Responses to multi-level institutional complexity in a national sport federation

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ABSTRACT

National Sport Federations are responsible for governing all aspects of a sport within their respective countries. In developing and promoting their sport National Federations must respond to multi-level complexity arising from internal stakeholder needs and commercial, government and social demands. While organisational complexity responses have been extensively researched, little of this work has considered the unique positioning of sport federations. Drawing on the theoretical perspective of institutional logics and complexity, the authors adopted a case study approach to investigate Triathlon Australia's response to its complex operating environment, conducting 18 in-depth semi-structured interviews with current and former board members, chief executives, senior managers, and government representatives responsible for national sport policy and funding. Interview data were complemented with an examination of Triathlon Australia's annual reports and Australian government policy documents (1998–2016 period). Four themes and several organisational responses' themes emerged from the inductive and iterated thematic data analysis: (a) external complexity – alignment, diversification, transcendence, negotiation; (b) interstitial complexity – empathy, formalisation, collaboration, specialisation; (c) internal complexity – division, balance, leverage; and (d) emotions – connection, harness. Driven by quasi-insolvency and admission into the Olympic programme, and national government policy requirements for funding, Triathlon Australia responded to its complex environment by embracing all logics, designs and agendas, unravelling new ways to solve or mitigate it via hybrid responses. Implications for both theory and practice are outlined.

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1. Introduction

Within today's contemporary sport environment most sport organisations have to deal with substantial complexity (Gammelsæter, 2010; Svensson, 2017) and the "inevitable feature" of change (Slack & Parent, 2006, p. 253). While many sport organisations have shown great resilience, adapting to face challenges and to capitalise on new opportunities (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2015), their responses to complexity have varied. National Sport Federations, major players in the sport landscape, frequently deal with heterogeneous and possibly contradictory stakeholder requirements who influence their operations and whose inputs are often difficult to determine (Phillips & Newland, 2014; Winand, Rihoux, Robinson, & Zintz, 2012).

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National Sport Federations are exposed to a multitude of external pressures, related to requirements of government funding (Dowling & Smith, 2016; Grix & Carmichael, 2012); political priorities and agendas (De Bosscher & Van Bottenburg, 2010; Hanstad & Skille, 2010); expectations of an increasingly professional workforce (Dowling, Edwards, & Washington, 2014; Taylor et al., 2015); implementation of new business and governance practices (Winand, Scheerder, Vos, & Zintz, 2016); and finding ways to become more attractive as a commercial product (Phillips & Newland, 2014). They are vulnerable to complexity arising from both their internal and external environments and most National Sport Federations have a central field position in a very complex array of private, public and non-profit organisations at different geographies (i.e., local, regional, and national).

National Sport Federations can be described as meta-organisations in that they typically consist of multiple organisations. Their federated organisational design also adds an interstitial level of complexity (Toubiana, Oliver, & Bradshaw, 2017) as several conflictive interests arise from affiliated members with often-incompatible interests that emerge from regional affiliates and associations.

Most National Sport Federations also deal with internal complexity as they have both 'high-performance' and 'participation' agendas, and their very existence can be threatened if their results do not meet funding linked key performance indicators which encompass both participation and elite success outcomes (Dowling & Smith, 2016; Houlihan & Green, 2010). Elite success of a given sport is realised through athlete achievement in major international competitions and professional leagues (De Bosscher, Shibli, Westerbeek, & Van Bottenburg, 2015), and is underpinned by motives as diverse as ideology, national pride, prestige, recognition, and political gain (Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Houlihan & Green, 2008). The main objectives of participation sport is to increase the number of people engaging in physical activity, both organised and non-organised, (De Bosscher & Van Bottenburg, 2010), that can contribute to better social, education, and health outcomes (Hylton, 2013).

In summary, most National Sport Federations contend with multi-level complexity—that is the experience of complexity at several levels (external, interstitial, and internal complexity), which requires a range of organisational responses. National Sport Federations experience multi-level complexity when responding to numerous, often conflicting, requirements coming from: commercial, government, and social logics (external complexity); interests of affiliates within the federation (interstitial complexity); and a dual-mission to deliver elite and participation outcomes (internal complexity). While the effects of complexity in organisations have been extensively researched, little is known about multi-level complexity and how organisations respond to it (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010). Consequently, extending our understanding of complexity management at different levels is both theoretical and practical important. We examine the different levels of complexity and associated responses as a means of contributing to our understanding of complexity management. The purpose of this research is to investigate a National Sport Federation's response to its complex operating environment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Institutional logics and complexity

Institutional theory, namely institutional logics and complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) provides a framework by which to explore National Sport Federations organisational responses. Institutional logics are sets of principles that stipulate "how to interpret organisational reality, what constitutes appropriate behaviour, and how to succeed" (Thornton, 2004, p. 70). Organisations face institutional complexity when two or more logics have incompatible requirements (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Early organisation studies research in sport focused mainly on clubs, deinstitutionalisation (O'Brien & Slack, 2003), and legitimacy processes (Phillips & Newland, 2014), and examined the presence, change dynamics and effects of institutional pressures (Edwards, Mason, & Washington, 2009; Green & Collins, 2008). In their work on this topic, Cousens and Slack (2005) noted a shift from the dominant league institutional logic to a corporate logic in the North America professional sport organisations. However, institutional logics have not been widely used in sport management scholarship, thus the application of this perspective could provide new sport management insights (Washington & Patterson, 2011), in particular, how sport organisations deal with logic multiplicity and respond to their conflicting requirements.

Most organisational studies identify two institutional logics: commercial and social (Battilana & Dorado, 2010). However, research using sport fields have shown the complex presence of three or more logics (Gammelsæter, 2010; Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011; Steen-Johnsen & Amis, 2010), with the commonly added third logic relating to the criticality of the government (Steen-Johnsen & Amis, 2010). Notably, the role of government is largely missing from contemporary institutional research (Clegg, 2010).

Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011) concluded that different and conflicting institutional logics – amateur, professional, and commercial – can coexist in a multisport club environment and are linked to specific agendas (i.e., participation, elite, and entertainment sport). This suggests the presence of a vertical multi-level connectedness and potential complexity. How sport organisations respond to this and the understanding of an interstitial level of complexity are absent from the debate so far.

2.2. Multi-level complexity

Governance conflict can arise between the National Sport Federations and key actors who may want to shape the sport for a specific purpose (Washington & Patterson, 2011). Besides experiencing institutional or external complexity emanating

from their field, National Sport Federations also face complexity at interstitial and internal levels, as Washington and Patterson (2011) noted, "sport fields are sites of conflict and struggle at both logic level and at the governance level" (p. 10).

By design, most National Sport Federations deal with an interstitial level of complexity, due to their federated operating model, in order to govern their several regional affiliates and the often conflictive interests that arise (Toubiana et al., 2017). Adding to the complexity, the particular tensions that emerge between National Sport Federations and affiliates also need organisational responses (Toubiana et al., 2017).

Internal organisational complexity occurs over conflictive concerns and predilections (Toubiana et al., 2017). For National Sport Federations, internal complexity and conflict is related to their need to both increase sport participation and achieve elite performance (De Bosscher & Van Bottenburg, 2010; Hanstad & Skille, 2010). Challenges arising from this elite versus participation agenda can impact a National Sport Federation's legitimacy and effectiveness, and are at the core of organisational survival (Greenwood et al., 2011; Phillips & Newland, 2014; Washington & Patterson, 2011).

