
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY RECREATION AND ATHLETICS

Our project provides an analysis of Concordia's Athletic's formal structure and its key contingencies. We discovered in our analysis that the organization has a low level of formalization and is mainly decentralized creating horizontal communication. This informal structure is important in their case in order to be able to deal with the changing environment they are in. We also found out that the design of the organization is a product matrix where the product managers are primary authority of their teams and functional managers simply assign technical personnel to project and provide advisory expertise as needed. Because of all these aspects, it was clear that the organization was organic and would grow eventually.

Mana341- Section A

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Danielle Leonard 6542735

Tracy-ann Lavigne 6599222

Kazi Mahbubuzzaman 6267270

Louis Théorêt 6325009

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to conduct an analysis of Concordia University's athletic department. The analysis will focus on the formal structures of the organization such as how the organization is differentiated, its level of formalization, if its centralized or decentralized, on their level of horizontal and vertical integration and the kind of design they used for their organization. The research will also focus on the organization's key contingencies such as the main stakeholders, their values and beliefs, if they are resource dependent or not and if the organization provides a service or product technology.

The athletic department focuses on providing the top student-athlete experience in the country. The department provides many varsity teams in which student-athletes can compete in and represent the school either on the field, the ice or the court. The varsity teams are an opportunity for student-athletes to perform in a high level of competitiveness. The organization also provides a source of entertainment for Concordia's community through sporting events such as homecoming football, playoff games, and tournaments. They also offer recreational opportunities to students that aren't in a varsity team.

The main primary data source for this analysis is an interview conducted with John Bower; Associate director, student athlete services. The interview was held in his office at Concordia's Loyola campus which lasted 1h30. Mr. Bower answered every question about the organization relevant to our research purpose. He answered clearly and gave additional information such as stories and examples in order for this analysis to be more complete and to understand better the organization and where it is going. Furthermore, secondary data was gathered from articles found in newspapers such as the

Concordian, from the Stinger website, and from electronic files on the CIS website. This information sources were to familiarize us with the context in which the department works in and to learn of recent events.

Formal Structure

The department of Recreation and Athletics is made up of three major departments, student athletic services, administration, and recreation, the later being beyond the scope of this project. Within student athletic services, the associate director John Bower oversees the varsity and club teams that compete for the university and the services associated with it. Next, administration provides support to both varsity and recreation in terms of marketing and communications, facility management, event coordination, and travel administration. Overall, the department is run by the director, Patrick Boivin, who is responsible for the effective leadership, vision, operation and management in its pursuit and support of its objectives. This includes coordination of broad-based initiatives, athletic and recreation strategic planning and development and management of the unit's administrative and financial resources.

The level of formalization within the department of athletics is rather low. Some functions require more formalization than others while overall the inter-departmental communication and procedures are informal. John Bower spoke of the many informal hallway conversations that he uses for coordination and progress reports. Furthermore, the department lacks a formal communication through newsletters or databases for policies and procedures and has no formal feedback system in place. The main formalization within the department comes from weekly and monthly meetings with unit heads and from staff meetings. To contrast, the formalization of the department becomes more mechanistic when dealing with outside stakeholders. There are large amounts of

written documentation that goes into dealing with the RSEQ, the CIS, and the university administration. Verifying eligibility is one very important component of this and requires up-to-date information reported daily to verify player status and if not reported correctly can cost teams wins and possible suspensions. Lastly, payroll and purchasing activities are important to have formal procedures in place for accuracy.

To re-emphasize, the horizontal communication within the student athlete services is undeniable. Being located all in one building allows for constant communication and coordination. Furthermore, vertical information linkages such as hierarchical referral and rules and plans allow for the effective running of the department. To illustrate, procedures to communicate with say the vice president of university must be coordinated through either the associate director or director. If they are not accessible then the procedure for subordinates is to wait until they are available to contact the VP.

The athletic department has organic management processes with a product matrix design structure where decision-making is decentralized. Like most companies, major decisions in regards to financial and administration are made at the upper levels while day to day operational decisions are made by lower level decision makers, creating a decentralized decision making structure. For instance, the coach has the final say on their starting roster and the director or the associate director has no authority over it.

