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Case Study

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Green et al.

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Abstract

Nonprofit organizations have been a part of the US business economy since the late 1800s. Religious nonprofits have seen consistent growth in availability and services for the past several years. With that growth, there is increased competition. The purpose of this case study is to analyze International Sports Federation, a nonprofit organization, and provide recommendations for sustainable growth. Today's religion-focused organizations find themselves challenged in a disruptive climate. The result of this research is beneficial to scholars and practitioners, so that they can assist religious nonprofit organizations in gaining sustainable success under the lens of disruptive change in the marketplace.

Keywords: Nonprofit; International Sports Federation; Global sports initiative; Missions; Change management; Case study; Disruption.

1. INTRODUCTION

Which charitable organization would you choose to donate your money or time? Now stop to think about why you chose them. Was it because you are familiar with their work, believe in their business strategy, admire their culture or have volunteered with them in the past? Most likely the organization you chose is established as a nonprofit organization. A nonprofit organization is defined by the Social Economy Network as a group that is "organized under state law for purposes other than generating profit for its members or officers" (Nonprofit Organizations, 2018). The Urban Institute states that there have been "more than 30 types of tax-exempt nonprofit organizations" and that they are categorized by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) as public charities, which "encompass arts, education, health care, human services, and other types of organizations to which donors can make tax-deductible donations" (Pettijohn, 2013). In 2015, there were more than 1.5 million registered, tax exempt organizations in the United States, with greater than one million being public charities (The Foundation Center, 2013). Despite the donation growth, resources are limited, and nonprofits compete for donations with other nonprofits and for-profit organizations venturing into social enterprise through established foundations.

International Sports Federation (ISF) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established to send sports and medical teams out internationally to develop relationships, to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, and to distribute Bibles. Their home office is established in Acworth, Georgia and another global office recently opened in London, England. The staff members, currently number 14, and all collect their own financial support to serve at ISF through donations and fundraising. ISF services range from facilitating Vacation Bible Schools in orphanages abroad, to providing recreational opportunities at medical clinics, to operating sports camps and clinics. ISF competes with organizations such as Sports Outreach Institute and Youth Missions

International for monetary donations and volunteers (International Sports Federation, 2020). This case study will help determine ways for ISF to garner attention and strategically steer philanthropy now and in the future. In addition, it will examine growth and support situations impacting global sports initiatives through the strategic analysis of International Sports Federation.

1.1. Review of Literature

Disruptive change impacts all types of organizations including religious nonprofits. Research shows that nonprofits are essential to the quality of life in our communities. When nonprofits were formed, they were a disruptive innovation in the business world. Disruptive innovation is defined by Harvard Business School professor and author, Clayton Christensen, as involving “radically new business models and working methods” (Meeting the Challenge of Disruptive Change, 66–76). The theory of disruptive innovation is explained by Christensen as one where “a smaller company with fewer resources can unseat an established, successful business by targeting segments of the market that have been neglected by the incumbent, typically because it is focusing on more profitable areas. As the larger business concentrates on improving products and services for its most demanding customers, the small company is gaining a foothold at the bottom end of the market or tapping a new market the incumbent had failed to notice” (Hutt, 2016).

Winand *et al.* (2016) found that nonprofit organizations in the sport sector, such as sport clubs and sport federations, face many challenges in competing for membership and resources, such as donations, grants, facilities, and volunteers. The sporting industry has long been considered a competitive market where being innovative and proactive, along with favoring risk and creating value are inherent to success. Competitive pressures surround non-profit sport organizations (NPSOs), and this accentuates the necessity to differentiate these organizations from commercial sport providers. These organizations must mobilize resources, knowledge, and skills to implement new ideas, innovate, and use disruptive innovation for success. Results from the authors’ study suggest that the size of the organization and categories of sport influence preferences in knowledge creation/appropriation, and type of innovation created. Results also suggest that sport federations are driven by demands by members in meeting their expectations of new services and are not risk averse. Sport federations surveyed have a positive attitude toward newness that favors innovativeness, and managers must realize the importance of an attitude of innovation.

Hwang and Christensen (2008) discovered that disruptive innovation has made many products and services affordable and convenient for consumers in a variety of industries. The theory of disruptive innovation helps explain how complicated, expensive products and services become simple and affordable ones. Christensen (1997) is considered the seminal author on disruptive innovation and concluded in his initial findings that incumbent firms almost always stumble over disruptive types of innovation. According to the Christensen Institute (2020), disruptive innovation theory is defined as “the theory that explains the phenomenon by which an innovation transforms an existing market or sector by introducing simplicity, convenience, accessibility, and affordability where complication and high cost are the status quo. Initially, a disruptive innovation is formed in a niche market that may appear unattractive or inconsequential to industry incumbents, but eventually the new product or idea completely redefines the industry” (para. 1).