2.3. Organisational responses

Recent research has suggested that multiple logics may cohabit within an organisation for lengthy periods of time and this multiplicity of logics can impact the way in which an organisation responds to differing stakeholder demands (Besharov & Smith, 2014). As organisations experience different degrees of complexity they vary their responses to conflicting prescriptions, prioritising certain interests at the expense of others (Greenwood et al., 2011). It has been shown that organisational responses have important consequences for social legitimacy and access to resources critical for sustainability (Greenwood et al., 2011; Washington & Patterson, 2011; Winand et al., 2012).

Greenwood et al. (2011) suggested field-level and organisation-level factors could explain variation in how logics are enacted between different fields and organisations. However, Carlsson-Wall, Kraus, and Messner, 2016) argue that this does not explain variations within organisations whereby "the same set of logics may create tensions in some situations but not in others. . . [as logics are]. . . accorded different priorities in different situations" (p. 47–48). Similarly, in studying commercialised sport clubs in Europe, Gammelsæter (2010) identified seven co-existing logics which he suggested could: "create the potential for fragmented, incoherent, conflict ridden, and goal-ambiguous organisations, but pluralism also creates opportunities for organisations to meet expectations from various constituents simultaneously" (p.585).

In conceptualising how sport for development and peace organisations deal with multiple stakeholders and associated tensions, Svensson (2017) suggested four hybrid types for managing divergent demands: differentiated, separating distinct elements pertaining to different logics; symbolic, adopting some components of a logic into another one; integrated, dissimilar logics are combined to create a new one; dysfunctional, when contradictory logics make hybrid organising inoperative.

In relation to Swedish football, Carlsson-Wall et al. (2016) suggested that one way of dealing with competing logics was through producing 'concurrent visibility' through performance management systems. Their research found that "compatibility of logics varies not just between fields and organisations. . . but also between situations within an organisation. . . whereby. . . the same two logics may be experienced as either conflicting or compatible" (p. 57).

The presence of multi-level complexity has implications for governance (Gammelsæter, 2010), different ways of enacting logics through performance management (Carlsson-Wall et al., 2016) and the development of sustainable structures and processes (Svensson, 2017). In addition, Svensson (2017) argued that organisational hybridity can help National Sport Federations develop more sustainable structures and processes, and called for the use of longitudinal case studies to provide much needed empirical insights. We build on these efforts to date, examining institutional logics, complexity, and response decision-making within a National Sport Federation.

3. Method

A single case study approach was taken to generate a better understanding of institutional pressures and organisational responses to multi-level complexity (Yin, 2014). Case selection was made through theoretical sampling based on its potential for theory building (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Eisenhardt, 1989). Triathlon Australia selection met a combination of criteria. First, as an Olympic National Sport Federation, Triathlon Australia has access to all public funding programs and, consequently, to their associated governmental pressures and duties, such as mandatory annual reports that inform about responses to the government logic. Second, a strong and foundational commercial component (i.e., IronMan), along with the presence of elite and participation commercial stakeholders, generates significant non-government revenue and constitutes a third institutional logic – commercial logic. Third, the use of a hybrid model to govern their regional affiliates (i.e., State and Territory Triathlon Associations) that form the federation advises about Triathlon Australia's experience of interstitial complexity, the social logic requirements and the responses to it. Fourth, the achievement of world class competition results while growing its participation base provides useful data concerning Triathlon Australia's responses to possibly conflicting elite and participation agenda needs – internal complexity. Fifth, innovative practices to deliver their elite and participation agendas such as world championships that include recreation sport participants in the same event. Finally, publicly available and rich (e.g., insolvency periods and entrance to the Olympic program) data, as well as Triathlon Australia's short history (i.e., founded in 1989) enhances longitudinal investigation and theory building.
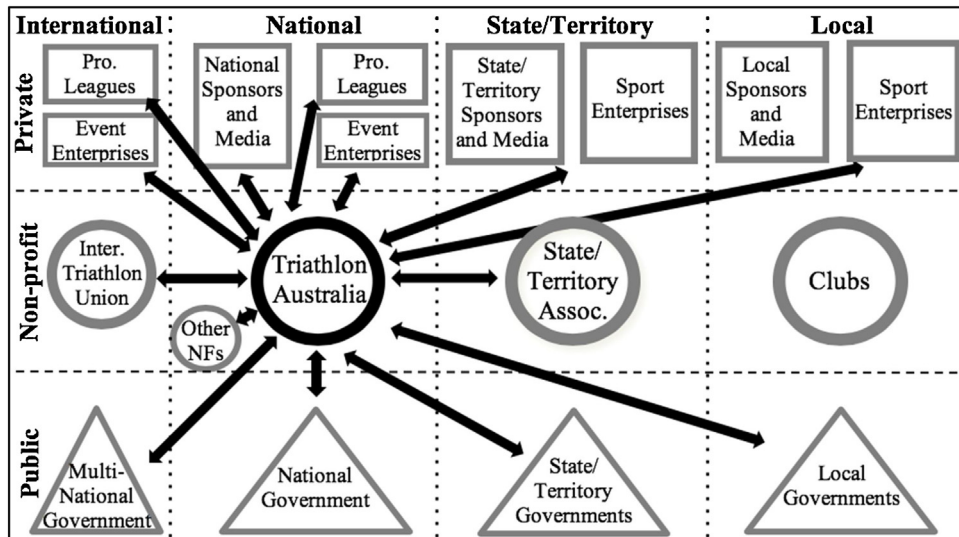
Fig. 1. Triathlon Australia's central position in the Australian sport system.

3.1. Organisational context

The sport of triathlon started to develop and formalise its operations in Australia in the early 1980s. Triathlon Australia was constituted in 1986. It is a federation composed by eight different State and Territory Triathlon Associations. Each association is a stand-alone affiliated organisation with their own legal status, board, and professional staff. They currently work together with Triathlon Australia as a 'one management' model. Australia is one of the most successful countries in triathlon internationally, with medals won in almost every major event in both men's and women's competitions. Membership has grown significantly, from 9755 members in 2010–2011 to 21,445 triathletes in 2014–2015 (Triathlon Australia, 2010b, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015a). Triathlon Australia's budget depends less on public funding than other Australian National Sport Federations (Australian Institute of Sport, 2015c). Dependency on Australian Institute of Sport funding dropped from 67% in 2014 to 47% in 2015 (Australian Institute of Sport, 2015c, 2015a). Triathlon Australia has a significant record in organising major events. It has hosted 88 world and continental events. It also has a strong presence in the International Triathlon Union (ITU) decision-making structures with one vice-president on the executive board, two honorary members and three Australians in ITU committees. The field position of Triathlon Australia within the Australian sport eco-system is represented in Fig. 1.