In saying this, the athletic department has a product matrix designed where the product managers, or in this case, coaches, are primary authority of their teams and functional managers simply assign technical personnel to project and provide advisory expertise as needed (see appendix A).

Overall, the organization is more organic in its management processes. As discussed previously, decision-making is primarily decentralized and the level of formalization is low. However, based on discussion with John Bower, the department is trying to move to a more mechanistic management process by implementing more clear procedures and clear hierarchy of authority that has not previously been in place. This implementation has only begun to take place and will be seen in management process in the near future.

Key Contingencies & Context

The department of athletics at Concordia University has multiple internal and external stakeholders that help to shape and define the program. To begin, the external stakeholders in order of importance to the department are, the Réseau du Sport étudiant du Québec (RSEQ), the Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS, formerly the Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union), the Concordia Student Union (CSU), the provincial government, the stinger boosters, and stinger alumni. On the other side, the internal stakeholders are the employees of the Athletics department, and the President's Executive Group (PEG). Finally, the athletes are a big part of the stakeholder's equation in this organization. They can easily be put in both categories because they are the customers to the student athletic services (external), but they also represent the school when they are competing (internal).

Taking a look at the organizations culture, one of the main values that emerge from the interview with M. Bower is the idea of a family. It is imperative to the organization that everyone sticks together as a team. Also, it is important for the members to be upfront and accountable to everyone. This can easily be found in the

organization logo and mascot of *Buzz the Bee*. Just like the insect, the organization profoundly believes in a sense of community in order to attain their goals. The use of slang like “bee at the game”, “beelieve” and “bee the best” helps spread the dominant culture through its several subgroups that consist of the different varsity teams. Another important belief of the Stingers Athletics is to include the Montreal community in its projects and events. A great example would be the Kelly-Anne Drummond cup in women’s rugby that raises money for women’s shelters and commemorates a former member who was murdered by her live in boyfriend. Not only does this event foster competition for the title of the cup, but it also reaches out and touches communities that aren’t normally associated with the Stingers. It allows building visibility and integrates the external community in the university’s larger experience.

Next, the level of uncertainty of the Concordia Stingers Athletics is affected by two factors, the low complexity of its domain and the instability of its environment. The importance of teamwork, the decentralization and the horizontal way of communicating are at the forefront of the structural contingency of the organization. The uncertainty is created by the complexity of dealing with the numerous stakeholders that directly affect its activities. The Stingers Athletics are a not for profit organization thus it relies primarily on funding from the CSU, government, and donations. The money it receives is the resource that helps them build facilities and develop programs that will attract the best students/athletes in order to have successful teams. Therefore some uncertainties stem from the financial dependencies of the program. In addition, due to the nature of varsity athletics, much uncertainty stems from the result of competitions. The regulation of the CIS only allows for athletes to play for 5 seasons creating a high turnover and a

new make up of teams each year as players graduate and new players are recruited. Finally, the Athletics department gains legitimacy through the success of its teams not only in terms of win-losses but in its athlete retention rate, academic all-Canadians, success of its athletes post-graduation, and number of fans at competitions (see appendix B).

As mentioned previously, the Athletics department can be described as selling a service. According to John Bower, the department is providing sport entertainment to the Concordia community and also a high level of sporting competition to athletes.

Like most of the service providing organizations, the Stingers Athletics' customer interaction is relatively high while customizability is low. In terms of the athletes, the high interaction between coaches, trainers, and therapists allows for improved skill level and experience, while customizability comes from the sport they participate in. Looking at the entertainment side, the high interaction between fans and teams creates an experience that makes the fans want to come to another game while customizability stems from their choice of event.

The production technology for the Stingers is relatively complex since it is a customizable service the customer is generally treated in a unique way that creates a lot of variety. Coaches constantly have to deal with specific situations that they may not have seen before. With high variability comes low analyzability. Since the coaches mostly deal with case-by-case situations, there are no standard procedures; they must use their experience. In saying this, Concordia Stingers Athletics would be described to have a non-routine department technology.

Finally, we could argue that the Stingers Athletics has low interdependence (Pooled) and operates with a mediating technology. The organization has many departments (football, rugby, hockey, cross-country, etc.) that work independently within the organization like subgroups. However, we can see some sequential interdependence too because there is still a need for coordination, planning and communication between the different departments.

