

‘ Strategic Renewal: The Case of The Irish Rugby Football Union’

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Abstract

This paper uses the empirical setting of the IRFU's strategic renewal journey from the amateur era in rugby to the professional era. The study is conducted at a micro level and uses intensive qualitative research techniques to answer the research question How and why strategic renewal and business models can lead to new institutional logic ? The study is also longitudinal in construct as it looks at this unique phenomenon from 1995-2010. The data set draws on 34 unique interviews and multiple sources of secondary data to show that the strategic renewal process the IRFU embarked resulted in a new professional institutional logic that has been maintained across the organisation. The findings draw on theories from business model research, governance and institutional logics. The research shows that the IRFU, used strategic coupling and de-coupling as a management tool throughout the journey.

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1. Introduction

“Rugby now, he acknowledges, is a different animal to that of his debut World Cup. Very, very different world, he nods. It’s a different sport we’re playing. It’s changed so dramatically. You can look back at it and smile at certain times from those early days of preparation and professionalism and how the game has just moved on to a completely different level. I would say the mentality has changed. I would definitely think the mentality is that we feel as though if we can play really well and play to our ability, that we are a match for anyone in the world. That is probably something different from back in the early years. There was always an acceptance of running the top teams close. That is definitely dead and buried. ***Now it’s about winning and winning only.***” (Brian O’Driscoll, Irish rugby team captain, *Irish Times*, August 9, 2011)

Until the announcement by the International Rugby Board (IRB) on Sunday 27 August, 1995 in Paris, rugby was a game bound by its amateur ethos. Players and coaches until then were not paid for their efforts but in most cases simply played for the love and enjoyment of the game. Amateurism had given the game so many of its most appealing aspects and overnight the rugby had gone from being a game to a business and all that so critical a movement would embrace. The decision in Paris by the IRB to “Open” the game to payments, swept away 120 years of sacred rugby tradition. It was no exaggeration to say that the announcement was received with utter dismay by the majority of people involved in the game. Likewise, it should be stressed it was greeted with enthusiasm by the top representative players who saw, or thought they saw, the road open to untold riches (Van Esbeck, 1999).

The declaration by the IRB in 1995 left the Irish Rugby Football Union, the governing body for the game in Ireland with some tough decisions to make. The rugby amateur ethic, so passionately held by the IRFU, who had not supported the move to professionalism, was dead. No one knew what direction the game would take (*Irish Times*, February 2, 2011). The strategic renewal journey that the IRFU embarked on post 1995 is an interesting phenomenon; because the professional game structures in Ireland today are the envy of many other rugby playing nations.

“I think we are the envy of the other nations, especially our provincial teams. We got it right, it actually worked” (IRFU/Provincial Committee Professional).

The highlight of this was witnessed in 2009 when professional rugby in Ireland was dubbed to be in a “Golden Era” after winning the countries first “Grand Slam” (an undefeated

campaign) for 61 years in the annual Six Nations tournament in 2009. This success capped off a period of unprecedented success in Irish rugby since the turn to professionalism.

“There's never been such a good period in Irish rugby as the last six years” (Declan Kidney, Irish Rugby Senior Team Coach, *Sky Sports*, January 9, 2009).

Success was not only witnessed on the pitch as there were massive gains made in rugby at grass roots level too since the emergence of professionalism. A measure of the success of the IRFU's business model and strategic renewal journey can be seen with the redevelopment and recent opening of the state of the art national rugby stadium “The Aviva” in 2010.

The main focus of the paper is based around how the renewal strategy and business model the IRFU selected, implemented and tweaked when necessary, following the decision by the IRB. These important decisions have reshaped the institutional field and brought a new institutional logic to Irish rugby. The IRFU were faced with many options and alternatives to deal with following the change in their environment. The extent of the renewal journey that faced the IRFU can be compared to the renewal journey of other traditionally strong playing nations. The renewal journey so far for Ireland has been a success where the decision was made early to implement a centralised approach and keep the best players on offer in Ireland playing professionally.

However, other traditionally strong playing nations did not get the renewal journey correct and professionalism has had a detrimental effect on the game. This is as a result of poor professional structures backing up the professional game. A good example of this is the Scottish Rugby Union where the strategy implemented has left a nation steeped in history struggling for survival in the recent professional era.

