

## Investigating Change Management in Sport Organization through Recent Reforms of the Badminton World Federation

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**Abstract:** In an era of constant change and innovation, most sport events and related governing bodies have undergone major reforms. This paper is trying to explore the changing sport organization from the perspective of the change management. The Badminton World Federation (BWF), with frequent tries of making changes and promoting reforms, is selected as the study case. Reviewing the recent changes of management structure, inner culture and event settings, this paper suggests that change management strategies of BWF will be pertinence and effective apply to Larson's team.

### 1. Introduction

The Badminton World Federation (BWF) is the international governing body for badminton event. This sport organization was established in 1934 with nine founding member associations and originally called the International Badminton Federation (IBF) (BWF, 2018). Since established, BWF has been featured with frequent reforms ranging from its office location, organizational culture and governing structure, to match rules of the event. Thus, change management can be view as a key aspect of BWF's management strategies. Details of BWF and its recent management strategies will be critically analyzed in the following parts from the angle of change management. As the key issues of its reforming process, organizational culture and structure of BWF will be particularly discussed.

### 2. Key Aspects of Change Management for A Specific Organization

Change is about becoming different through some kinds of process. It can be planned and deliberate transform, while it can also be an unplanned reaction to inner and outer pressure. In short, 'change' discussed here is referred to the process that, individuals, groups and organizations of all shapes and sizes alter from one state to another, over a period of time (Baker, 2007; Byers, Slack and Parent, 2012). For a specific organization, change management is about the process, tools and techniques to manage the people-side of the change processes, to achieve the required outcomes, and to realize the change effectively within the individual change agents, the inner teams, and the wider systems (Baker, 2007).

Distilled from the definition of change management, this paper tends to highlight three elements of change management, which are the context of change, the process of changes and the agents involved. The three elements are worth attentions from the managers who are promoting and leading changes.

The context of change is about the internal and external environment within which changes are taking place. Structure, culture and social, political or economic environments are the several important contextual factors that can influence the control mechanisms adopted in organizations

(Johnson and Gill, 1993). It is also an important approach to figure out sources and resistances of changes as well as explain why changes take place, for reviewing the context of change. When examining the starting point of changes, Lewin (1967) simplified the various environmental features into driving and resisting forces, suggesting that the underlying principle is that driving forces must outweigh resisting forces when changes take place.

Organizational structure and culture are mentioned above as important internal factors in terms of the context of change. In fact, organizational structure and culture are also vital aspects of management of a certain organization.

Structure is a key concept within organization theory for understanding how organizations operate (Byers, Slack and Parent, 2012). Organization is a goal-directed system, within which, key elements or resources including people, work, technologies and information need to be arranged intelligently in order to gain the maximization of resource utilization and achieve goals (Kribikova, 2016). In this way organizational structure is created. Organizational structure consists of soft and hard elements. Hard elements are referred to the setting of working positions, arranged as the formal organizational structure, and procedural organization arrangement, building up the purposeful order of logically connected operations. Soft elements are constructed as informal organizational structure or social network, which are linked to human resources and organizational culture (Kribikova, 2016).

Organizational culture refers to a set of common norms and shared values deeply rooted in an organization that can strongly affects organizational members or even shape human behaviors (Champoux, 1996; Schein 1992; Zammuto and Krakower, 1991, in Choi et. al., 2010). The type, dynamic pattern, and strength of organizational culture are considered significant aspects for study in order to precisely measure organizational effectiveness, in turn, allowing various organizations to facilitate internal integration and external adaptation (Weese, 1995, in Choi et. al., 2010). This point can be linked to the most common view on the relationship between organizational culture and performance, which is the so-called strong-culture thesis. It has often been assumed that commitment of an organization's employees and managers, sharing the same set of values, beliefs and norms, will have positive results that the 'strength' of 'corporate culture' is directly correlated with the level of profits in a company. It is frequently argued that a distinct organizational culture can make contributions to the organizational performance through facilitating goal alignment, which means that a common culture makes it easier for the members of the organization to reach agreement on goals as well as appropriate means for attaining them. There are also positive effects on motivation. A shared culture encourages people to identify with the organization and feel belongingness and responsibility for it, which makes them more motivated to cooperate with others and make contributions to achieve the goals and missions of the organization (Alvesson, 2002).

