

Strategy as Practice: the case of Sport Club Corinthians Paulista

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The Purpose of the Paper

This work intention to describe the processes of strategy as social practice while carried by the strategists embeddedness in contexts socially constructed. For this it makes use of the *Sport Club Corinthians Paulista* case, a traditional Brazilian Sports Club, especially in professional soccer team, where the work describe its trajectory inside of the Brazilian Championship of Soccer during the period of top management club corruption crisis that ends with fall of soccer team from main division to second division of Brazilian Championship of Soccer (period between September and December of 2007), than its performance in second division and the return to the main division with a new top management team (period ends of 2007 and all year of 2008).

Thus, the center of this work describe and analyze the structural reality constructed socially by a crisis of corruption implanted through old controllers that affected the standards of institutional meanings and sunk the club in a financial crises. Hence, the work show how the power of agency of rooters influenced the process of deinstitutionalization and change of the corrupt practices and destitute of high direction to the choice and new practices of new controllers that had used his power of strategically agency in the direction to avoid the financial crisis continuity, to construct and to legitimize new practices that influenced satisfactory performance of the soccer team and the rescue of the institutional image of the organization in the presence of its rooters, sportive environment and society that the club is embedded showing the contextualization of the duality of structure and action.

Theoretical Background

The theoretical background starts with short presentation of 4 Strategic perspectives of Whittington (2002) with eminence in Systemic approach that send to theoretical argumentation to Strategy as Social Practice by actors (agency – Giddens 1984) embeddedness in structures socially constructed (structure – Giddens 1984) that by recursiveness practices, make explicit their day-by-day strategic actions guide and restricted by context of structural environment (WHITTINGTON 1992, 1996, 2002, 2006a and b; POZZEBON 2004; CRUBELLATE, GRAVE & MENDES 2004; JARZABKOWSKI 2003, 2004 and 2008; LOVERIDGE 2006; MACHADO-DA-SILVA & VISEU 2007).

This theoretical argumentation was structured in two conceptualizations:

- 1) *Theoretical presuppose of Structurationist Theory convergent to Strategy as Social Practices* - that argue, by Giddens (1984 and 1989), concepts of agency, structure, duality of structure and action, social action, capability of individual actions, structural properties beyond others definitions. Berger & Luckmann (1985) and Scott (2008) contribute with concepts of institutions, institutionalization and legitimacy. Machado-da-Silva, Fonseca & Crubellate (2005) supported by Emirbayer & Mische (1998) and DiMaggio & Powell (1983) define recursiveness and Jarzabkowski (2008) also contribute with Institutional Realm;
- 2) *Theoretical presuppose of Strategy as Social Practices* – where Whittington (1996), Jarzabkowski (2003 and 2004) e Pozzebon (2004) talk about agency capability of strategist and his influence under/over social and environmental context. Simon (1970), Greenwood & Hinings (1996) and Machado-da-Silva, Fonseca & Fernandes (1999) about bounded rationality, interpretative schemas and meanings resources, ceremonials process and symbols. Conceptualizations of Interactive Strategizing, Procedural Strategizing and Integrative Strategizing exposes in Jarzabkowski (2008). And, finally, process of Strategic changes, deinstitutionalization, bricolage and learning argued in Loveridge (2006) and Jarzabkowski (2004).

Methods of Analysis

In the methodology approach the research shape according like a description and case study by the means of exploratory and qualitative methods.

To Yin (2001) the case studies conformity with an extensive and empiric research strategy that investigates a contemporaneous phenomenon inside your context in real life, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context weren't clearly defined. Yin (2001) still explains that essence and main tendency of case studies is try to brighten a decision or a complex whole of decisions: the reason of all decisions was taken, how was implemented and with which results.

The documental/empirical research had like main sources of data secondary and longitudinal (period of analyses one and half year 07/2007 - 12/2008): 1) specialized soccer teams press like web pages and newspapers; 2) specialized radio and TV programs with routers and top management interviews of Corinthians team; 3) Corinthians club web page for data's

historical/trajectory facts, top management public declarations and others informations that contributed to case analysis in sequence of events and context.