3.2. Sources of data

Data gathering techniques included collecting government and Triathlon Australia documents and data covering the period from 1998 to 2016 and conducting a series of in-depth interviews with key informants. Documents included: national government legislation and policies; Australian Olympic Committee policies; Triathlon Australia's annual reports, strategic plans, and job descriptions. The selected Triathlon Australia documents provided insights into the role of personnel in decision-making, historical records of board membership including its composition (gender, expertise, rationale provided for appointment), and the process of governance delivery and structural change. Eighteen interviews were conducted between 2016 and 2017 with key decision makers: 5 from the Australian Sports Commission[1], 4 from Australian Institute of Sport, 1 from Australian Olympic Committee, and 8 from Triathlon Australia (board members and senior managers).

The interview guide was based on the sources of complexity and responses to it identified by the literature and adapted to the role and organisation of the interviewees. Key informants gave their perspective about: dealing with a complex set of stakeholders (Winand et al., 2012), managing a federation (Toubiana et al., 2017), delivering a dual mission (De Bosscher & Van Bottenburg, 2010), strategy (Pache & Santos, 2010), structure, (Battilana & Dorado, 2010), organisational positioning (Greenwood et al., 2011), and identity (Kodeih & Greenwood, 2014).

The use of multiple data collection methods (e.g., semi-structured interviews, annual reports, government policy), allowed for methodological triangulation strengthening the reliability of a study's findings and conclusions (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 2014). Also, interviewees from different hierarchical ranks and functional areas was undertaken to prevent

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[1] Changed its name in 2018 to SportAUS.

convergent imprint management and/or retrospective sense-making (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The Australian Sports Commission, the Australian Institute of Sport, and the Australian Olympic Committee are drawn on to collect data on the external environment providing points of triangulation of information/perspectives.

3.3. Data analysis

The initial step in the case study data analysis involved chronologically arranging information extracted from the annual reports, strategic plans, and interviews data to identify patterns. Preliminary category analysis for both documents and interviews was inductively guided by open conceptual coding to identify first order themes. The next step was to search for relationships between and among the first order themes and combine those into second order themes (Table 1). Themes are supported with data from multiple data collection methods in order to mitigate the possibility of retrospective accounts (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010).

4. Findings

The timeline analysis highlights the critical positive and disruptive events that influenced Triathlon Australia's decision-making and (re)actions. These were: joining the Olympic programme (1995); debuting at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games; and facing insolvency on three occasions (2002, 2004, and 2010). Four themes – external complexity, interstitial complexity, internal complexity, and emotions; together with associated organisational responses' second order themes are discussed below.

4.1. Responses to external complexity

The presence of an array of commercial, social, and governmental *institutional logics* emerged as a key theme from both the document and interview analysis. These logics are differentiated by their distinct stakeholders and vocabulary (Table 2).

Triathlon Australia's responses to the complex and sometimes conflictive logic pressures encountered are classified as: (a) alignment, (b) diversification, (c) transcendence, and (d) negotiation. Each of the four classifications of responses is described in turn, with illustrative quotes and commentary.

4.1.1. Alignment

Triathlon Australia responded to their stakeholders through strategically planned generic and customised alignment. This was achieved by identifying common goals across partners/logics and addressing these together, or by isolating unique requirements and tailoring actions accordingly. As a senior manager of Triathlon Australia explained: The difficulty is reconciling the tension between the different stakeholders and ensuring that we are aligned in relation to a goal of ensuring that we're providing the best possible experience that we can for our members and participants. So, when you speak to the Australian Sports Commission, they share that goal. When you talk to the event directors, they likewise share that goal, and when you talk to our State and Territory Associations, and their boards, likewise that's a goal that they share.

Customised alignment connected different stakeholders and logics. For instance, Triathlon Australia worked together with a commercial partner (Ironman) to grow a common membership base of regular participants. This response has co-developed and the relationship has matured over time: "So the dialogue has probably changed in the last couple of years with Ironman as they start to appreciate that we're all in this together, and, again, growing the base is important for both of us" (Triathlon Australia board member).

Triathlon Australia recognised the need for a 'more professional' workforce and did so through board member and employee recruitment, aiming to achieve alignment between government pressures for efficiency and commercial

Table 1
Data structure.

First order themes	Second order themes
External Complexity	Alignment
	Diversification
	Transcendence
	Negotiation
Interstitial Complexity	Empathy
	Formalisation
	Collaboration
	Specialisation
Internal Complexity	Division
	Balance
	Leverage
Emotions	Connection
	Harness

Table 2
Triathlon Australia's field institutional logics.

	Commercial	Government	Social
Stakeholders	Event enterprises, sponsors, media	Australian Sports Commission, Australian Institute of Sport, State and local governments	State and territory associations, clubs, participants
Logic exclusive indicative vocabulary	De-risking, revenue, customers, monetising, service, third-party, retention, tracking, tailor, product, business, lobby, ecosystem, triple bottom line	Governance, reports, subsidising, programs, selection, world-class, officials, levels, standard, administration, informed decisions, model, unified, federated, national, pathways, profile, medal, enable, athletes	Giving back, life enrichment, passion, willing, embrace, community, people, joy, love, wellbeing, family, parents, contribution, essence, together, heart, life-long
Logic shared indicative vocabulary	*Commercial + Government* – Skill, stakeholders, CEO, professional, industry, expertise, management, duplication, inefficiency, international, strategy, expert		
	Government + Social – Partnership, volunteer, talent, reconcile, transparent, integrity, opportunity, health, development, vote, clubs, legacy, roles, championships, involvement, nationwide		
	Commercial + Social – Engage, fun, events, excited		
	All – Participation, membership, elite, age-groups		

demands for a business mindset. As a Triathlon Australia board member explained, the goal was to "ensure that we had the right people doing the right roles, and that meant going to market and getting the best possible people we could to maintain those roles".

4.1.2. Diversification

Strategic diversification through organising high-quality events facilitated common interests from the Australian Sports Commission, event companies, State and Territory Triathlon Associations, and event participants; and led to validation across logics. Customised diversification was targeted through an increase in membership growth. Triathlon Australia's membership increase strategy was achieved in conjunction with the Australian Sports Commission, event enterprises, and event participants, and partially addressed logic requirements.

Triathlon Australia developed specific agenda interventions in response to competing logics and to better achieve stakeholder legitimacy. For instance, when triathlon was confirmed as part of the Olympic program (1995), Triathlon Australia significantly increased funding for elite development. Triathlon Australia supported its high-performance athletes by developing a commercial professional race series in 1996. This provided a vehicle to meet the needs of the government (medals) and commercial (revenue) logics, while also realising public sport authorities and sponsor validation.

However, in 2002, an exodus of major sponsors together with the high production cost of the elite series led to loses of more than $95.000AUD. Simultaneously, private and public funding decreased after the 2000 Olympic Games, severely impacting Triathlon Australia's financial situation. In response, Triathlon Australia focused on its participation agenda and expanded its footprint around the country by outsourcing its event delivery to the private sector, while maintaining the focus on elite delivery to secure public funding and retain alignment with the government logic.

