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Managing interorganisational links in sporting goods industries - the case of sailing clusters

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Introduction Manufacturers of sailing equipment tend to be co-located in clusters (Chetty, 2004; Gerke & Benson-Rea, 2012; Glass & Hayward, 2001; Sarvan et al., 2012). Location-specific factors attract these firms and other sport cluster stakeholders (e.g., service providers, specialised media, professional sport). Co-located universities and governing bodies can become stakeholders of sailing clusters after discovering the economic impact and innovation potential of the co-located firms (Gerke, Desbordes, & Dickson, 2014). The interorganisational setting of sailing clusters requires firms to develop strategies determining interaction with their environment (Warren, 1967).

Research Topic This study investigates behavioural strategies of sporting goods firms. The empirical contexts are the bilateral relationships and multilateral networks in sailing clusters. The theoretical framework considers the traditional interorganisational behaviours observed in clusters - competition, cooperation, and coopetition - but emphasises positive interorganisational behaviours - collaboration and citizenship behaviour (Gerke et al., 2014; Shilbury, 2000). Review of Literature Interorganisational citizenship behaviour (ICB) are discretionary behavioural tactics, enacted by boundary personnel, and not explicitly included in formal agreements that promote the overall functioning of an interorganisational network (Autry, Skinner, & Lamb, 2008). Collaboration is the process of co-creating knowledge through active interorganisational exchange aiming at a common goal (Clarke et al., 2013). Cooperation in contrast is the optimisation of interfirm routines and processes (Dyer & Singh, 1998). Competitive behaviour identifies the industry and its actors as key determinants of firm behaviour due to dependence on the same resources (Astley & Fombrun, 1983; Porter, 2008). Simultaneous occurrence of cooperation and competition is coopetition (Bengtsson & Kock, 2000).

Research Design A multiple case study investigates sailing clusters in Southern Brittany (France) and in Auckland (New Zealand), and the strategies for interorganisational behaviour of its members. Cases were selected to augment the generalisability of findings through literal replication (Yin, 2009). The unit of analysis is the cluster with interorganisational relationships and networks as embedded units of analysis. Semi-structured interviews, observations, and secondary data were analysed with NVivo coding, content and narrative analysis. Results Results reveal that ICB and collaboration are the most common strategies. Advancement, altruism, and loyalty are the most common forms of ICB. Advancement means behaviour that improves interorganisational relationships, common knowledge bases, and interorganisational processes (Autry et al., 2008). Results show that system suppliers, accessories suppliers, and cluster governing bodies engage most in advancement. Advancement is evidenced by an increased effort to form interorganisational links, create jointly new knowledge, and promote the cluster as a whole. Altruism refers to helping each other out in solving problems or acquiring needed skills or knowledge (Autry et al., 2008). Results reveal altruism notably between different accessory suppliers through mutual word-of-mouth recommendation and cost sharing for new technology or facilities. There is also altruism between system suppliers and shipyards through knowledge sharing and interorganisational exchange beyond commercial agreements.

Professional sport teams play a crucial role through their involvement in product development and testing. Finally cluster governing bodies' activities reveal altruistic characteristics, as these aim at improving cluster relationships, processes, and knowledge bases. Loyalty means allegiance to a partner organisation (Autry et al., 2008). Results reveal loyalty in the bilateral relationships between shipyards and their suppliers even in difficult economic times. Discussion Collaboration and ICB are the predominant strategies to manage interorganisational links in both sailing clusters. ICB and collaboration are strategically linked as altruism and loyalty are antecedents of collaboration. Collaboration aimed at product development represents advancement. The findings imply that organisational behaviour and strategy research needs to widen the range of interorganisational behaviour in collective settings from the dichotomous view of competition and cooperation to a multi-dimensional view, taking into account positive interorganizational behaviours - collaboration and citizenship behaviour.