Ireland still has to make up for lost time in terms of developing facilities and stadiums, but the net result is that we have a relatively vibrant sport, whereas the Scots have a stadium but a shell of a game. Back in the Naughty Nineties, that would have been unimaginable (*Irish Times*, March 6, 2007).

How the IRFU has developed this “vibrant sport” is fundamentally down to their decision making, effective management and clear business plan that leaves the game in a healthy state fifteen years after the operating environment shifted considerably.

There was recognition in Ireland that things were changing and that rugby had to keep abreast of those changes. Though not by revolution but by evolution, careful planning, and strategy

and prudent financial management. A headlong rush into so radical a change was bound to bring problems of a major dimension, and so it proved. The game was not ready to embrace professionalism on so broad a scale. The IRFU's policy was, of course, criticised by some who saw such a policy not as prudence but as reluctance to come to terms with the changes. Events were to prove the caution and prudence to have been wise, (Van Esbeck, 1999).

This empirical setting offers an excellent opportunity to study the research question: ***How and why strategic renewal and business models in can lead to new institutional logics?***

The following research uses intensive qualitative research techniques drawing on interviews, newspaper articles, books, and observations to examine the strategic renewal journey that IRFU undertook following the decision to open the game to professionalism. The research is longitudinal and the sample used examines the recent phenomenon from the years from 1995-2010.

The main advantage of this study is that the transition to professional rugby is still a relatively new concept therefore reflections and memories can be effectively and through interviewing key actors while the reflections are still reasonably fresh in their minds and thus providing the of researcher with rich, valid and up to date primary data. The research question being investigate follows the guidelines issued in Pettigrew, Woodman and Cameron (2001) for future research on organisational change to combine the “what if “questions with “how to “questions and therefore effectively linking theory with practice.

The focus of the research is important for a few reasons. Firstly, it bridges a gap in strategic management literature by looking at the influence business model decisions and institutional logics have on a firm's strategic renewal journey. The research is being carried out at a micro level, thus it answers a call (by O'Brien and Slack, 2004), for further case study research at a micro-level to investigate individual sports organisations confronting field level changes. O'Brien and Slack's paper focuses on the transition from amateurism to professional in rugby union in England, however it differs to this research as it focuses solely on isomorphic forces and institutional logic paying little or no attention to the role of the decision maker on strategic renewal journey.

This paper builds on and adds weight to the special addition of Long Range Planning Volume 43 (2010) dedicated to Business Model research. The special addition was published due to an opinion held by authors in the field of management, that the 'Business Model' was an

under-appreciated topic in academic circles, and deserved a level of attention much more in line with its widespread use in business (Baden-Fuller, 2010). The special addition of LRP focuses on areas such as Business model foundations: definitions and approaches. How do business models emerge? Building new business models for emerging economies and social uses, and lastly, implementing business models: key success factors. Contributors to the special addition include Charles Baden-Fuller, Benoît Demil, Xavier Lecoq and Ian MacMillan along with many others to contribute to the edition containing 18 papers on the topic of business models maintaining its stance of seeking to be ‘in the thick of the action’

Throughout this research the terms strategic renewal, strategic journey and organisational renewal are used at various points. In the past there has been some cloud over what in fact strategic renewal in fact referred and often gets confused with strategic change. Therefore, it is important to note that all the mentioned previous terminology refers and supports to the following definition of strategic renewal in this research.

“Strategic renewal includes the process, content, and outcome of refreshment or replacement of attributes of an organization that have the potential to substantially affect its long-term prospects.” (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009)

In contrast, strategic change for example, might refer to extensions, additions, or deletions of an organisation without any associated renewal. Thus, renewal is one particular and unique type of change.

The paper is structured as follows; the next section will explain the basis for the theoretical background focusing on theories grounded in business models, governance and institutional logics. Following the literature review the methods used to carry out the study are explained in detail. The penultimate section concentrates on the main findings derived from the study. The paper is then concluded with a brief discussion and concluding comments.

2. Literature Review

The following literature review is focused on strategic decision making in professional sport, and applies the lens on strategic management theories in the following areas: 1) Business Models 2) Governance Structures 3) Institutional Logics. When analysing organisational change or renewal journeys it is important to understand the decision making process that has led to the strategic renewal process. It is also seems important to understand the diffusion processes that characterise it (O'Brien & Slack, 2004). The literature review also forms the basis for theory building that is shown through the resulting propositions.

