature of change as well as the absence of change between archetypes (Hinings & Greenwood, 1988a; Slack, 1997). Hinings and Greenwood (1988) explain the theory behind organizational tracks by stating, “Organizations can be sorted in terms of whether and how they change. The notion of tracks is an attempt to provide a systematic basis for the process of change. An archetype is a composition of structures and systems given coherence by an underpinning set of ideas, values and beliefs. Tracks are about the extent to which organizations remain over time within the assumptions and parameters of a given archetype or move between archetypes,” (p. 26). Based on these definitions, Hinings and Greenwood suggested that organizations experience one of four tracks when experiencing an organizational change (i.e., Track A – Inertia, Track B – Aborted excursion, Track C – Reorientation, and Track D – Unresolved Excursion). Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to contribute to the organizational change literature by understanding the outcomes of intercollegiate athletic departments changing from one association to another association by determining an athletic department’s archetype and organizational track based on their move from the NAIA to the NCAA.

Several researchers have used archetype and organizational track theory related to the sporting context. Kikulis, Slack and Hinings (1992, 1995) and Amis, Slack and Hinings (2004) used archetypes and organizational tracks to explain how 35 Canadian National Sport Organizations (NSO) progressed over a period of years from a volunteer-archetype NSOs to a professional-archetype NSOs. The premise of these studies suggests that organizations within the same sport context (such as NSOs) experience similar archetype characteristics. As for organizational tracks
results showed that NSOs that finished an organizational change possessed “leadership with the technical and behavioral capacity for change” (p. 158). Those NSOs that failed to change archetypes were deficient in “transformational leadership” (p. 158). Similarly, Cousens (1997) used archetypes to understand the changing industry of the minor league baseball system within the United States. Cousens assessed the impact on five minor league sport franchises based on the environmental shift in the business and revenue generation structure of professional sport franchises during a 10-year period from the late 1980s to early 1990s. The two archetypes developed by Cousens comprised of, (1) the sport-centered archetype and (2) the business-centered archetype. The results from this study showed that of the five minor league baseball franchises that participated, one franchise was within the sport-centered archetype, three were in the business-centered archetype, and one was between the two archetypes. Cousens found that the spark for change and the ownership of the franchise influenced greatly on “the ability of the franchises to adapt to their environment” (p. 316).

To accomplish the understanding of outcomes as a result of intercollegiate athletic associational change related to archetypes and tracks, the fundamental question presented is “What are the outcomes of colleges and universities making an organizational change from the NAIA to NCAA Division III?” Over the past 10 years, 10 colleges and universities have changed from the NAIA to the NCAA Division III ranks. This study analyzed a sample of the three NCAA Division III universities that have changed athletic associations (i.e. NAIA to NCAA) using archetype and track theory to ground the study. A multiple case study research strategy involving a qualitative methods approach accomplished this task to answer the research question. Case study selection used purposive sampling to benefit the quality of the data collection process given the small sample size (Yin, 1994). Data was collected through several archival sources participating universities (Yin, 1994). Semi-structured interviews used a series of questions that were significant in developing the archetypes and organizational tracks for participating athletic departments. Interviews were conducted with key athletic administrators that were essential to the transition process of their athletic department. The data was analyzed using a theme-based, pattern-matching approach to develop athletic department archetypes (Campbell, 1975).

As a part of a larger study involving schools changing to NCAA Division II, the results of this study uncovered benefits and future challenges facing universities and athletic departments undergoing organizational change to the NCAA. It was observed that the transition process was taken for granted by athletic departments in the form of necessary resources (i.e., staffing and funding) and cultural considerations (i.e., values and beliefs of university). Results also showed reasons for leaving the NAIA was not to move toward the potential benefits of the NCAA, but to move away from the ‘declining’ NAIA.