Other tool used was structured interviews with a club counselor with seven meets throughout this period. The meets happened every time that the rooters and/or top management club team takes movements and decisions that impacted the circumstances and affected the club and the social environment involved.

The case descriptions obey periods of time with relevant happens of facts and events that had impact in the social context in club's environments.

For the argumentation explored per (YIN, 2001; WHITTINGTON, PETTIGREW & THOMAS, 2006; JARZABKOWSKI, 2008; and JARZABKOWSKI & WHITTINGTON, 2008) this study satisfies all methodologies requirements, mainly, because its primordial objective was the description of facts lined up to theoretical background, and not a inferential and prescriptive analysis if this or that fact, supported in this or that theory, provoked this or that result. Hence, incessantly, the researchers adopted, with extreme care, the choice of the data sources and the data to be told in the study taken a neutral position of data description and analysis always concerned to avoid bias, and being worried, also, with the allegiance of the language offered in data secondary vehicles.

Short Description of the Case

The Sport Club Corinthians Paulista is one of most traditional sport club in Brazil that was founded in 1910 in São Paulo downtown with strong English bias, have professional teams in all popular Brazilian sports practiced in Brazil with emphasis in professional soccer team that provide a main source of financial resources due the size of your rooter (one's biggest of brazil with more 25 millions of rooters) and they are named "*Fiel Torcida*" translated like "*Faithful Rooter*" that have great influence in club decisions.

The club had the same controllers (top management team) for last 14 years that in the ends of 2006 was discovered with corruptions acts against the club that dropped in deep financial and image crisis. This crisis affected all parts of club specially the credibility, the image and professional soccer team that down to the second division of Brazilian Championship of Soccer represented a great shame (in front of rival rooters teams and society) and sadness for your "*faithful rooters*".

Nevertheless, in the ends of 2007, the "*Fiel Torcida - Faithful Rooters*" start a strong movement to discharge the corrupter controllers, put in place a new top management team in command and support the soccer team to get back your position in main division of Championship.

The new top management team had, and still has, hard work to make a complete re-structuration of all departments into the club, to recuperate the image and financial health of club and, mainly, put the professional soccer team in main division of Brazilian Championship of Soccer, that happened in 2008 with the soccer team been champion in second division of Brazilian Championship of Soccer where the teams was leader of the championship from the

first to last round, with 4 rounds of antecedence and 20 games of invincibility. The principal recognition of rooters that said: “*Eu Voltei – O ano em que a fiel não abandonou o Corinthians*”; Translation: “*I am Back – The year that Faithful didn’t abandon the Corinthians*”.

In chronological order this work relate the club’s top management team decisions, actions, interactions, negotiations and contextualization to rescue the club that was embedded in a hard social context.

Main Findings and Contributions

This case study show the strategic actions of agents (president, directors, club associates and rooter) involved in the context and how they influence the construction of a club’s new structure.

The social environment was enclosure by actors’ interactions that influenced the virtual structure in the presence of an emergent social context that affected the significations patterns of organization (duality of structure – Giddens 1984) that appears line up with positive results while the year. For this, the club environment has institutional characteristics that change through the time passing across all process of practices legitimation to provide a dynamic durability to the institution.

The concepts of recursiveness (Machado-da-Silva, Fonseca & Crubellate 2005), Bricolage (Jarzabkowski 2004, 545) and process of strategical changes, deinstitutionalization and learning argued in Loveridge (2006) and Jarzabkowski (2004) fits perfectly in this case.

This case study presents, beyond the others, two main contributions: 1) the work research is realized in a different kind of organization, a sport club with different social expectations and characteristics of most commercial and productive enterprises; 2) show how the managers have to act for different social expectations and situations where the main focus isn’t only a financial objective, but recover the symbolism, signification, image and credibility of organization in front a society, and how, when and where the others actors (like rooters, sportive environment and society) influenced their decisions, sometimes this actors showed more power of influence in decisions than the top managers team.

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