2.1 Business Models

The topic of Business Models is of exceptional importance to managers when undertaking decision making and strategic renewal. The choice of business model is typically seen as a key component of organisational success, (Baden- Fuller, 2010). Like other interdisciplinary topics, business models are frequently mentioned but rarely analysed, therefore, they are often poorly understood.

This can and should be remedied. Increased understanding of the essence of business models and their place in the corpus of the social and organizational sciences should help our understanding of a variety of subjects including market behaviour, competition, innovation, strategy and competitive advantage, (Teece, 2010).

2.1.1 Effective Business Models

When studying business models it is fundamentally important to understand what are the constituents of an effective business model and when to change it? Johnson, Christensen and Kagermann, (2008) answer this question by explaining that an effective business model must solve an important problem or an important need for the target customer. The authors also explain that a successful business model must also have an effective profit formula, put simply; this means the business model must make profits for the organisation by using certain key resources and key processes. A good business model yields value propositions that are compelling to customers, achieves advantageous cost and risk structures, and enables significant value capture by the business that generates and delivers products and services.

It is essential when the enterprise is first created; but to keep the model viable is also likely to be a continuing task. Superior technology and products, excellent people, and good

governance and leadership are unlikely to produce sustainable profitability if business model configuration is not properly adapted to the competitive environment, (Teece, 2010). The question is when it is time to alter the existing business model (Jonson et al 2008), suggest circumstances when a change in business model is appropriate.

The authors recommend that if the opportunity arises to address through disruptive innovation the needs of large groups of potential customers who are shut out of a market entirely because existing solutions are too expensive or complicated for them. Jonson et al, (2008) also suggest that if the opportunity to capitalize on a brand-new technology by wrapping a new business model around it is an appropriate time for business model renewal effort. Furthermore, it is suggested that an opportunity to change a business model, if there is a gap in the market, where a particular customer need is not yet addressed by a rival. The final situation suggested is to respond to a shifting basis of competition.

The general consensus in strategy literature is that successful firms alter strategy to address changes in their environments and enact more favourable conditions (Barr and Huff, 1997). Changes in the environment often act as triggers or shocks for engineering change in organisations (Huff, Huff and Thomas 1992). IBM undertook its first strategic transformation in response to a technological advancement in electronic computing that occurred in the external environment as a result of university research (Agarwal and Helfat, 2009)

However, as there are times when business model change is necessary, managers must also be aware of when the time is not right to alter the business model. (Jonson et al, 2008) explain that there's really no point in instituting a new business model unless it's not only new to the company but in some way new or game-changing to the industry or market. To do otherwise would be a waste of time and money. These insights provide the basis for the following proposition in regards to the strategic renewal journey undertaken by the IRFU.

Proposition 1: Business model renewal is required for strategic response to competitive and environmental forces.

2.1.2 Agency Theory

Over the last several decades strategy researchers have devoted considerable attention to the question of how corporate elites (i.e., corporate executives and directors) affect corporate strategy (Jensen and Zajac 2004). In many studies, the focus of the research is on agency theory. Agency theorists suggest that the focus on structural analyses of corporate governance arrangements and how boards of directors align the interests of executives and shareholders (Jensen and Meckling, 1976).

(Kroll, Walters and Wright, 2008) argue that a sole reliance on agency theory when considering a board of directors results in an underspecified explanation of director effectiveness. The authors suggest that agency theory's prescription for desirable directors on the board addresses factors relevant to vigilance, this theory does not elaborate on issues pertaining to directors' experience as it impacts strategic decisions. Kroll et al (2008) find that boards that include experienced directors provide valuable guidance for strategic decision making for firms contemplating acquisitions. In this view, boards are engaged in tasks related to control of management's decisions as well as guiding those decisions. Findings also suggest that boards that contain directors with experience become engaged in monitoring and advising because, through experiential learning, they may be enabled to contribute positively to firm outcomes.

A very recent study on the agency theory and corporate governance literature by Boive, Lange, Mc Donald, and Westphal (2011) focuses attention on the psychological factor that is likely to influence a CEO's motivation to do what is best for his/her organization: the degree to which the CEO identifies with the organization that he/she leads and the degree to which a CEO's self-identity is intertwined with the identity of his/her organization.