In recent years, the introduction of the Australian Government's 'Winning Edge'[2] policy (i.e., Australian elite support program) introduced further complexity by linking National Sport Federations' funding directly to high-performance results (Australian Institute of Sport, 2015a). Several interviewees from Triathlon Australia noted the challenge of financial sustainability in the face of government funding cuts if performance targets were not met. Nonetheless, Triathlon Australia decided not to expand its financial investment in high-performance – choosing instead to only expend the direct funding from the Australian Sports Commissions and the Australian Institute of Sport and reinvest the remaining funds in participation sport. To achieve financial autonomy from public authorities, Triathlon Australia focused on diversifying its revenue sources, "to future-proof the organisation... we need to go out to third parties and secure third-party finances ... still keeping one eye on the fact that the ASC [Australian Sports Commission] is... for all intents and purposes, our biggest sponsor and our only sponsor of our high-performance program" (Triathlon Australia board member).

Product diversification targeted specific customer segments. In conforming to its commercial logic, a board member explained: "If we're tracking participant numbers well, we're also data tracking what that's made up of. So, then we can start to make informed decisions around how we tailor our products. So, it's all part and parcel of becoming better equipped to tailor our offerings". Assisting with the event enterprise tasks by diversifying the sport offer has been beneficial for both parties:

I think the beauty of having a diversity of products is that there's a diversity of attractions for people too. So, you think, see things like your women's only events, and you see things like the Corporate Tri's [Triathlons]... things like that, all these different attraction points for people getting to the sport. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

Triathlon has also invested in duathlon (run, bike, and run), aquathlon (swim, run), and more recently the aquabike events (swim, bike). Varying distances and terrain are another source of product variety (e.g., cross triathlons). Triathlon Australia

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[2] Discontinued in 2018.

has implemented several participation programs to cater for diverse needs and population groups. Notably, their *Trystars* program is supported by both public and private funds. The Australian Sports Commission finances the program and it has its own sponsor and it has a club development component as the revenue generated is distributed to the clubs.

4.1.3. Transcendence

Triathlon Australia has also dealt with complexity through transcendence, which is, going beyond what was required. This is evident when addressing government requirements, in particular with the recruitment of a high-profile board and executive, and in implementing the 'one management' model. To maintain validation from the government, Triathlon Australia focused on transcending threshold government requirements for 'professionalising' the workforce and were strategically astute in ensuring key stakeholder involvement in this process. For example, in 2016 the Australian Institute of Sport Director was involved in the recruitment and selection of Triathlon Australia's CEO and High-Performance Director positions.

While public sport authorities directly intervened in Triathlon Australia's governance in response to its second insolvency episode (i.e., 2010), Triathlon Australia reacted swiftly to regain control of its agenda. Not only did Triathlon Australia implement all of the government's recommendations but they transcended what was required, by developing a whole of sport approach and establishing a 'one management' model. Triathlon Australia's hybrid approach with centralised services in a federated system was subsequently recognised as 'best practice' by the Australian Institute of Sport:This structure has been implemented by Triathlon Australia (TA) where stakeholders are genuinely committed to an improved organisation and there is strong alignment across all layers of the sport. The organisation demonstrates behaviours such as trust, transparency, integrity, collaboration, and recognition. Some of the results from the alignment at TA include: a collective targeted investment approach; shared services; one strategic plan for the sport; a more agile organisation; and a collaborative approach to budgeting where funding is allocated on merit to projects aligned with the highest whole of sport priorities (Australian Institute of Sport, 2015b, p. 9).

4.1.4. Negotiation

Triathlon Australia developed a national strategy for membership, its main non-public revenue source, through a deliberate negotiation strategy. Triathlon Australia relies on external companies to run their events, but it sanctions the races to ensure they are safe, fair, and that all participants (full member and one-day member) have insurance. Potential tension is evident in this situation as event companies want more operational freedom to increase participant numbers and, consequently, their profit. A value negotiation approach was taken to address this tension, with race promoters lowering registration price, but at the same time attracting more participants. Negotiation has also been used to reach compromises between commercial and social interests. The race calendar is an example of this:

> .. . when we're putting the calendar together for the year that we try not to go to a remote place, because obviously it's one thing to fly to Perth, if you then have to go from Perth then to Broome, then it's another cost as well, so, you know, we are trying to make sure that it is accessible for people.. . we also try and make our qualifying events for people who are going to the world championships, that there's enough in each State, so people don't have to travel interstate for those type of events. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

4.2. Responses to interstitial complexity

There is significant complexity in managing a federation and Triathlon Australia responded to this through a major structural realignment. The change involved, "a three-year project ['whole of sport'] for us to bring our [9] state associations much closer to us" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). This theme is comprised of five responses: (a) empathy, (b) formalisation, (c) collaboration, and (d) specialisation.

4.2.1. Empathy

Triathlon Australia has managed a complex set of stakeholders with empathy and trust via attentive and frequent listening, relationship building, and dialogue invitations. When developing the 'one management' structural change, Triathlon Australia listened carefully to its affiliated associations' needs through frequent consultative meetings. "It's just really understanding the stakeholders and what their requirements are and what they're trying to get out of it in order to facilitate decent conversations with people around those particular topics. So, I think it knows your audience" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). Listening is also recurrent:

> every month we have a national leadership team meeting and we all get in a room, we talk about the National issues. When I talk to some other sports they say that it's very difficult; they can't get people in a room; they can't get all the States to talk to each other. Whereas every month we sit there and go through National issues, every quarter we catch up face-to-face and sit in a room together and we have a listed agenda, we have an action plan, we have things we want to do on the strat [strategic] plan and the ops [operational] plan. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

Triathlon Australia invested in building personal relationships inside and outside of the federation to create trust and understanding. For instance, when developing the 'whole of sport' approach, a Triathlon Australia senior manager revealed

that the 'goodwill' of the State and Territory Triathlon Associations to execute this initiative was paramount, as was developing a good relationship to create trust among the State and Territory associations' board members. Triathlon Australia's CEO reinforced the importance of establishing relationships in her report for the 2010–2011 annual report:

> The establishment of relationships with our key stakeholder groups was a priority for me during the first six months. . . I travelled to each state, except NT, to meet the staff and board of the State and Territory Triathlon Associations. I also met with the Australian Olympic Committee, the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency, and the Australian Commonwealth Games Association to ensure productive ongoing relationships. Event organisers were invited to a meeting on 19 May 2011 to discuss a range of issues of relevance to them and to foster an ongoing sense of cooperation between the national association and the clubs and private event organisers who plan and conduct races (Triathlon Australia, 2011, p. 9).

The employee-board relationship was also crucial. "It's not easy. It takes time. It takes conversation. It is a drain on and sometimes it can feel like you're being drawn away from really your core business. But it is an essential part of managing the process" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). The efforts paid off, the Triathlon Australia board supported the proposed method and course of action and with the board backing the plan, the director felt empowered.

Triathlon Australia promoted relationship building and empathy development through dialogue with stakeholders. Notably invitations to 'listen and understand' were extended to key organisations when developing key strategies and important decision-making, such as Triathlon Australia's strategic plans and the 'whole of sport' initiative. Triathlon Australia actively consulted with numerous and varied stakeholders (e.g., Australian Sports Commission, event organisers), funding the cost of conference meeting travel and accommodation for all clubs, and making registration free for general public (see Triathlon Australia, 2010b, 2011, 2015a).