Christensen *et al.* (2015) further consider disruption as a process in which a smaller company with fewer resources can successfully challenge established incumbent businesses. Christensen and Raynor (2003) found that the term disruption typically means two things—it can be used as shorthand for disruptive innovation. Then, when used as “a disruption,” it refers to a specific type of innovation (para. 2).

2. METHOD(S)

This case study employs qualitative research as an exploration of the International Sports Federation, using this technique as a real-life model. Additionally, PESTLE, SWOT, and Competitive Analysis were used to determine ISF’s competitive environment in the field of sports missions. PESTLE and SWOT focused on various external macro-environmental influences affecting nonprofit sports missions, while the goal of a Competitive Analysis was to determine competitor strategies. The following sections present the data gathered on the call, a Competitive Analysis, as well as results from the SWOT and PESTLE tools outlining the current opportunities and challenges. In summary, the study team conducted a phone

interview with the CEO of the International Sports Federation to gather specific information related to the case study.

2.1. Organizational Background

ISF's shared vision is "Changing the World Through Sports." International Sports Federation is a faith-based organization with roots in the Southern Baptist denomination. The vision of establishing the International Sports Federation was brought to life during a lunch between a missionary on furlough from Madagascar, Dr. Fred Sorrells, and a Fellowship of Christian Athletes staff member, Cheryl Wolfinger. Dr. Sorrells mentioned that the mission field had a need for sports to connect with the locals. ISF was officially voted into establishment on June 4, 1993, in the basement of Park Cities Baptist Church by board member Dr. Ward Walker. On that day, Cheryl Wolfinger was named chief executive director and she has been leading ISF's outreach efforts for more than 20 years. The primary focus of a nonprofit is to serve the public through goods and/or services. Salaries for employees of nonprofits are generally lower, and organizations operate mostly on volunteers, because of the main source of income coming from donations. The Boys and Girls Club, American Heart Association, American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, American Red Cross, and National Council of YMCAs of the USA are all nonprofits.

This situation can be a bit overwhelming when one considers the vast number of nonprofits competing for the limited amount of monetary and human resources available. Harvard Business Review wrote that nonprofits now also compete with some for-profit companies providing social services. The article states "nonprofits are now forced to reexamine their reasons for existing in light of a market that rewards discipline and performance and emphasizes organizational capacity rather than for-profit or nonprofit status and mission" (The New Landscape for Nonprofits, HBR). Here is where we reach the crux of the matter. An increase in the number of nonprofits has made it difficult for some organizations to thrive due to limited resources. Competition for donations calls for change in the way that some nonprofits approach their business strategy. If they do not participate in disruptive innovation, then they need to engage in sustaining innovation.

ISF's organizational structure leans more toward a hierarchical arrangement, with the CEO, Cheryl Wolfinger, and the board having ultimate decision-making authority. However, there are coordinators assigned to different initiatives and living in international locations. It is easy to assume that these international coordinators have some autonomy and decision-making authority, based from their knowledge and expertise.

Larson and Gray (2019) defined organizational culture as "the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, beliefs, institutions, and other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or country. ISF culture can be described as conservative, faith-based, and Christian missioned-focused (Sportsmission.com, 2019). In this capacity, likeminded volunteers donate time or money. The staff is clearly committed to ISF's cause because staff members must raise their own financial support to serve with this organization (Sportsmission.com, 2019).

ISF believes that playing sports enables volunteers to establish relationships with participants and then share their faith. In part, ISF works as a liaison between the missionaries, churches, governments, and other individuals requesting volunteers, and the volunteers themselves. ISF works to help connect the people willing to give their time and spend their money with the groups that have the most pressing needs. Since their inception, the ISF ministry has worked with the International Mission Board missionaries in more than 40 countries on six continents and has sent more than 10,000 volunteers to over 126 countries.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this research, a PESTLE analysis was used to determine ISF's competitive environment in the field of sport's missions. According to Yüksel (2012), the PESTLE analysis focuses on the political, economic, socio-cultural, legal, and environmental factors in the external macro-environment. This tool is also important to help spot opportunities and warn of potential threats. It helps organizations determine the direction of change in the business environment and to shape an organization's direction to work with change. It assists

Table 1. PESTLE Analysis of the International Sports Federation.