External control mechanisms, and especially board independence from management, have dominated prior research on the agency problem in corporate control. This brings much needed attention to the question of how internal, psychological factors may affect CEO propensities to engage in actions that advance personal interests at the expense of firm interests. The findings of (Boive et al 2011) show how a CEO whose identity is more extensively intertwined with an organization will be more motivated to avoid actions that diverge from firm interests. CEOs with high organisational identification, the distinction between firm and self is minimized, rendering those CEOs particularly concerned about their firms' well-being and the images they project to external constituents.

Proposition 2: In an effective “Senate” structure board members should satisfy for the following conditions: 1) relevant experience in the industry and 2) willingness to engage actively in monitoring and decision making.

2.1.3 Coupling & Decoupling

Business model literature also pays attention to the role of coupling between organisational elements. (Hinings, Casebeer, Reay and Golden-Biddle, 2003) pay particular attention to the role of “loose coupling” in the health care system in Alberta, Canada. “Loose Coupling” is defined as “when structures and activities in various parts of an organization are only weakly connected to each other and therefore, are free to vary independently” (Aldrich, 1979, p. 76). Karl Weick’s (1976) paper on loosely coupled systems introduced the concept to the field of management literature. Loosely coupled systems are not the main focus of attention in this area of management literature is in coupling and de-coupling.

(Denis et al, 2001) describe coupling as the support for the goals and initiatives pursued by individuals within constellations and between constellations as a whole and groups inside and outside the organisations. (Demil and Lecoq, 2010) view business model evolution as a fine tuning process involving voluntary and emergent changes in and between permanently linked core components, and find that firm sustainability depends on anticipating and reacting to sequences of voluntary and emerging change giving the label ‘dynamic consistency’ to this firm capability to build and sustain its performance while changing its business model. ‘Dynamic consistency’ is, the capability to anticipate change sequences and implement incremental or radical changes to adapt the business model to maintain or restore on-going performance. This capability requires managers to have a deep knowledge and understanding of their business and the relations on which it is built.

Tilcsik (2010) highlights the importance of understanding the role “Decoupling” plays in business model renewal. The author defines decoupling as “the creation of gaps between formal policies and actual practices”. Westphal and Zajac (2001) suggested that decoupling occurs not because it is functional for an organization, but because it serves the interests of organizational leaders. Tilcsik (2010) findings suggest that responding to new institutional forces is an important challenge for many organisations. For example, when laws and

regulations change, or when an organization begins to operate in a country with unfamiliar rules and norms, managers must decide how to handle newly encountered expectations about particular organisational policies. Tilcsik (2010) findings also suggest that managers implementing changes to organisational models must also pay close attention and understand organizational responses to institutional pressures, a researcher must explore the competing ideas and interests of individuals within organisations, rather than treating organisations as unified entities.

Proposition 3: In the process of strategic renewal the mechanisms of coupling and decoupling was used by decision makers to drive the new business model forward.

2.2 Governance Structures

Recent research explains that executives tend to treat governance as expense activities and bureaucratic support functions (Carmeli and Markman, 2011). Findings from Carmeli & Markman (2011) explain through their findings using from the ancient Roman civilisation that Rome expanded its territory, strengthened its military, enhanced the quality of life of its citizens, and extended its longevity because it used governance *as strategy* and not only as back-office operation.

2.2.1 Centralized Structures v Decentralized Structures

(Siggelkow and Levinthal, 2003) explain that to create a competitive advantage—and at times simply to survive—firms face the challenge of identifying activity configurations that are not only internally reinforcing, but also appropriate, given the firm’s current environment. For incumbent firms, this challenge is particularly acute after environmental changes, such as technological shifts, that allow new ways of performing existing activities and that create new, high-performing, coherent sets of activity and policy choices, i.e., new business systems.

Responses to environmental challenges can be configurations that are centralized or decentralized. An organizational structure is called “centralized” when decisions are made

only at the level of the firm as a whole, while a decentralized structure when decision making has been disaggregated into a number of subunits, or divisions, each making its own decisions (Siggelkow and Levinthal, 2003).