4.2.2. Formalisation

After the second insolvency period, Triathlon Australia introduced formalisation to manage the federation more efficiently and effectively. Triathlon Australia initially developed a formal strategic plan and the 'whole of sport' approach. To date, there have been two strategic plans: the *Strategic Plan 2010–2015* and *Our Strategy 2016–2019* (Triathlon Australia, 2010a, 2016b). The 2010–2015 strategic plan formalised the vision, mission, and values (see Table 3). It also established the following goals: (a) organisational excellence, with a focus on the 'whole of sport' national strategy, and financial and human resources sustainability; (b) increase participation, expand the number of opportunities to try the sport; (c) membership, grow and retain the member base; (d) events, increase the number and type of quality events through leadership and collaboration; (e) high-performance, sustain the elite results via an effective and efficient coach, and athlete pathway; and (f) brand, develop the brand to attract sponsors.

In 2015, Triathlon Australia launched a new strategic plan with a stronger corporate ethos (see Table 3). "We've got a national strategic plan, so every state is using one strategic plan, so that's made it easier. In the past they'd been state specific, so the one national strategy that you've read down gets used amongst every State" (Triathlon Australia senior manager).

Another formalising initiative was the aforementioned 'whole of sport' project, corresponding to an internal formalisation to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness, building a 'one management' model. This model, which standardised processes and structures, eliminated duplication between Triathlon Australia and the State and Territory Triathlon Associations, began to diffuse: "Increasingly, at an operational level, the language has included the term 'whole of sport'" (Triathlon Australia, 2013, p. 30). There were three facets to this plan: operational (e.g., events manual), management (e.g., budget) and, more recently, legal (e.g., moving towards a single organisation in a unified model).

4.2.3. Collaboration

Triathlon Australia established collaboration as a core response to the challenges arising from its stakeholders' requirements and this is reflected in its strategic plans. Internal collaborative efforts were undertaken with the State and Territory Triathlon Associations, and external collaboration with both the government and the private companies that organise triathlon races. This response was also built into Triathlon Australia's new structure. The 2010–2015 strategic plan included collaboration in two of their key result areas: 'organisational excellence' aiming "to build a sustainable and prosperous organisation by enabling innovation, collaboration, and excellence in the development of its assets"; and 'events'

Table 3
Triathlon Australia's strategic plans statements and content.

Strategic Plan 2010-2015	Strategic Plan 2016-2019
Vision: *To be the leading triathlon nation and grow the sport of Triathlon in Australia*	Triathlon Purpose: *To enrich the sporting landscape by issuing a unique challenge anyone can accept*
Mission: *To ensure the existence of quality participation opportunities and pathways within the sport of Triathlon in Australia*	Triathlon Australia Purpose: *To continuously grow, strengthen and connect the Triathlon family and every starting line in Australia*
Values: *Respect, health, enjoyment, belonging, achievement*	Values: *Respect, health, enjoyment, belonging, achievement, integrity*
Key results areas: *Participation, high-performance, organisational excellence, membership, events, brand*	Pillars: *Participation, elite, passion*
Other content: *Key objectives, key drivers, key strategies, key performance indicators*	Other content: *Focus areas (engagement, access, pathways), enablers (clubs, partnerships, organisation), key performance indicators*

"to ensure that opportunities exist at all levels to compete in events of the highest quality through leadership and collaboration" (Triathlon Australia, 2010a, p. 1).

The subsequent strategic plan (2016–2019) outlined the partnership enablers: "A sport of collaborative partnerships, enhancing value" (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 11). Triathlon Australia president emphasised the teamwork in the strategic plan development: "Our strategic plan was developed in collaboration with our State and Territory Boards (STTA's) and numerous stakeholders who have all played a role in formulating the plan which will guide our sport over the next three years" (Triathlon Australia, 2017, p. 6).

Internal collaboration represented an effort that was a substantial achievement. Triathlon Australia collaborated with State and Territory Triathlon Associations in the delivery of government programs. For instance, these organisations got together to include triathlon in the *Sporting Schools Program* (Triathlon Australia, 2015a). The CEO at the time described this collaborative mindset:

> I feel fortunate to work within one of the few sports where the board and presidents of the State associations see themselves contributing to something much larger than their own State or Territory. It is with a spirit of true collaboration that the presidents meet to discuss 'whole of sport' governance principles and in turn take these principles and concepts back to their STTA boards (Triathlon Australia, 2014, p. 9).

Another Triathlon Australia CEO noted, "behaviours and collaboration have made us the envy of many other sports" (Triathlon Australia Annual Report, 2017, p. 7):

> So, there's this real collaboration, we budget together, we prioritise together, we do our strat [strategic] plan together, we have the same strat [strategic] plan, operations plan, we're on the same accounting system... we're on the same IT system, we're halfway through storing our documents, a few hundred thousand documents, storing them in one spot, in the cloud. . . . So, that's amazing, other sports, no way, no way will they do that so, we have cooperation, a lot of it.

Internal collaboration also used persuasion to convince stakeholders, by demonstrating the added value of the common pathway. This was essential to maintain strategic trajectory. Persuasion has been studied as a means to allure actors into adopting a new logic (Tracey, 2016). Change to the board membership, either at national or state level, can create issues. This means that a lot of work, time, and energy go into convincing new board members of the importance of 'whole of sport' approach. A Triathlon Australia senior manager emphasised this issue:

> .. . our national behaviours are pretty well ingrained, but they are optional. So, one of the big issues that we'll always face within our sport is every year we could lose half of our board members on a rotational basis, because they come up every two years for voting . . . . Each year you could start off with Ground Hog Day [a situation in which a series of tedious events appear to be continually repeating], so you just spent a year talking to and influencing a bunch of people and then half those people next year could be changed and then you start again.

External collaboration with race promoters was outlined in Triathlon Australia's 2016–2019 strategic plan: "Use the National Calendar, State Series races, and ITU races to drive collaborative relationships with event organisers" (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 16). In 2014, Triathlon Australia and the newly formed Australian Professional Triathlon Race Directors Association signed a memorandum of understanding to optimise quality race delivery, aiming to "establish a basis for collaboration, consultation, and communication between the parties" (Triathlon Australia, 2015a, p. 42). Collaboration was embedded in Triathlon Australia's structure, and a Presidents' Committee, including presidents of all State and Territory Triathlon Associations and chaired by Triathlon Australia's president, was created to manage the 'whole of sport' initiative.

4.2.4. Specialisation

The National Sport Federation also responded to interstitial complexity through a specialisation process focused on board members and senior managers' skills and expertise. Since its inception, Triathlon Australia's board member composition, qualifications, experience, and background has changed to adapt to the challenges that the federation faced. In 2009, when Triathlon Australia was almost insolvent, substantial changes were made to the board. The Australian government intervened, disbanded the executive structure, and required a change from a state representative to skilled-based board and mandated a new board to be elected.

More recently, the board of directors has become more 'corporate-like', matching the skills and expertise of new board members and CEO with the current strategy, increasing the number of board members with accounting expertise, and appointing a CEO with experience in National Sport Federations and the Australian Sports Commission. The CEO was charged with re-organising Triathlon Australia after the financial collapse, developing the 2010–2015 strategic plan and progressing the 'whole of sport' agenda. The change in the board members profile was also represented in the job descriptions, where management or law skills were an essential requirement and past experience within triathlon was secondary (Triathlon Australia, 2015b). From 2016 onwards, new board entrants came from a legal background as the strategy's next step is to simplify the legal framework and reduce the number of board members in the sport.

