Documenting Nonprofit Governance in Voluntary Associations

A research to practice summary of: Irimia R, Gottschling M (2016) Taxonomic revision of Rochefort Sw. (Ehretiaceae, Boraginales). Biodiversity Data Journal 4

Summary: This paper analyzes governance problems in voluntary associations, particularly focusing on growing associations that were founded as grassroots organizations. This study reports on 5 Swiss patient organizations and describes 5 challenges in different target groups. Data collection consisted of a case study analyzing Swiss patient organizations and a sample of 25 interviews (from association president, managing director, employees, volunteers, members and internal/external stakeholders) were conducted by Karin Kreutzer and one other interviewer. This study offers two life cycle stages: an internal focus on members and an external focus providing services to nonmembers.

Who can benefit from this research: This research is beneficial to any association who faces governance challenges between managers and board members and are transitioning from an orientation toward the inside to an orientation toward the outside of the organization.

What are the primary findings:

- Five patient organizations grew they underwent a transition from an orientation toward the inside to an orientation toward the outside.
- Voluntary/membership associations have the capacity to offer services or products exclusively for their members. As transition came, they began to offer services to non-members which negatively caused them to grow in size and importance. Resulting in complications for the nonprofit—not being able to meet all the needs for the amount of people they were serving.
- Due to expansion of external orientation, board members faced challenges with governing new recruitment and selection. And board members were implemented in order to deal with external challenges. The role of board members changed from representing member interest to balancing the stakeholders needs due to the increase in size of the nonprofit community.
- Transparency had not been an issue in the early stages of the organization but became a challenge of keeping the stakeholders updated on the distribution of their donated funds.
- Though the nonprofit that were sampled were all different they all shared the same developmental path and were faced with the same challenges.
- Finally, there was no connection between organizational transition from an internal orientation to external and the study was unable to distinguish if the organization was dominated by its CEO or by the board.

What type of organization or mission might make the most use of this research:

- This research would be useful for nonprofits who have a health focus and offer select services. These organizations were transitioning from an internal orientation to external
therefore, this could be used with any organization that will be going through the same transition.

**When would this research be useful:** This research would be most useful for organizations with any upcoming changes in their future.

**How does this research inform practice:**

- In this article the researchers have shown the governance challenges of voluntary associations during organizational transition. This study proves that managers and board members must pay attention to their members and manage the transition, very carefully, in order to maintain the organization’s effectiveness.

- These types of studies help nonprofits prepare for organizational transitions such as moving from an internal orientation to an external one.

**Keywords:** Internal Orientation, External Orientation; transition process, nonprofit governance, life cycle