Political	Economic	Sociocultural	Technological	Legal	Environmental
Government tax codes impact the way people give.	ISF CEO believes economics impact volunteers more directly than ISF operations.	ISF supporters are excited to be involved and fund missions.	Technology has a positive impact on the organization's ability to connect with people around the globe.	Banks are reluctant to work with nonprofits due to legal liability if the nonprofit is unethical.	The ecological footprint of ISF sporting events is low by offering camps in local environments.
Geo-political unrest causes hesitancy when ISF determines volunteer opportunities.	Donation increase in the fall when summer participants frequently become fall donors.	US posture on social factors such as immigration, lifestyle, and social conventions create tense conversation with those outside the country.	Social media has made it easier to promote upcoming missions and share stories.	There are local, legal restraints on what can be brought into a community.	Natural disasters create opportunities for ISF volunteers to identify areas where people are in need of their services.
ISF does not see corruption within industry but faces political corruption and bureaucracy when dealing with other countries.	This is a stable/growing nonprofit sector. ISF has experienced positive fundraising efforts.	Some cultures consider sporting events a "big business activity, while others view it as recreational" (Morang <i>et al.</i> , 2017).	ISF is dependent on a third-party application to help them manage missions.		Organizers and volunteers are exposed to unregulated environments creating potential medical and health risks.

with avoiding starting projects that are likely to fail and objectively view market opportunities. Table 1 provides the PESTLE analysis performed on ISF by the authors.

Political: ISF is impacted by geopolitical unrest in host countries. These factors cause hesitancy and increased caution when determining where to send teams abroad. An article in *Christianity Today* discussed how a mission to Nicaragua was canceled due to fear that volunteers would be in danger. The author of the article, Lee wrote, "ministry leaders canceled the summer programming last month since recent political unrest—the worst in the Central American country since the 1980s—could endanger visitors. Already an estimated 200 people have been killed this spring as Nicaraguans take to the streets to protest the current administration, led by President Daniel Ortega" (Lee, 2018). ISF as an organization does not see corruption within the industry but faces political corruption and bureaucracy when dealing with other countries.

Economic: ISF CEO, Cheryl Wolfinger, does not believe economics have an impact on the operations of the company, though it may affect volunteers. Currently, the economy is strong, and people have more disposable income. In a telephone interview, Wolfinger stated, "donors are faithful in giving and support." According to Nonprofitsource.com, "overall revenue from online fundraising grew by 23% in 2017 and international nonprofits raised the most, \$4.11 per visitor" (2018 online giving statistics, trends & data: the ultimate list of giving stats, 2018). When asked about the organizations' role in the growth of the industry,

she felt the ISF represents a group of frugal people who run a small, respectable ministry. The integrity of their ministry is worth the donor's investment. Some seasonal factors play a role in growth with a peak in giving in the fall. Typically, after the summer is over, volunteers become donors in the fall.

Social: Many people agree that through sports, youth learn sportsmanship, values, and skills that will prepare them for their future. Attitudes and beliefs about sports, missions, religion, etc., have impacted the organization in a positive way. Those who support the effort appreciate the value of sending American students abroad to work in a mission that uses sports to build relationships. Considering local views of recreational sports, some cultures may consider sporting events a "big business activity, while others view it as recreational" (Morang *et al.*, 2017). The organization experiences some negative social impact because of assumptions regarding US posture on social factors such as immigration, lifestyle trends, and social conventions. These assumptions create tense conversation and raise questions from those outside the country. Once leaders and volunteers with the organization have an opportunity to interact one-on-one, all hesitancy is dispelled.

Technology: Advances in technology and communication positively impact ISF. The ability to use Face-time has helped connect with kids across the globe. It opens the door for staff to answer questions and enables virtual relationship building. Technology has also made it easier to promote upcoming projects and share individual stories using social media platforms such as Facebook. ISF is also dependent on a third-party application called egiving.com to help them manage missions.

Legal: Each country ISF works in has specific laws about the amount of cash teams can bring into the country, as well as supplies and equipment. Typically, ISF sends a prep team to set things up in the host country. At times, they send resources in as well. They must find creative ways to get funds and resources to those in need. Local governments in host countries will intervene and seize money and goods for themselves. After 9/11, many regulations changed including parameters around wiring money. These changes make it difficult to find banks willing to work with international charities working in higher risk areas.

Environmental: The environmental footprint of ISF's sporting events is typically low. They offer camps in participant's existing locations so typically there are not ecological impacts related to building stadiums or large, additional energy demands. On the opposite end of the spectrum, organizers and volunteers are often exposed to unregulated environments in the host country.

