Understanding Organizational Change and Effectiveness in Canadian Sport Organizations: An Internal and External Stakeholder Approach

Ashley Thompson, University of Ottawa
Milena M. Parent (Advisor), University of Ottawa

Management - Organizational Change (Amateur Sport)  
20-minute oral presentation (including questions)  
Thursday, June 7, 2018  
11:40 AM  
Room: Acadia B

Review of Relevant Literature & Purpose
Organizational change can be somewhat chaotic (cf. Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004; Wagstaff, Gilmore, & Thelwell, 2016). This is true for organizations undergoing minor changes; but it is especially relevant for organizations undergoing large-scale transformations. The difficulties in implementing large-scale or radical changes (Amis et al., 2004) lie in its very definition. Radical change – also known as frame-breaking change (Nadler & Tushman, 1989) – affects the core aspects of the organization such as organizational structure and design, power dynamics, and strategy (Amis et al., 2002, 2004; Cunningham, 2002; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), and, therefore, fundamentally affects how the organization functions and operates. Despite the difficulty in navigating change, as Amis et al. (2004) argued all organizations will inevitably engage in some form of radical change if they are to survive. Further, organizations must continue to function throughout the transition period and effectively deliver services to their key stakeholders. Consequently, it becomes important to not only identify the types and ways in which organizations change (as outlined in the seminal research of the 1980s-90s and 2000s; e.g., Amis et al., 2002, 2004; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Huy, 2001; Nadler & Tushman, 1989) but expand on this research and further understand the implications of these changes on organizational stakeholders. Examining the perspective of organizational stakeholders (i.e., individuals, groups, or organizations who affect or are affected by an organization; Byers, Slack, & Parent, 2012) is important as internal stakeholders are usually the ones tasked with implementing and coping with change (Wagstaff et al., 2016) and, while undergoing change, must continue to meet the needs of their external stakeholders (e.g., deliver products and services). However, with the exception of Wagstaff et al. (2016), who examined change from the perspective of internal stakeholders (i.e., employees), the current body of literature has yet to understand organizational change from the perspective of both internal and external stakeholders. More specifically, to our knowledge, research has yet to examine the (in)effectiveness of the organization during the transition process. Thus, the purpose of this study was to understand how organizational change impacts the effectiveness of sport organizations by examining the perceptions and experiences of internal and external stakeholders.

Theoretical Framework
Given the limited research examining organizational change from the perspective of the stakeholders and the importance of stakeholders for the success or sport organizations (cf. Esteve et al., 2011), this study will utilize stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010) as the overarching approach. In addition, in order to guide the data collection procedures through the creation of the semi-structured interview guide, an integrative framework is used combining the four major models found in the organizational effectiveness literature: the goal attainment approach, the systems resource model, the internal process model, and the multiple constituency approach (see Chelladurai, 1987).

Research Context
This study employed a case study methodology (Yin, 2014). The focus of this case study was on U SPORTS, the national governing body of university sport in Canada. U SPORTS has gone through considerable changes since its inception in 1906 (see U SPORTS, n.d.a.). The most recent of these major changes has been the transformation from Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS) to U SPORTS. The core aspects of this transition included a change in governance structure/style, which propelled other changes such as, leadership, management, brand, organizational processes, location, and technological changes. These changes were initiated by the enactment of the Canada Not-for-profit Corporations Act (NFP Act) (Government of Canada, 2017, August 1) which mandated a significant change in governance structure of existing national-level not-for-profit (NFP) organizations. With the enactment of this mandate, U SPORTS (at the time CIS) took on a significant shift from an operational style Board of Directors (BOD) to a strategic one, placing the operational aspects of the organization into the hands of the management staff.
Methods
At the time of submission, data collection was ongoing. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and archival material. Three interviews with former paid staff and board members were used to obtain a more in-depth understanding of the history of U SPORTS organizational changes. Second, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with current internal stakeholders (i.e., paid staff) and members of the BOD with the goal of understanding the effectiveness of the organization during the change process, as well as identifying the U SPORTS’s key stakeholders, guiding the last phase of data collection. In the third phase (currently underway), it is anticipated that 18 interviews will be conducted with primary external stakeholders (e.g., sponsors/partners and member universities) to understand the U SPORTS’s during the change process, as well as the effectiveness of the external stakeholder’s own organization during said change. In addition, archival material and documentation will be used as a secondary data source to provide information on the U SPORTS’s structure and change process. Data analysis will follow Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach to thematic analysis. Interviews will first be transcribed verbatim and then analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 11 where both deductive and inductive codes will be used. At the time of submission, the study was in Braun and Clarke’s (2006) first stage of data analysis: familiarization with the data. The remaining analysis – generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report – will be completed by March 2018.

Results
Preliminary data show that internal stakeholders faced several challenges potentially impacting U SPORTS’s effectiveness. Themes uncovered relate to communication challenges during a relocation change, change resistance, and the addition of a predominantly new office staff. However, data show organizational effectiveness in several key areas including: keeping external stakeholders informed throughout the change process through frequent updates, the cohesion and support among the young staff, and the transition in technological systems.

Contributions
The contributions of this research have both theoretical and practical implications. As the survival of sport organizations depend on their managers’ abilities to negotiate periods of radical change (cf. Amis et al., 2004), understanding how organizations effectively or ineffectively manage change can help guide future organizations in similar situations. Further, as organizations do not operate in isolation with their external environment and the stakeholders within this environment, it becomes important to understand the effects of change on these external stakeholders as they can provide the focal organization with key resources (e.g., sponsorship dollars). Thus, managing the interests of these stakeholders – even during an organizational change process – is important for the organization’s survival (cf. Freidman et al., 2004; Slack & Parent, 2006).