In order to get the best people across Australia, Triathlon Australia now operates from various geographical locations. Within State and Territory Triathlon Associations the issue of specialisation is less straightforward. Employees "have roles that are made up of 10% membership, 10% participation, and 15% of this, 20% of that, so these people have to be experts across all sorts of fields" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). Triathlon Australia responded to these challenges via the 'one management' model:

> So, we have duplication, massive duplication, we have lack of alignment and we're unable to bring in skill sets. So, we have to have lots of generalists so, there's nine CEOs and we've got lots of general people that have to do lots of things so we

can't bring in skill sets like an example marketing person and then a digital expert, who can just be that amazing person in the digital space, we can't have that because no organisation's big enough to have that amazing digital person (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

4.3. Responses to internal complexity

Triathlon Australia manages two clearly defined agendas, developing elite and participation sport. An Australian Institute of Sport senior manager explains that the connection is good governance, as well- prepared National Sport Federations can develop both elite and participation. Triathlon Australia interviewees stressed the differences between these two affirming that high-performance is much more expensive and specific in terms of dedicated positions, tasks, and goals, and is the most important agenda: "it's the culture if that makes sense the culture was more as an organisation driven around high-performance" (Triathlon Australia senior manager).

Triathlon Australia has achieved success as a 'Winning Edge' foundation sport (i.e., among the top sports in elite results), performing above the expectations as measured on management and female Olympic results. Elite performance is seen as the "sexy side of the sport" (Triathlon Australia senior manager) and the main measure of organisational performance:

a very. . . funny dynamic happens in our sport, which is probably the same with other sports as well, we can be up in participation, we can be up in membership, we can be up in sponsorship, our race directors could be happy, everything could be going really, really well, but if our lead athletes aren't racing good, the sport's terrible.

The high-performance agenda is under pressure to deliver success. There is an expectation to have good results given the past top performances, the so-called 'golden era': "it is, kind of, hard for them because, you know, we've had such a big legacy in the sport of triathlon in Australia that, you know, it's very hard to keep those results replicated year-on-year" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). Albeit this high-performance priority, most interviewees stated the low conflict level when addressing distinct agenda requirements. Responding to these agendas encompassed: (1) division, (2) balance, and (3) leverage.

4.3.1. Division

Triathlon Australia's elite and participation operations have been segregated in terms of strategy, structure, and staff. The 2010–2015 strategic plan for Triathlon Australia separated high-performance and participation in two distinct key result areas, from a total of six. The current strategic plan kept these two agendas separate, reduced the total number from 6 to 3 and renamed them as 'pillars' (Triathlon Australia, 2010a, 2016b). Triathlon Australia's structure reflects this agenda separation. The high-performance component is highly specialised in that the team worked in what was described as a "silo . . . looking after this very pointy end of the sport" (Triathlon Australia senior manager). The elite and participation agendas are two different departments with almost no points of contact and are also physically separate. The high-performance department is mainly based at the Gold Coast hub, while the participation section is located at the Sydney headquarters. This agenda segregation created tension between elite and participation staff:

.. . the staff that work [*sic*] in participation, always feel that high-performance is more important, and that they get more money, and they get more profile. They get much more media. So, there's always this sense of, the people that work in participation, and membership, and events, are kind of, they don't feel, it's really hard to make them feel as valued as the high-performance people. But the high-performance staff are always grumbling. So, they, they high-performance staff never really feel like they've got enough resources to do what they need to do to win gold medals. And they have a sense, almost, of entitlement. That they're the people that are doing the important, high-profile work; and that, they need to keep every single dollar that's given to them. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

4.3.2. Balance

Triathlon Australia has sought to achieve balance in the development of both agendas through strategy, funding allocation, staff and board member background. Both agendas are represented equally in Triathlon Australia's strategic plans and the balance effort is highlighted:

These three purpose pillars [passion, participation, and performance] will guide, direct, and discipline our decision-making and our efforts as custodians of the sport of triathlon in Australia. They represent the balance we will require if we are to maintain the unique essence of triathlon at the heart of a thriving sporting ecosystem. They are the triple bottom line of our strategy for 2016–2019 (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 6).

Triathlon Australia has also tried to balance the agenda via funding allocation. As previously stated, Triathlon Australia is highly dependent on funding from the Australian government, which prioritises elite sport over participation. While Triathlon Australia has invested its own revenue in participation sport, the budget for elite is still much higher than for participation.

Most of Triathlon Australia's staff is dedicated to elite performance activities. However, when taking the State and Territory Triathlon Associations' professional workforce into consideration, the majority of employees are involved in participation. However, the central leadership roles reflect the 'importance' of high-performance management. For instance, the elite department has a *Director* title while the participation branch is headed by a *Manager* (Triathlon Australia, 2017).

Triathlon Australia's effort to balance the organisational agendas can also be seen in the board members background. Longitudinal data shows that this has shifted from an executive committee dominated by high-performance experience, to one more balanced between elite and participation, and, more recently, towards a majority of board members being active age-group participants. Still, as a Triathlon Australia senior manager pointed out, high-performance remains central to the organisation and the board as a whole is always very concerned with elite results.

4.3.3. Leverage

Triathlon Australia has leveraged differences between the elite and participation agendas through strategy, age groups, and events. Direct and indirect links between high-performance and participation sport have been embedded in the strategic plans to leverage the development of both agendas (see Table 4).

Age-groups provide the basis for Triathlon Australia to leverage elite and participation sport. Athletes compete nationally through a qualification system that allows the best to represent Australia, the same as elite competitors. Performance driven age-groups represented around 1000 of a total of 21,592 members (season 2015–2016) (Triathlon Australia, 2016a). These participants have a dedicated committee looking after their interests and a focused department with specialised staff to take care of all the logistics involved regarding their races. International age-groups results are highly valued by Triathlon Australia. For instance, Triathlon Australia's annual reports communicate podium classifications alongside with high-performance results as every age-group has medals and a world champion awarded by ITU.

Triathlon events combine and leverage elite and participation races. Events take place in the same place on the same weekend and this synergetic strategy acts to: (1) optimise financial resources, (2) concentrate the organising team and facilities, (3) reduce organising activities (e.g., road closures), (4) provide more race calendar weekend slots, (5) create additional sponsor opportunities, and (6) further connect the triathlon community. In addition, Triathlon Australia has focused on organising major international competitions to respond to the Australian geographical isolation, improving home competitions and reducing cost of sending their athletes abroad (Australian Sports Commission senior manager and Australian Institute of Sport senior manager). These international competitions are complemented with comprehensive participation of the performance age-groups, contributing for the financial sustainability of this strategic choice.

