Exploring Post-Merger Sociocultural Integration in Sport

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Organizational mergers may provide organizations with opportunities to grow and develop (Kaplan, 2007). Accordingly, there has been a number of examples of mergers in both for-profit (e.g., Adidas and Reebok) and non-profit sport organizations (e.g., the merger between the Canadian Amateur Hockey Association and Hockey Canada). The existing literature on mergers in sport (e.g., Kihl, Shaw, & Schull, 2013; Stevens, 2006) suggests that challenges might also arise with the integration of cultural and human aspects of the newly merged organizations due to culture clash and conflicts among stakeholders. In that regard, merger success may not be fully achieved without post-merger sociocultural integration, a process which involves meshing organizational culture and human resources from the pre-existing organizations following the merger (Stahl et al., 2013). While understanding post-merger sociocultural integration is crucial to not only reducing conflict but also fostering shared goals within the merged sport organizations, little is known about sociocultural integration in merged sport organizations.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine post-merger sociocultural integration in sport. More specifically, this study examines challenges in post-merger sociocultural integration and how such challenges are managed.

Method

Based on a qualitative single-case study design (Yin, 2013), this study examined the Korean Sport and Olympic Committee (KSOC), a new organization founded in 2016 that was the result of a merger between the Korean Olympic Committee (KOC) (the organization responsible for managing elite sport) and the Korea Council of Sport for All (KOCOSA) (the organization responsible for mass sport development). The KSOC merger integrated many different elite and mass sport organizations such as Local Sport Councils (LSCs) and National Sport Federations (NSFs), which were formally associated with the KSOC and the KOCOSA respectively. Therefore, this particular case provided the platform to better understand a complex environment created by stakeholders with varying cultures and values. Data in the form of interviews (17 in total) and archival materials were collected and analyzed for this study. Data analysis involved inductive (open-coded) and deductive (based on literature on sociocultural integration) content analysis according to guidelines suggested by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Results and Implications

Diverse themes pertaining to the KSOC’s post-merger sociocultural integration emerged. More specifically, conditions and factors in the pre-merger phase (e.g., cultural difference and stakeholder power) that triggered challenges (e.g., culture clash, turnover at top management, and conflict among employees) regarding cultural and human resources integration in the post-merger phase were identified. Solutions to help facilitate socio-cultural integration utilized by stakeholders within the KSOC case included leadership interventions (e.g., having interim co-presidents) and inter- and intra-organizational communication (e.g., workshops and job rotation). Participants also discussed the importance of a slow integration based on mutual understanding among stakeholders. This study also highlights the importance of understanding internal and external factors throughout the process of organizational change in sport in order to increase organizational effectiveness. We further argue that managers in sport organizations need to employ diverse leadership and communication-based interventions in order to manage issues regarding cultural and human aspects in organizational changes.