Organization is considered to be an open system reacting to impulses and changes of its environment (Kribikova, 2016). To adapt itself into the changing environment, arrangements of the key resources or the organizational structure should be able to respond to changes flexibly. Similarly, as an element forming the soft part of organizational structure, organizational culture should be also reactive to changes. Thus, organizational structure and culture are often involved into change management as vital reforming objects.

### **3. BWF's Change Management of Organizational Structure, Organizational Culture and Badminton Events**

#### **3.1 The Overall Governing Structure of Badminton World Federation**

At the very beginning of considering management strategies of BWF, development history, governing structure, daily work, and the current focuses of BWF, as the basic background information, should be clearly sorted out first. This can also help form a general guide for the further discussion on how BWF deal with issues of reforming and managing changes.

Since founded in London on 5 July 1934 as the IBF with nine members including Canada, Denmark, England, France, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland and Wales, BWF has

gradually developed into a federation of 189 members globally (BWF, 2018). It was relocated to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in 2005 (South China Morning Post, 2018). Later in 2006 at the Extraordinary General Meeting in Madrid, it was renamed as 'Badminton World Federation', with the word 'Badminton' at the front, stressing the sport event (Badminton Asia Confederation, 2006). BWF is recognized by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) as the governing body for badminton at the international level (BWF, 2018).

Generally, the governance system of BWF is consisted of six parts, including the Annual General Meeting (AGM), the Council, the Executive Board, the Committees, the Commissions and the Management Team. The AGM is the highest authority of BWF, usually held in May every year. The main business of the AGM is to make significant decisions including electing the Council, receiving reports audited accounts, and strategic plans from the Council, approving proposals for amendments to the Constitution and Laws of Badminton. The Council is the elected governing board of BWF and usually serves a term of four years. It oversees daily business of BWF between AGMs with the assistant of Executive Board. Key Decisions of the AGM and Council are open to the public, published after meetings and can be downloaded online. The Committees, the Commissions and the Management Team are the implementation teams of BWF, covering different functional areas including administration, finance, marketing and so on (BWF, 2018). Overall, the management structure is relatively stable, but the positions and department settings under different modules were changed frequently in the past 20 years. Two major adjustments within the Council and the implementation teams will be discussed later in details.

Under the governing framework, BWF carries out daily work including showcasing the event as entertainment through various media platform, enhancing participation in badminton, building up solid partnerships with a range of stakeholders and improving the internal capacity of the organization itself by seeking for 'Good Governance' with various guidelines, modeling and self-assessment tools. (BWF, 2018). The main areas of BWF's day to day activities can be summarized as membership service, internationally regulation and governance, event development and promotion, and other affairs related to Olympic and Paralympic Games (BWF, 2018). Through the practice of daily work, BWF have also identified a sets of problems on the current match rules and recently put a series of proposals, such as using Hawk Eye to assists the referees, testing different scoring systems and fixing the serving height, into practice, in addition to the adjustments of location, organization title and management structure.

From the historical relocation, renaming, to the positions adjustments, it can be seen that reforming and changes are the key features of BWF's effort during the past 20 years. Relatedly, change management has been the significant aspect worth further discussion in terms of the organizational management of BWF.

### **3.2 BWF's Frequent Reforms and Changes**

In the past twenty years, BWF has carried out a set of major reforms and related strategies with the goals of improving organizational capacity and promoting badminton. These strategies and changes are various and mainly related to three aspects, the organizational structure, the organizational culture and the sport event.

As, mentioned above, the management structure of BWF is relatively stable, but the positions and department settings under different modules were changed frequently.

One major change is the setting of Executive Deputy President. This position was proposed by the former Executive Deputy President, Datuk Punch Gunalan (4 February 1944 – 15 August 2012), and had been occupied him since set up in 2005 until he resigned after a vote for no-confidence motion against him passed in 2008 (DAWN, 2008). Considering the context from the view of Lewin (1967)'s force field theory, there are one main driving force, the 'Asian hegemony' in badminton, and one vital resisting force, the question of the legitimacy, for this change. For a number of years, European members and Asian members have been fighting with each other to grab the power of regulating badminton events in order to establish rules and competition environment in