Leveraging events by connecting elite and participation has challenges. Event promoters delivering the races still need to make a profit. While adult age-groups are profitable, junior athletes, a major concern of elite development, are less so. Thus, Triathlon Australia relies on linking these age-groups to generate a cross-subsidy:

.. . membership service because you were servicing your members by putting on an opportunity for athletes to race. So, think the challenge in that space for the sport is to try and understand that dynamic. . . but I think also, that the State associations and the sport need to realise that junior racing. . . in Olympic distance, is not just about high-performance outcomes. It's about providing opportunities for athletes of that age to engage in the sport and then become members of the sport for life. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

4.4. Responses with emotions

More recently, the appearance of emotions is a notable feature of Triathlon Australia's organisational rhetoric and has been embedded it its communications. 'Passion' appeared 24 times in its last strategic plan. Two emotion related responses emerged from the data: (1) connection and (2) harness.

4.4.1. Connection

Triathlon Australia pointedly highlights the connective role of emotions: "to continuously grow, strengthen and connect the triathlon family and every starting line in Australia" (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 4). The 'passion' strategic pillar is

Table 4
Strategic leveraging direct and indirect links between elite and participation agendas.

Link	Exemplary quotes from Strategic Plans (SP)
Inspiration (indirect)	".. . that the performance of Australian triathletes at an elite level has a critical role to play in inspiring Australians of all shapes, sizes and ambitions to embrace triathlon and approach that first starting line" (2016-2019 SP)
Passion (indirect)	"We are a unified triathlon brand and community in Australia, anchored in a shared triathlon identity" (2016-2019 SP)
Age-groups (direct)	"A clearly defined pathway for performance focused age group athletes, including draft-legal options for sprint distance" (2016-2019 SP)
Clubs (direct)	"To create a culture of uncompromising success throughout the sport, supported by a world-class nationwide network of high-performance environments and facilities and pathway focused clubs" (2016-2019 SP)
Education (direct)	"Develop coaches and officials' education initiatives to better service all levels of the sport" (2010-2015 SP)
Events (direct)	"Use the National Calendar, State Series races and ITU races to drive collaborative relationships with event organizers" (2016-2019 SP)
Partnerships (direct)	"Use the purpose pillars of passion, participation and performance to build and execute a commercial partner engagement strategy" (2016-2019 SP)

described as: "everyone becomes part of the triathlon family, whether an elite athlete, an age group competitor, or a volunteer" (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 7). Triathlon Australia CEO noted that one of Triathlon Australia's aims is: "building and connecting the passion, allowing other people to experience the joys of the sport I fell in love with" (Triathlon Australia, 2016a, p. 7). He also explicated why he took up the job: "The answer for me is a simple one, 'passion', it's in my blood, and I wanted to give back to the sport that gave me so much, and excite as many people as possible to a triathlon start line" (Triathlon Australia Annual Report, 2016a, 2016b, p. 7).

This emotional bond of the sport also creates an organisational challenge. It drives a strong sense of entitlement among some stakeholders increasing the difficulty to address their requirements and, consequently, increasing complexity.

> So, there's a lot of competing needs and everyone thinks that their concern is the most important thing, that's got to be fixed. So, it doesn't matter how proactive or reactive you are to both issues across a range of stakeholders, whether it be within my organisation or with external stakeholders, or with clubs and members. Those people will all think that the thing they're coming to me about is the most important thing in the world and has to be addressed now, and I think that comes back to the passion in sport in Australia. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

4.4.2. Harness

Going beyond emotion as a connector, an Australian Olympic Committee senior executive suggested that, Triathlon Australia "could benefit from converting some of that passion into commercial opportunities, monetising that in ways that will then help feed participation programs and the elite programs: How is the million-dollar question?".

Triathlon Australia has harnessed its emotional bond, internally and externally. Within the organisation, emotions have been leveraged with staff, committee, and board members and it is perceived as a distinctive and important requisite in the sport sector workforce. According to a Triathlon Australia board member: "sports administration at any level is not a nine-to-five, Monday to Friday job, so if those people lacked the passion then they're going to get out of the sports industry pretty readily". In a recent job vacancy, the 'desirable' selection criteria was: "passion and commitment to the development of the sport" (Triathlon Australia, 2015b, p. 2).

Moreover, Triathlon Australia's next harnessing step is to expand through the use of volunteer specialists:

> How do we best employ volunteers? Because there's a whole host of specialist volunteers. . . So, you know, uni [university] students doing sports-related studies who would love to be involved in an Olympic sport like triathlon and would be very happy to do work for us on a volunteer basis to get the experience. (Triathlon Australia board member)

Triathlon Australia has harnessed staff affection and commitment, and located it within a specific objective: "Develop a whole of sport HR [Human Resources] strategy that creates employee passion, engagement and internal loyalty to our brand and values" (Triathlon Australia, 2016b, p. 17). Triathlon Australia has also harnessed the emotional link of highly skilled triathlon participants to establish and accelerate its the new Paralympic committee (Triathlon Australia, 2012). The commitment and dedication of its members is a consistent message throughout Triathlon Australia's annual reports. The following extract from 2012 is indicative of this allegiance to the organisation:

> These committees have provided an excellent means by which to bring together specialist expertise and resources from our membership. We have many talented and passionate members very willing to volunteer their time to further the goals and objectives of our sport (2012, p. 9).

In the 2015–2016 annual report, the CEO stated: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff at Triathlon Australia, who are small in numbers, but big on passion for the sport they work tirelessly toward in meeting our goals" (Triathlon Australia, 2016a, p. 7).

At board level, Triathlon Australia has appointed members with the combination of skillset, passion, and commitment. One of the 2006–2007 board candidates stressed that he had "plenty of demonstrated passion for triathlon" (Triathlon Australia, 2007, p. 23). Several Triathlon Australia's presidents and CEOs have valued passion and professional skills through their executive messages in the annual reports. One example came from the CEO report: "I see this skill and passion demonstrated in our regular board meetings" (Triathlon Australia, 2012, 2014, p. 9).

A focus on harnessing emotions may also lead to unintended consequences. Board members can be passionate about a particular component of the sport, as it resonates with their background or skillset, but not care about other organisational requirements:

> If you bring on someone who has a membership background, that's what they're passionate about. So, you'll tend to find a lot of workload comes out of that now, because those people want to leave their legacy in that area that they're passionate about, not so worried about the other issues, that's somebody else's specific skills. (Triathlon Australia senior manager)

5. Discussion and concluding comments

5.1. Responding to external complexity

The environmental turbulence faced by Triathlon Australia, including periods of insolvency, government intervention, and inclusion into the Olympic program, forced both radical and incremental changes to strategy; board composition and background; and organisational structure and processes; and it also led to a widening commercialisation of participation

sport. The hybrid organising and the inter-relationships between the three different logics in operation (i.e., commercial, social, and government) created different degrees of compatibility between logics. Dealing with a crisis situation (e.g., pending insolvency) coalesced tension and compatibility between logics.

Carlsson-Wall et al. (2016) found situation-specific behaviour was related to the sports or business performance of a football club. They also argued that non-linearity is typical for sports where the winners receive additional rewards. Likewise, we found that the (re)actions of Triathlon Australia were situational, whether this was to meet the demands of the commercial, social or government logics, or a combination thereof. Suitable responses can suppress complexity and leverage some of its aspects for organisational benefit (Toubiana et al., 2017). For example, the vertical and horizontal integration change in organisational structure necessitated by government demands and commercial imperatives were achieved by exploiting the passion that bound and motivated everyone together.