Findings from Siggelkow and Levinthal (2003) show that implementing solely a centralized decision making strategy or decentralized strategy is advantageous. The authors explain that temporary decentralization with subsequent reintegration returns the highest long-term performance. This organizational structure allows the firm to both initially explore possible solutions and eventually coordinate across its divisions. The findings from the study are passed strongly around organisational interdependencies. Results show that if an organisation can ignore interdependencies for a while can it be beneficial for long-term performance. Likewise, creating temporary interdependencies, even though they could be avoided, can lead to more valuable long-term outcomes.

Siggelkow and Levinthal's work forms the base for the following proposition.

Proposition 4a: In the process of strategic renewal the governance structure has to evolve accordingly.

Proposition 4b: In changing environments "The Senate" like collaborative decision making structure is more efficient than CEO centred approach.

2.3 Institutional Logic

Institutional logics define the norms, values, and beliefs that structure the cognition of actors in organizations and provide a collective understanding of how strategic interests and decisions are formulated (DiMaggio, 1997).

2.3.1 Diffusion of Logics

Despite the wealth of research on the origins of institutions, little is known about how institutions and their underlying logics are extended following initial diffusion. (Shipilov, Greve and Rowley 2010) argue that institutional extension happens through multi-wave

diffusion of related practices that is such that an organization's adoption of practices from an institutional logic implies its acceptance of the logic. This then makes organizational adoption of subsequent practices sharing the same logic more likely, irrespective of these practices' adoptions by the organization's network contacts.

(Shipilov et al 2010) research focuses on the diffusion and the spread of board reforming practices of boards of large Canadian organizations between 1999 and 2005. During this period, "board reform" was the diffusing institutional logic of governance and was intended to motivate directors and their boards to more fully represent external shareholder interests.

Results suggest that the diffusion of practices consistent with an established institutional logic has different mechanisms than those driving the diffusion of the practices with which the logic initially took hold. Findings further suggest that organizations that already subscribed to a particular logic as indicated by their adoption of the first wave of logic-defining practices were more likely to adopt subsequent practices consistent with the logic, regardless of the adoptions of their network contacts. (Shipilov et al, 2010) also find that mimetic adoption in the second stage of diffusion is caused by uncertainty. Later adopters rely on the results of the adoption of the early movers to reduce their doubt in adopting the new practice.

(Purdy & Gray, 2009) suggest that standard institutional diffusion models may be inadequate to account for how new populations of organizations establish themselves in emerging fields. Purdy & Gray's research focuses on how competing logics can be persist and by identifying the mechanisms through which competing logics differentially diffuse, rather than viewing diffusion as a dissemination process driven by isomorphic pressures, (Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, and Suddaby, 2004).

Another finding by Purdy & Gray (2009) suggests that institutional entrepreneurs do not have carte blanche to launch new organizational forms. The author's findings clearly show that entrepreneurial efforts at theorization by one group may be contested by other institutional actors promoting alternative new logics, by those striving to preserve existing institutions (institutional resisters), or by those trying to corral new resources to serve their own extant institutional ends.

A study on the emergence of a professional logic in English rugby union by O'Brien and Slack (2004) focuses on how the shifts in logics evolved. The authors carried out 43 interviews with key individuals in English rugby union and the results illustrate how

isomorphism change in accord with a new professional logic diffused throughout the field. Findings suggest that during a period of high uncertainty, intense competitive pressures and sustained financial crises lead to high levels of mimetic behaviour between clubs to try and insure they were not left behind to early movers.

Proposition 5: In the process of strategic renewal the decision makers at the IRFU have chosen the strategy of late adoption of the best practices.

2.3.2 Institutional Maintenance

A study of the formal dining rituals at Cambridge University by Dacin, Munir and Tracey (2010) offer a unique insight on the role of rituals in institutional maintenance. The authors work seeks to explore the process through which institutions are maintained and reproduced as well as reinforcing a given institutional order. The focus is at a micro level, but results show that rituals have a profound impact at a macro level. Dacin et al (2010), answers one of the most serious criticisms levelled against institutional theory that it has neglected how the struggle for legitimacy manifests itself in the everyday lives of organization members (Barley, 2008).

Findings show that rituals socialize participants into particular norms and values and teach them the roles they are expected to play. The ritual of college dining has historically reflected the British class system in the sense that Fellows and students drawn almost exclusively from its upper reaches and served by waiters and butlers whose primary objective was to protect the privilege of the former. Participants were therefore familiar with the performance and how to enact its main aspects *before* their arrival at Cambridge (Dacin et al, 2010). Summary findings show that the survival and perpetuation of macro institutions is rooted in micro events such as organizational rituals (Dacin et al, 2010).