As seen in PESTLE, ISF donations are directly impacted by government policies and political unrest. Recent changes in the tax policy have made donors uneasy and soon ISF could face potential financial burdens through the loss of donations.

Additionally, a Competitive Analysis was performed on ISF and its competitors by the authors. A comparison table was used and is a traditional method for presenting the competitor analysis and is used for comparison of key elements. ISF needs to begin thinking in the long term, as they position their organization against competition. These critical elements were identified and used for comparison between International Sports Federation, Youth Missions International, and Sports Outreach and are presented in Table 2.

Table 3 represents the researchers' SWOT analysis of the International Sports Federation, Youth Missions International, and Sports Outreach. A SWOT analysis examines the internal organizational factors of strengths and weaknesses. SWOT also examines the external organizational factors of opportunities and threats. Using internal and external data for organizations, a SWOT analysis can indicate where the organization can improve internally, along with providing information for developing strategic plans.

3.1. Strategic Implications

Nonprofit organizations can benefit from understanding the ramification of disruptive change on their organization. This research contributes to management literature concerned with the management function of planning and planning as a strategic imperative. The following strategic implications were observed:

3.1.1. Nonprofits Should Conduct Strategic Analysis before Going into Foreign Countries

Organizations, such as the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (n.d.), strategically plan its global initiatives to deal with the changing humanitarian needs. The OCHA Strategic Plan 2014-2017 presents OCHA's vision, overarching goals and strategic objectives and a related Management Plan explains how OCHA will strengthen its operations to deliver against this plan. This is an example of how organizations benefit from management planning. Throughout this case study, ISF does not evaluate

Table 2. Competitive Analysis of International Sports Federation.

Critical Elements	International Sports Federation	Youth Missions International (Industry Competitor)	Sports Outreach (Industry Competitor)
Unique Selling Proposition	Christian Mission Opportunities	Christian Mission Opportunities	Christian Mission Opportunities
Value to Stakeholders	Final customers/stakeholders are the recipients of the outreach project. Better market positioning would increase potential impact.	Final customers/stakeholders are the participants in the outreach training programs/missions and the participants in the camps.	Final customers/stakeholders are the participants in the outreach missions and the participants in the camps.
Positioning Market	Low, Value Driven, Budget Option	Middle	Top
Marketing Mix Product	Variety of mission outreach options.	Variety of mission and training options.	Variety of mission and training options.
Price	\$900 + airfare start	\$649—includes airfare	Prices not available online
Place	International	Local and International	Local and International
Promotion	Website, Word of Mouth (WOM), Alumni, Social Media	Website, WOM, Church sponsorship/promo, Social Media	Website, WOM, Church sponsorship/promo, Social Media, Sponsors, Business Partners, Ministry Partners

Table 3. SWOT Analysis.

	International Sports Federation	Youth Missions International (Industry Competitor)	Sports Outreach (Industry Competitor)
Strengths	Strong mission statement, smaller organization/less politics, networked with larger organizations, strong following via social media, financially supportive and loyal alumni.	Excellent online accessibility, clear organizational vision, easy accessibility and ability to donate online, clear communication about programs and services available, heavy social media presence, clarity of services offered, financial transparency.	Historically involved in ministry, strong online, media, and social media presence, established offices in several countries, more accountability with large governing board of directors, apparent gender equality in governing board, online services allow for easy applications and donations, strong partners and sponsors, financial transparency.

(Continued)

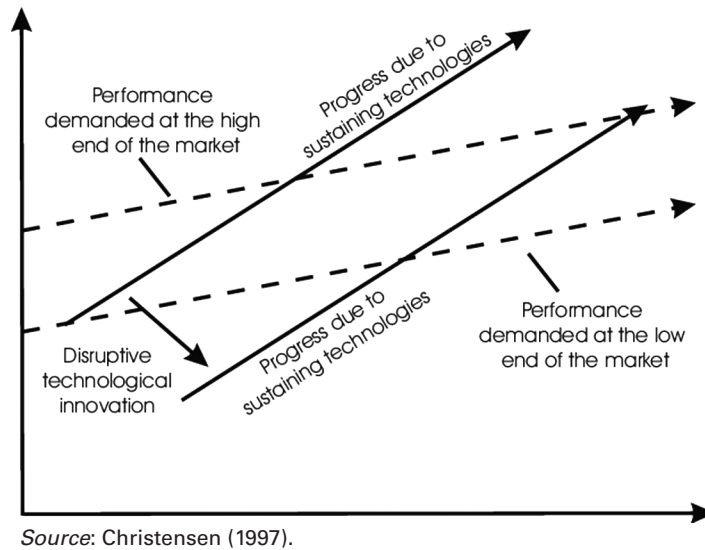
Table 3. (Continued)