The way in which organisations respond to different demands has important consequences for their social legitimacy and access to critical resources, and in dealing with threats to their existence (Greenwood et al., 2011). As highlighted in this research, National Sport Federations have to deal with a complex array of tensions, challenges, and enablers which may require actions or compromises that favour one logic or another.

5.2. Responding to interstitial complexity

Triathlon Australia's response to interstitial complexity was to transition from a federated model, to a hybrid 'one management' model, through implementing a 'whole of sport' approach. Triathlon Australia actioned this through a sequence of responses (i.e., empathy / formalisation / collaboration / specialisation) that created the conditions for a voluntary, collaborative, and good-will based approach to developing common national behaviours that avoided duplication and improved efficiency and effectiveness, while still maintaining the autonomy of the affiliated associations. This strategy allowed Triathlon Australia to leverage complexity by integrating and differentiating processes (Toubiana et al., 2017) with its State and Territory Triathlon Associations.

5.3. Responding to internal complexity

The insolvency period related to its elite series pressured Triathlon Australia to invest in participation to address the commercial logic requirements while maintaining some elite focus to achieve the government logic approval. This shows that agenda pluralism can be an advantage in addressing different logic needs and in reorganising institutional settlements. It also demonstrates that an agenda is not necessarily connected to a specific institutional logic (Skirstad & Chelladurai, 2011).

Triathlon Australia utilised a diverse repertoire of strategic responses: divided the agendas' structure; balanced its funding and staff allocation, as well as its board background; partially integrated the agendas via the age-groups; and leveraged its events and multisport component, by reducing costs and increasing revenue. Despite the differences between the mission's embedded agendas, there is now a perceived low level of conflict.

5.4. Responding with emotions

The centrality of emotions in decision-making inductively emerged as a theme from the data, and most notably it was described by Triathlon Australia and numerous interviewees as 'passion'. Passion was positioned as the common link bringing together everyone in triathlon; and it was harnessed to attract highly skilled staff and board members and enhanced their commitment. This new 'passion framing' allowed for validation of the social logic. It also concurrently leveraged commercial and government logic attributes, resulting in having emotionally invested, committed, and skilled employees and directors (Mair, Martí, & Ventresca, 2012; Toubiana & Zietsma, 2017; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015).

5.5. Conclusion

The theoretical contributions extend knowledge on the location of complexity and responses to it. This study is among the first to examine multi-level complexity and responses. Most complexity studies have focused on institutional complexity as an external complexity, which occurs when conflictive requirements of several institutional field logics are at play (Greenwood et al., 2011; Ramus, Vaccaro, & Brusoni, 2017; Raynard, 2016). The findings of this investigation suggest the presence of other levels of complexity: interstitial level, when affiliated organisations within the federation present different interests from the main organisation; and internal complexity, when different organisational agendas have conflictive needs to be solved (Fig. 2).

This investigation has shown that environmental turbulence caused by critical events, including near insolvency and entrance into the Olympic program, necessitated an organisation specific response to an increasingly multi-level complexity (Ramus et al., 2017). We argued that multi-level complexity represents challenges to management and require appropriate responses to it. To date, literature has been silent about organisational responses to multi-level complexity. The responses incorporated centralising (cf. Besharov & Smith, 2014) and partially aligning agendas, models, and logics (cf. Ramus et al., 2017). Thus, the research findings revealed that the centralisation process amplified complexity but also created opportunities to address it by opening the available repertoire of creative and hybrid responses to retain legitimacy and access resources from external stakeholders, internal affiliates and to be successful in addressing its mission.
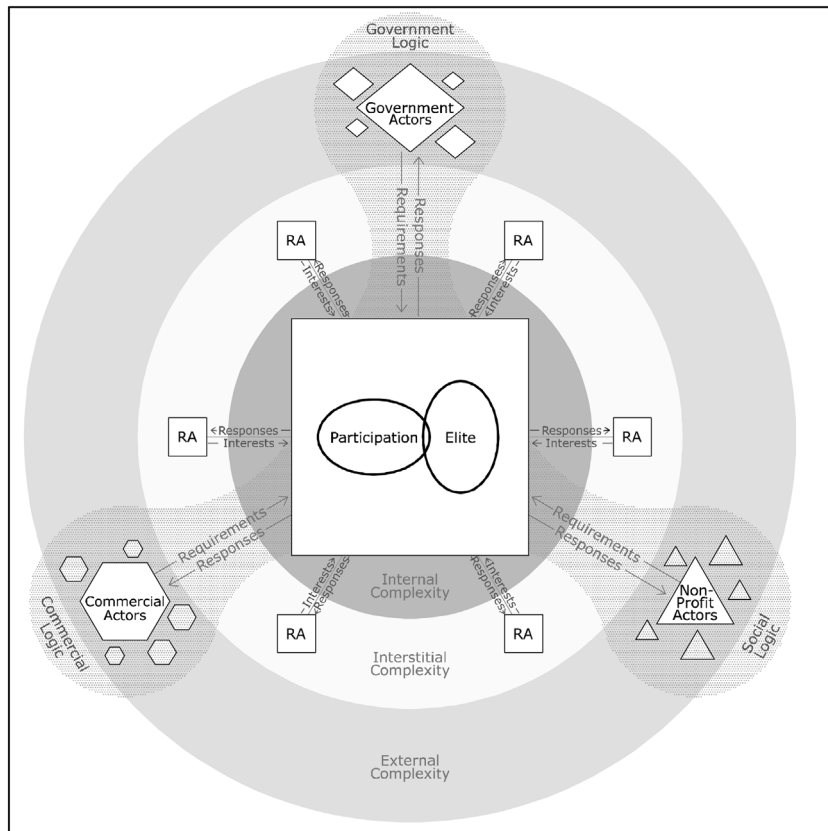
Fig. 2. Triathlon Australia's multi-level complexity.
RA: Regional Associations.

Practitioners can draw on evidence-based recommendations to manage multi-level complexity using hybrid and aligned responses. This study helps to better understand and manage the challenges resulting from navigating different logics, implementing hybrid governance models and developing participation and high-performance sport. It also provides insights about National Sport Federations stakeholders' requirements, their influence and organisational responses to these. The case analysis provided here may assist sport policy-makers, such as government authorities, through an acknowledgement of the complexity of policy effects on National Sport Federations' structure, processes, decision-making, and sustainability. Given the institutional pressures faced by National Sport Federations, understanding how they respond to stakeholder demands is crucial in adapting to ever-changing environments.

The use of a single case, and the associated country and cultural contexts, are acknowledged limitations of this study. The robustness of the longitudinal approach was restricted due to the lack of access to annual reports from the 1990s and associated board minutes. Future research might consider how to capture a broader set of data, in different sport and cultural contexts.

While this study did not specifically research organisational hybridity, we support Svensson's (2017) suggestion to empirically investigate whether organisational hybridity could help frame the development of sustainable structures and processes. Future research could also profitably examine how management controls such as incentive structures or performance management systems (Carlsson-Wall et al., 2016) are used to manage the co-existence of multiple institutional logics in sport organisations. Furthermore, as contemporary organisations, fields, and societies become more tangled and interdependent, research should move beyond examining the effects and responses to institutional complexity and focus on the bigger picture created by multi-level institutional complexity.

Acknowledgement

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