Proposition 6: In order to maintain new institutional logic from strategic renewal, the organisational infrastructure was set up in order to socialise new members in the organisation.

2.4 Summary

The literature focuses broadly on the concept of strategic renewal. The literature reviewed diverges into three main areas, Business Models, Governance Structures and finally Institutional Logic literature and how these three areas have effect on organisations undertaking a strategic renewal journey. The main theories that emerged from the review of business models show a general picture that business models generally require strategic renewal to counter act against competitive forces or in response to environmental forces. Strategic renewal requires an organisation to have a board that is constructed around directors whom have experience and engage in decision making processes. Coupling and decoupling techniques emerged in the literature as effective management tools to insure implementation of the renewal process in organisation do not become derailed or diluted by rival ideas or conflicting sections of the organisations.

A recent study in the field of governance (Carmeli and Markman, 2011), suggest that if governance is used in a strategic way rather than just deeming it as a cost, then it can be used as an effective management tool to insure organisational longevity. Governance structures in strategic renewal may take the shape of either being centralized or decentralized and having the ability to be flexible can be advantageous when responding to environmental challenges.

Institutional logics theory suggest that two important areas for consideration in an organisation in strategic renewal is the role played by firstly how the new logic has diffused across the organisation and secondly, how does the new logic become maintained and then renewed as the organisation develops.

3. Methodology

3.1 Rationale and Context

The rationale behind undertaking this research was to investigate the organisational renewal journey and the decision making process undertaken by the IRFU after a major environmental shock. The approach used was theory elaboration using a grounded approach (Maitlis, S, 2005). The study draws on theories on business models, organisational logics and

governance structures. To gain a better understanding of the journey, the research is over a longitudinal time period 1992- 2010 as it is difficult to imagine a theory (macro, meso or micro) being purposely developed to explain a phenomenon at only a single point in time (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010).

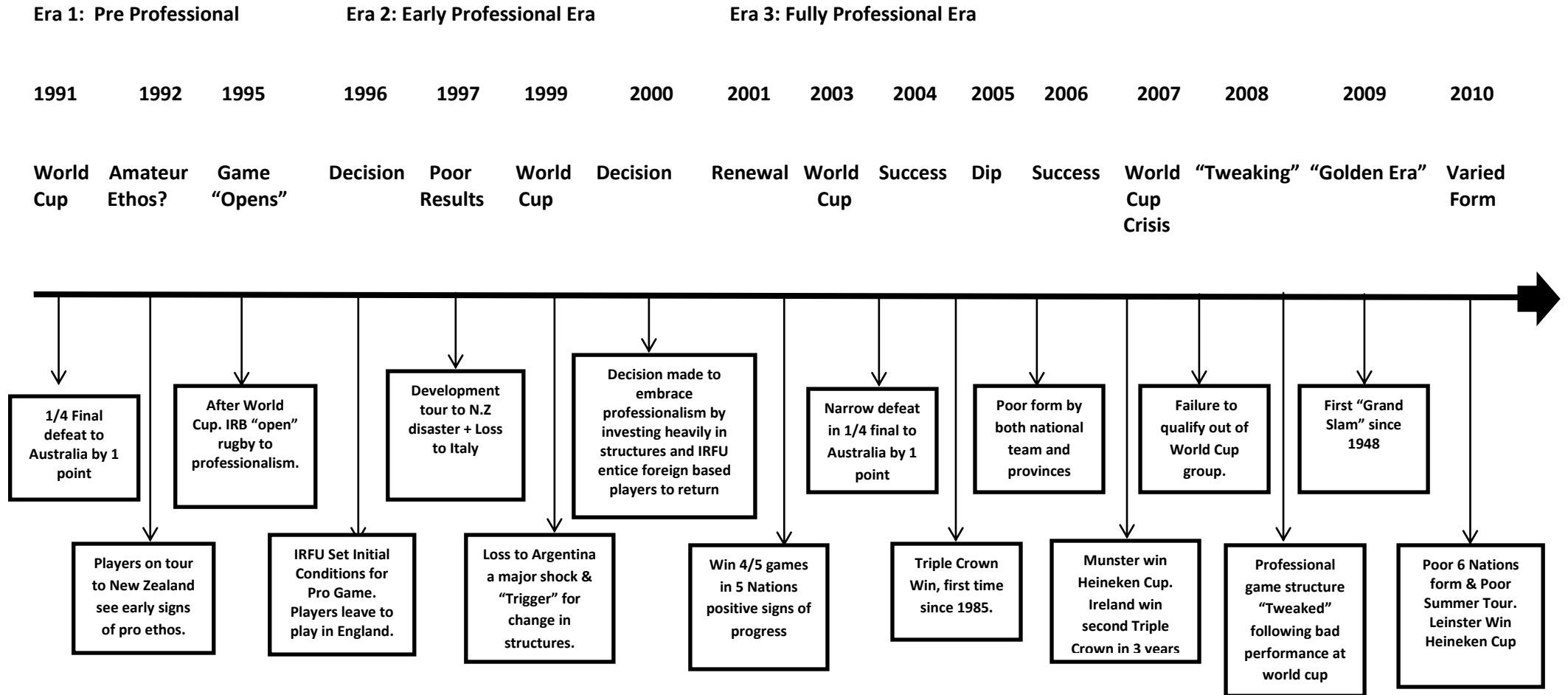
The IRFU, as case study was used for this research as it can offer rich empirical descriptions of particular instances of a phenomenon that are typically based on a variety of data sources (Yin, 1994) while the case study method is effective for tracing processes in their natural contexts and thus appeared most appropriate (Van de Ven, 1992) for this research.

