Examining the Amalgamation of New Zealand Golf: Financial, Strategic, and Integration Perspectives

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Mergers have occurred in variety of sports including hockey (Stevens, 2006), soccer (Boen, Vanbeselaere, & Swinnen, 2005), basketball (Boen, Vanbeselaere, Pandelaere, Schutters, & Rowe, 2008), and cricket (Velija, Ratna, & Flintoff, 2014). Mergers between traditionally gender segregated sport administrations have been a feature of the sport management landscape since the 1980s (Kihl, Shaw, & Schull, 2013; Velija et al., 2014). In 2005, after nearly 100 years as separate entities, Women’s Golf New Zealand and the (men’s) New Zealand Golf Association merged to form New Zealand Golf (NZ Golf). Men’s and women’s regional golf associations engaged in their own mergers in the years following the merger of the national-level organizations.

In this study, we extend previous research on the merging of gender-affiliated athletic departments (Kihl & Schull, 2011; Kihl et al., 2013). Complementing previous research (Kihl et al., 2013), we also use Schweiger’s (2002) interrelated merger model. Schweiger’s five-stage model comprises: 1) understanding strategic and financial objectives; 2) transactions and negotiation; 3) assessing and planning for organizational transition; 4) integration of two organizations; and 5) evaluation of integration activities. Whilst Kihl et al. (2013) utilise the transition and integration phases, we focus on understanding strategic and financial objectives and the integration of the two organizations.

The purpose of this research is to examine: 1) the strategic and financial objectives (Stage 1 in Schweiger’s model); 2) the extent to which the two organizations were integrated in the mergers (Stage 4 in Schweiger’s model). This research is part of a larger study evaluating the merger’s ability to achieve its intended consequences (Merton, 1936), as well as the positive and negative unintended consequences of the mergers (Schweiger, 2002).

Documentary analysis was undertaken on the Women’s Golf NZ and Golf NZ’s annual reports from 2003-2008. These dates were chosen as they reflected the build-up and aftermath of the merger. In addition, the issues of two golf magazines, The Cut and NZ Golf, were analyzed over the same time frame. The magazines were analyzed to ascertain the views of the golfing public on the proposed merger and the effects of integration. The 15 Golf (regional) Districts’ and NZ Golf’s current constitutions were also examined. This process was undertaken to identify similarities and differences across the constitutions of these organizations, especially with respect to board and committee structures. The documents were examined by both authors. The following analytic codes were developed: constitutional structure; financial status; board structure; public commentary; strategic awareness; feedback to NZ Golf.

Primary data collection will occur in the period November 2015-February 2016. We will interview current and former directors of Women’s Golf New Zealand, New Zealand Golf Association and NZ Golf. In addition, we will seek interviews with the current CEO and Chair of each NZ Golf District. These participants will provide a regional perspective regarding the context for the merger’s strategic and financial objectives and evaluation of the integration from a regional perspective.

The interview data will be analyzed using open and axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 2014). Strategic and financial objectives, and evaluation of the integration phase will be the focus of axial coding, while open coding will drive the investigation of related themes that may be present in the data.

There is considerable disparity between the regional organizations’ constitutions. Terms of office for Board members range from one year to six years, with variation in the right to be re-elected. The gender makeup of the Boards are also inconsistent, ranging from no gender-balance requirement, a requirement for representation of one person from the non-dominant gender if none are elected, through to a clearly delineated 50:50 split. Another key finding is that while some of the regional organizations have sought to re-configure the Board with a representative gender split to
govern all golf in their region, others have simply combined the pre-merger men’s and women’s committees into a single board structure. In these circumstances, each committee governs its own gender. NZ Golf’s board has 8 members, of which 2 of each gender must be represented, although its constitution requires the election of “a Chairman” from this group. We suggest that such variation in constitution and Board composition could produce problems for the efficient governance of golf in NZ. This is problematic as efficiency was one of the strategic and organizational aims of the merger.

When the interviews are complete, we will examine the experiences of key representatives regarding the varying gendered regional board structures evident at the regional level. We will also examine key players’ experiences of the inconsistent regional board structures and the impact of those structures on collaboration, coordination and communication at the national level. Given that two key expectations of the merger were to improve financial effectiveness and reduce overlap between the women’s and men’s organizations, analyzing these two concerns will address the strategic and financial considerations of the post-merger experience.

This research contributes to the gender and merger research as it extends Kihl and Schull (2011) and Kihl, Shaw and Schull’s (2013) research by examining strategic and financial changes post-merger. It will also contribute to understanding the consequences for women and men of merging gender specific sport organizations. It also provides an opportunity for Golf NZ and the regional sport organizations to reflect on the merger, a feature of mergers that is often overlooked (Ager, 2011; Štrach & Everett, 2006).