Analysis

The structure observed within the Concordia University Athletics Department is effective within its environmental domain, production technology, and goal achievement. Through its co-ordination, flexibility, and suitability to complex decision-making, the matrix structure paired with the organic system used by Athletics aids in the overall performance of the department.

When considering the simple-complex dimensions of environmental uncertainty, Stinger Athletics can be found in that later part of the scale. They must cope with ever-changing governing regulations, competition for quality student athletes and highly experience staff, and scarce financial resources. They deal with granting agencies, donors, alumni, parents, foundations, legislators, community residents, provincial and national rule-makers, and the athletes themselves. This large number of external elements and the frequency of change create a very complex environment that the matrix structure effectively deals with. The frequent external changes found in Concordia's Athletics Department domain demands for complex decision-making that are dealt with by the high interdependence between functions due to the large amount of co-ordination and information processing in both vertical and horizontal directions. The matrix

structure is used to balance the need for technical expertise and product innovation. In practical words, the matrix structure balances the need for coaching, athletic therapist, strength and conditioning, and administration expertise with the ability to transform the student athlete experience at Concordia.

Even though the matrix structure is effective within the department of Athletics there are some disadvantages to the system. The matrix structure requires frequent meetings that are time consuming, as discussed previously, the associate director formally meets daily with ACE and eligibility and AFA's, weekly with athletic therapy/strength and conditioning, and monthly with coaches. Another weakness to this system is the effort that is required to maintain a power balance. During the interview with associate director John Bower, he described inefficiencies where the autonomy associated with the coaches' job based on the organic nature of their department caused the coach to over step their authority. In recent years, procedures have been put in place to prevent the coaches, for example, contacting the enrolment services to get recruits into their preferred programs.

Linkage mechanisms

The external environment has an overwhelming impact on management uncertainty and organization structure. In saying this, an organization must try and maintain a balance between linkages with other organization and external environment. The main inter-organization linkage mechanisms that the Stinger Athletics department uses are formal strategic alliances, executive recruitment, and advertising and public relations.

To begin, Student Athletic Services uses strategic alliances with other universities to evaluate the effectiveness of the program. John Bower described the relationship they

have with Laval University and their willingness to provide information in the way they operate. This information helps the department to see where they are at in regards to other universities and the effectiveness of the procedures and processes they have in place.

Next, the Athletics' department has used executive recruitment to establish favourable linkages with the external environment. Over the past two years the Athletics Department has hired a number of new employees with backgrounds that lend to legitimacy and reputation of the program. The new director of Recreation and Athletics is Patrick Boivin, the former director of hockey operations for the Montreal Canadiens. John Bower the new associate director of R&A and the former Director of university programs at the Réseau du sport étudiant du Québec. Lastly, the newest addition to the women's hockey coaching staff is Julie Chu, the second most decorated US Olympic female athlete and former coach to the Minnesota U. Bulldogs, four time NCAA Div. 1 national champions. These additions to the Concordia team open the doors to potential sponsorships; personal contacts in regulation making organizations, and adds to the legitimacy of its programs through decorated staff.

Finally, through the most traditional way, the Athletics department uses advertising and public relations to create inter-organizational linkages. The marketing and communications team in Student Athletic Services advertises upcoming games, highlights of past games, and events going in the Stinger community. Furthermore, the athletics department uses public relations to shape a favourable image of themselves to the public. An example of this is the football team's annual Shriner Bowl where they visit sick kids at the Shriners Hospital and the next day play the McGill Redmen in a game to raise money for the hospital.

Taking a look at the organizations values and beliefs, the interview with John Bower discussed how the Stinger Athletics currently does not have a mission statement, values, or beliefs at a formal level. However, informally, he uses the mission “to be the best/provide the top student athlete experience in the CIS (Canadian interuniversity sport)”. The values in which John Bower believes will be important are that of pride, strength, hard work, and leadership. Even though these qualities are not formally written, many of the qualities already give meaning to organizational life. To illustrate pride, three years ago one could walk around either the Loyola campus or the Sir George Williams campus and not see any sign of stinger athletics. Today, it is difficult to go a day without seeing that stinger crest on someone’s hat, jackets, or sweater. Each year all athletes are given kit including the recent addition of the maroon stinger tracksuit that is worn in everyday life symbolizing the pride of being a Stinger.

