

**Examining Board Development in Sport Governing Bodies**

*Geoff Schoenberg, Griffith University*  
*Chris Auld (Advisor), Griffith University*  
*Graham Cuskelly (Advisor), Griffith University*

**Governance** **Thursday, May 30, 2013** **20-minute oral presentation  
(including questions)  
(Room 415)**  
**Abstract 2013-083** **4:40 PM**

The board of directors is an integral part of organizations and is an institutionalized structure within sport organizations (Kikulis, 2000). Originally the board of a sport governing body (SGB) was responsible for sport program delivery and operational activities. The professionalization of sport, or the hiring of professional management staff, sparked due to the growing complexity of the sport environment, has resulted in a shift in the role of sport boards. Boards are now expected to be strategic with an emphasis on longer term planning, leaving the implementation of plans to the CEO and staff (Inglis, 1997). Yet, this shift in purpose has not replaced many of the institutionalized elements related to sport governance.

Boards remain composed, primarily, of part-time volunteers who are elected by the members of the organization (Kikulis, 2000). Organizational members tend to desire board directors who are charismatic, likeable, modest, and sport-focused (Balduck, Rossem and Buelens, 2010) rather than directors with the skills and experience for long term planning. This echoes Shilbury's (2001) assertion that "little progress [has been made] in recognizing the diverse range of skills required for providing appropriate governance for contemporary sporting organizations" (p. 263). This institutionalized view of a board director has the possibility to cause disconnect between the board members who fit the traditional requirement of being sport-focused and sport-experienced with board members whose competencies align with the new role of the board.

The concept of board development, referred to as the recruiting and selecting, training and preparing, monitoring, and removing of board members (Brown, 2007) provides a theoretical link to resolving the tension created by the evolution of sport boards. The use of board development activities such as a nomination committee or formal orientations would assist sport boards to recruit the right board members and train the current board members to understand their role therefore assisting boards in adjusting and prospering in their new role. Yet, within sport organizations, board development is essentially non-existent. Board development is not even identified as a board role in the two most prominent papers on the roles of a sport board (Inglis, 1997; Shilbury 2001). Furthermore, Hoye and Cuskelly (2004) revealed a lack of even the most basic board development activities. One common explanation for a lack of board development activity includes a lack of resources, primarily time. Additionally, the use of some board development activities, such as a nomination committee, may be difficult due to structural constraints built into an organization's constitution. Some view board development unnecessary activity as it is presumed that board members already know all they need to know prior to joining the board.

Many guides to board development are rooted in prescriptive literature based off an author's personal experience rather than an empirical study. Typically, board development has been prescribed as a formal, identifiable board activity. Yet, it is possible that the aims of board development are being achieved through other methods. Rather than the formal structure of prescriptive board development activities, board development may be occurring through informal activities at both an individual board member level and on a board-wide level as well as through formal activities not centered on board development. Therefore, the overall research problem identified is: "How does board development occur within sport governing bodies?"

This study proposes a mixed methods approach in its reconceptualization and subsequent examination of board development. Qualitative semi-structured interviews with board members of state sporting organizations will help explore board development in a new way. The emergent themes will form the basis of a theoretical model which will then be tested using a survey.

Theoretical implications of this study include both sport governance and broader board development activities. Through the examination of board development, further insight into the ongoing effects of the professionalization of

## **2013 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2013)**

sport organizations will be gained. Additionally, the examination of board practices and processes will help to understand how a board becomes effective advancing the literature that has, to this point, focused primarily on determining what makes a board effective or not. Within the broader board development construct, the empirical examination of board development will help to shed insight into a concept that has primarily drawn on prescriptive and normative literature. By exploring and, possibly, discovering new board development practices, the concept of board development can be expanded and can be examined in other settings.

There are clear practical implications of this research. As sport boards continue to find the balance between the institutionalized expectations members and the pressures to become more strategic from both the general environment and government bodies, better insights into effective board development practices will help them to achieve those goals.

In summary, board development may be effective in assisting boards with the transition from an operational focus to a strategic focus. The commonly viewed approaches to board development have been inadequate in explaining how sport boards recruit, induct, and evaluate board members. Therefore, this examination looks to use a mixed method approach to identify formal and informal activities undertaken by the whole board and by individual board members that contribute to board development.