The study draws on qualitative procedures and inductive logic (Pratt, Rockmann and Kaufmann 2006). The case in question is an “extreme case” (Eisenhardt, 1989) while also professional sports have proven to be an effective setting for studying organisational phenomena and studying within sport has the added value of being be “Fun” (Wolfe RA, Weick KE, Usher JM, Terborg JR, Poppo L, Murrell AJ, Dukerich JM, Crown-Core D, Dickson KE, Simmons-Jourdan J.2008).

The research focuses on the renewal journey of the IRFU is at a micro level similar to work by (Reay, Golden-Biddle and Germann, 2006) whose work illustrates the importance of microprocesses and their impact on macro level changes. The research also aims to explain the decisions that the IRFU were faced with in the immediate aftermath of the change in environmental conditions and how the decisions chosen has resulted in a new professional logic becoming institutionalised.

Illustration 1: below shows an overview of major events that take place during the longitudinal time scale in question.

Illustration 1: Timeline of Events



3.2 Sources of Data

The study used the multiple data sources as part of the research. Data was draw from both primary data sources and secondary data sources.

3.2.1 Primary Data Sources

The main data collection technique used throughout the research was semi-structured interviewees with key IRFU staff, players, members of the Irish media and other stakeholder groups. Interviews allow a greater degree of understanding of why events occurred, as they did and how people felt about them (Denis, Lamothe and Langley, 2001). Interviewees from these sectors were all involved and present during the renewal process of the IRFU from amateurism to professionalism and could offer key insights from their own experiences.

In total 34 interviews were carried out as part of the research. Interview candidates were selected from drawing on information gained from secondary sources and from advice and recommendations received from early interviewees who identified other key people involved in the renewal process. Average interview duration time was 53 mins. Interviews were generally carried out at the interviewee's home or office while hotels and coffee shops were also common locations. Interview locations were generally left open for selection by the interviewee to insure that the interviewee was relaxed and comfortable in their surroundings. All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and fully transcribed.

The interviewing process lasted for the duration of the study with several interviews taking place during the final days of the research time limit. As per grounded theory and qualitative research, new themes, for consideration were constantly emerging with the rich data sources, (Grey, Stensaker and Jansen, 2010) being discovered from the interviews.

Interviews were normally opened with general request to explain why, in the interviewee's opinion; the IRFU has been successful in their transition to the professional era. Each interviewee was asked to identify key technological changes, major issues that were faced in the transition, key actors involved, external pressures faced, learning mechanisms and their general involvement with in Irish rugby. The interviews will focus on the circumstances and reasons of the events during the informant's tenure (Danneels, E, 2010). All interviews were concluded with a question relating to the sustainability of the professional game.