	International Sports Federation	Youth Missions International (Industry Competitor)	Sports Outreach (Industry Competitor)
Weaknesses	Too reliant on small donations, unable to apply for federal grants due to religious affiliation, small organization in competitive environment, impacted by tax laws, poor positioning and placement, website offers religious viewpoint but lacks essential information, difficult to donate, small staff, no clear financial transparency.	Faith-based organization, unable to receive grants, mediocre following on social media platforms, website lacking historical information.	Small global presence, unclear historical information, participants face ambiguity in benefits of choosing this organization over competition, unclear about denomination.
Opportunities	Work in conjunction with OBU, increasing visibility and awareness among potential volunteers and donors. Increase summer camp opportunities and volunteerism at large big sporting events.	Expand audience, work on increasing partnerships, and add volunteer sporting events internationally (e.g., World Cup, Olympics).	Add the history of the organization and impact numbers to website, include more than "testimonial" stories.
Threats	Politics: Policy changes. Unstable environments in different countries; environmentally and politically. For example, Somalia, Kenya. Other organizations offering same services.	Other organizations offering same services and established. Other countries not welcoming Christian-based group.	Competition against similar organizations (offering same services) but with clear denominational affiliation. They offer services in highly dangerous countries. Political corruption is a big risk.
Overall impressions of market	This organization would not be considered a leader in the nonprofit field of sports mission/ministry. It lacks clarity in quality information, no real financial transparency, and small social media following (1,500+ followers).	This organization would be a middle-of-the-pack organization in the nonprofit field of sports mission/ministry with the professional communications and modest social media following (2,200+ followers).	This organization would be a leader in the nonprofit field of sports mission/ministry with the professional communications, financial transparency, high ranking in a Google search (fourth), marketing, and strong social media following (5,700+ followers).

disruptive change but could benefit from sustaining innovation. Sustaining innovation is defined by authors Palmer *et al.*, as innovation to "improve business planning to symbolize a shift in thinking, it is also when an organization decides to 'tighten up on documentation, reporting and controls'" (2017, 143).

Volunteers and donors choose to support nonprofits through their time and resources for a variety of reasons. Bijetri Bose studies the effects of nonprofit competition on charitable donations. In his case study, he determined that "nonprofit competition is an important determinant of charitable donations," (Bose, n.d.). The competitive analysis of three similar nonprofit organizations provides comparative information

Figure 1. The Impact of Sustaining and Disruptive Technological Change: The Theory of Disruptive Innovation.



and detailed recommendations to more competitively promote International Sports Federation. The analysis showed that currently ISF would not be considered a leader in the nonprofit field of sports mission/ministry. The online information available lacked clarity in quality information and financial transparency. ISF becoming technologically advanced would serve as a sustaining innovation.

3.1.2. Market Needs Versus Technology Improvement

According to Christensen (1997), technologies often move faster than demand for them. This is illustrated in Figure 1. In supplier efforts to provide better products than their competitors and earn higher prices and earn profits, suppliers may miss and overshoot their markets. This means that they may give their customers more than they expected or are willing to pay for the product or service. This also means that disruptive technologies may not perform to expectations today, relative to what consumers expect, and then in the market may full satisfy consumer expectations.

4. CONCLUSION

Nonprofit organizations have been a part of the US business economy since the late 1800s. Religious nonprofits have seen consistent growth in availability and services for the past several years. With that growth, there is increased competition. There has been a significant growth in nonprofits. International Sports Federation faces competition for limited resources, and their strategic position is not as strong as similar competitors within this niche environment. Nonprofit Pro summarizes the importance of having a well-established position in the market, "everyone likes a winner, and it's only human nature to want to give dollars to organizations that are going to grow and increase in influence and the ability to deliver on their mission" (Fulton and VanHuss, 2018). The purpose of this case study was to analyze International Sports Federation, a nonprofit organization, and to provide recommendations for sustainable growth. Today's religious-focused organizations find themselves challenged in a disruptive climate. The result of this research is beneficial to scholars and practitioners so that they can assist religious, nonprofit organizations gaining sustainable success under the lens of disruptive change in the marketplace.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed equally to this case study.

Conflict of Interest

None.

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