At the athlete level, being a stinger means being a part of a family. Each athlete is proud to be a part of Stinger community and supports its fellow athletes. This pride of being of a Stinger athlete and representing Concordia University drives student athletes to act with poise and respect at school and on the sports field, and to be leaders in the community. These qualities that stem from Stinger pride are how the athletes support the Athletics department in their mission and goals.

Conclusion

To conclude, Concordia’s Athletic department has three major departments that use organic management processes. Through informal procedures as well as a strong horizontal communication between functions the department effectively adapts to the unstable environment in which it operates. This organic system paired with the product

matrix formal structure used by the organization allows for a balance in technical expertise and innovation. To contrast, the formalization and mechanistic processes seen in the department is used when dealing with outside stakeholders, and defined functions as the nature of their dealings requires procedure. This balance of these management processes is key in understanding the formal structure found in the Athletics department. In upcoming years, the department will be moving towards implementing formal procedures and practices that allow for better feedback on organizational objectives and more control by the upper levels of management. As mentioned in the interview with the Associate Director of Student Athletic Services, the department is working towards creating a formal mission statement and operative goals that will help shape the culture and objectives of the department. With this implementation we see a bright future for the Athletics department as it strives to attain its goal as the provider of the best student athlete experience in all of Canadian Interuniversity Sport.

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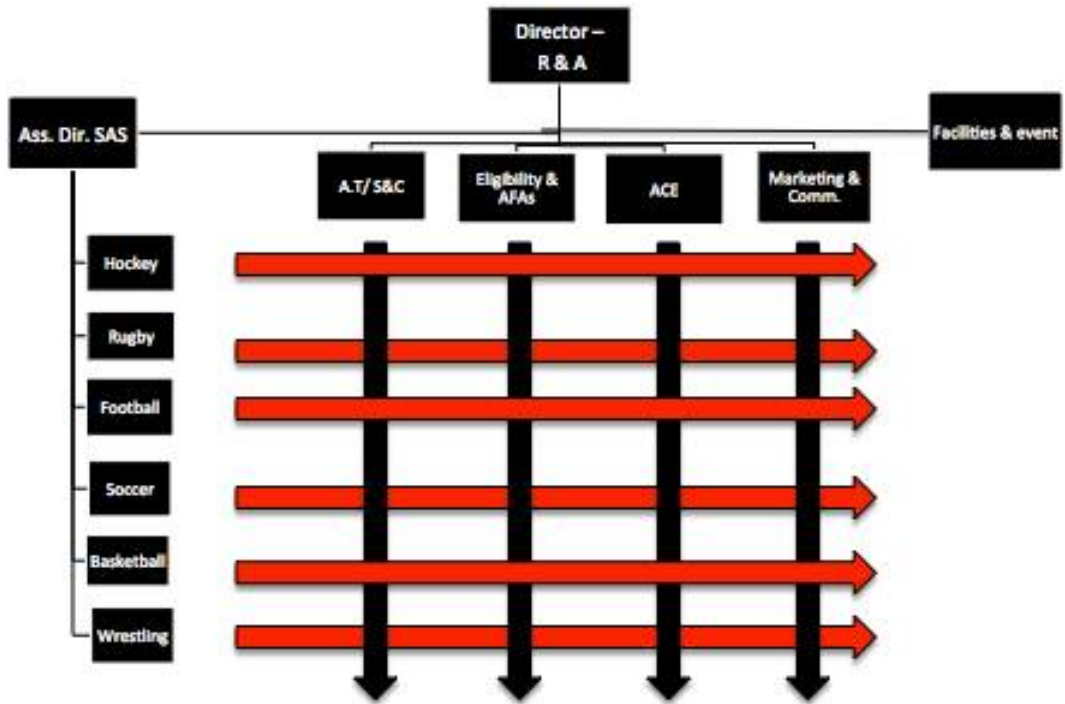
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Appendix A



Appendix B