favor of their own teams. When the headquarters of BWF relocated from England to Malaysia in 2005, the long-term battle ended with the victory of Asian countries, which was also the landmark event in BWF indicating the existence of 'Asian hegemony' (Suurballe, 2008). The 'Asian hegemony' refers to the fact that with the largest badminton population, the most outstanding grades and star players and the most advanced badminton techniques, tactics and coaching system, some Asian countries, especially China and Malaysia, have a significant discourse power in terms of badminton and BWF. As a famous player of Malaysia awarded a life peerage and authoritative figure in Badminton Association of Malaysia, Gunalan had held great power and authority in BWF since he became a member of BWF in 1984. Serving as the Executive Deputy President from 2005 to 2008, he was superior to all the other Vice President and almost stood up to the President, Kang Young-Joong. Although the setting of Executive Deputy President did put into practice driven by the 'Asian hegemony', the resistance from the questioning on legitimacy of both the position setting process and the bidding of relocation have never disappeared but gain more and more attentions. In 2007, Gunalan and Kang publicly blame each other through a press conferences during Sudirman Cup and Badminton World Championship, two of the most important badminton events organized by BWF. They both later received no-confidence motion and accused each other of plotting coup attempts.

As an element forming the soft part of organizational structure, the organizational culture of BWF has also been affected by the factions and chaos. During his term of service, Gunalan repeatedly told the media that changes and reforms were necessary for the future of BWF, and showed an attitude of encouraging innovation. He even claimed that he was a madman who firmly supported radical and subversive reforms (Sina, 2005). However, factions between Gunalan and Kang later proved that 'reforms' were not really encouraged under this context but just tools for political strife which on one hand can be the gimmick to win votes and on the other hand can be the weapon to attack opponents.

Led by the chaotic structure and splitting culture full of conflicts, a set of strategies related to changing event rules have not been well designed without clear understanding of the real problems led by inner factions, board inclusion of different change agents including players and coaches from different areas, cooperated implementing teams and operational guidelines. Some of the most criticized initiatives includes mandatory rule for female players to wear skirts, forcing star players to participate in the Super Series and frequent adjustments of the scoring system from 7-point system, 11-point system to 21-point system.

The chaos caused by internal wrangling, tension between the executive members and the persistent resistances against Gunalan finally led to the second major change of BWF governing structure. After Gunalan and Kang Young-Joong, the famous Danish player, Poul-Erik Høyer Larsen was elected as the current President of BWF. Under the context of faction scandals, led by Larsen, BWF re-constructed the centralization of the Council by canceling the position of Executive Deputy President and setting up a regulation that Vice Presidents should be elected from different continents of the world (BWF, 2018). These measurements in some way helped avoid bossiness and restrain the 'Asian hegemony' within BWF.

The current Council led by Larson has also realized the damages of the organizational culture caused by the past political factions. They made effort to bring back the open and tolerant culture. A set of measurements encouraging innovation and changes were recorded as a set of institutionalized documents under Enhancing Badminton's Future banner (BWF, 2018) through repeated communication, legalized hearings and voting process. Being passed by inner legitimation process of BWF means that this document has been discussed and accepted by most of voters who are usually the interactive change agents for the document goals. This can effectively help get the change context understood within BWF and rebuild team cohesion considering Carnall (1999)'s advice on managing organizational politics and deal with organizational culture with including more discussion of change context.

Also, Larson has played his leadership role in promoting changes well when interacts with various change agents. Larson and his team relatively state to the media and public the same theme

that BWF highly stresses the importance of changes and reforms on different occasions. As a former badminton player and a leader recognized as friendly, the good public image of Larson help him and his team gain more support and trust when highlighting the vision of Enhancing Badminton's Future. This leadership role help make the implementation of new changes more practical (Kotter, 2013).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Change management of BWF cover three elements including the complex context of badminton event worldwide development, the inner legitimacy process of change and the communication with different badminton event participants or actors as change agents. The main changed issues are the organizational structure, the organizational culture and the badminton event settings. Structure and culture of BWF was once torn apart because of internal conflicts and factions. Political scandals even did harm to the reputation of badminton event, making participants have no confidence in the event governing body. After reviewing the change management strategies of BWF, this paper suggests that Larson and his team applied more intelligent way to manage changes and promote reforms, trying to re-construct damaged legitimation procedures and include boarder discussion, compared to Gunalan and Kang announcing changes of BWF without inclusive discussion or blaming each other with sudden briefings. Hopefully, the current team led by Larson can solve the historical problems and achieve the goal of Enhancing Badminton's Future.

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