During the primary data collection five trips were made to the headquarters of the IFRU for interviews, two to the Leinster branch headquarters and one to the Munster branch headquarters. The author also spent one full day at the Irish Senior National Team's per World Cup training camp where a full tour of the facilities. These trips were undertaken to give the researcher an insight to level of preparation and attention to detail that is present in the professional era of rugby.

3.2.2 Secondary Data Sources

In addition to interviews and field trips, secondary data on the IRFU's transition to professionalism was collected. The collection of secondary data occurred at two different stages. The first stage of data collection commenced before carrying out the interview process. The purpose of this stage of secondary data collection was to gain a better understanding of the research question and to gain an understanding of key actors involved in the renewal journey. Please see Appendix 1, which gives a summary of all of the books used in the first stage of secondary data collection.

The second stage of data collection was a more formalised where articles were identified using primarily the Lexis/Nexus database for articles that were published in the Irish Times containing the words "Irish Rugby" and "Professionalism". The search returned 287 articles that provided insights into the research question. The search was limited to the Irish Times as it is a paper with a proud history for sports journalism and has given a lot of coverage to Irish rugby since its formation and is selected by the Irish government as the newspaper of record.

Along with newspaper articles and books, data was also gathered from various rugby websites. The secondary data helped provided insights to the research topic and also helped to identify key areas for further development and investigation as the research journey developed.

Table 1: Data Source Breakdown

Data Type	Total	Amateur Era	Amateur & Professional Era	Professional Era
Primary Data				
Interviews:				
Interviewee Roles:				
<i>Players</i>	16	7	4	5
<i>Management/Coach</i>	9	3	3	3
<i>IRFU/Provincial Committee</i>	9	2	2	5
<i>Media</i>	9	0	2	7
<i>Club Officials</i>	7	2	2	3
	50	14	13	23
Secondary Data				
Archival:				
<i>Newspapers</i>	287			
<i>Books</i>	8			

3.3 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using a temporal bracketing strategy (Denis, Lamothe and Langley, 2001) as it is effective for analysing multiple sources of data as implemented by Doz (1996), Langley (1999). This approach requires decomposing the data chronologically into discrete successive time periods or phases that become comparative units for analysis. This approach allows for continuity in the context and actions being pursued within the analysis.

The time periods used in the research were as follows. The first period selected was from 1992-1995, this period was labelled the “Pre Professional Era”. The second period identified was from 1995-2000 and labelled “Early Professional Era” and the final period selected was from 2000 to the end of the study 2010 and was termed the “Fully Professional Era”.

Following the temporal bracketing, interviewees were then segregated into different sections according to their roles in rugby and the time period that this role was carried out. This resulted in three categories: 1) Amateur, 2) Amateur / Professional Crossover 3) Professional. The

Amateur/Professional category represents interviewee's whose careers in rugby crossed over from the amateur era (pre 1995) into the professional era (1995 onwards). When selecting interviewees, this crossover period was heavily focused on as it was felt that these interviewees would be able to give the most interesting responses to questions as they would have knowledge of the IRFU before professionalism was introduced and during the professional era.

Interviewees were then separated and grouped into the roles that they held in the rugby industry. This analysis resulted in five general groupings: 1) Players 2) Management/Coach 3) IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee 4) Media 5) Club Level. Many interviewees had multiple roles within a rugby organisation context. A typical case of this is where a player, when retired from a playing role, moved into the role of a coach or a role in the media as a journalist. Please see Appendix 1 for a full review of interviewee grouping breakdown.

Players were selected as interviewees as it was felt that they were in the best position to offer insights on the micro processes associated with the transition to professionalism as they are on the ground level organisation and many of the changes will have direct effect on them. The interviewees were selected to try and give the research data that touched all levels of the IRFU's organisational structure.

Management/Coaches were selected as interviewees because it was felt that they were the most likely section of the organisation to be implementing the structural changes during the transition to the professionalism. IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee members were selected as interviewees because it was felt that these informants would be best suited to give insight on the strategic decisions and the thought process as they would have been at the forefront of any of the major decisions and structural changes being implemented. This grouping was coded with the relevant label as many IRFU committee posts are filled by provincial committee members and there can be crossovers of posts on provincial and IRFU committees. Interviewees from the two remaining groupings, the Media and Club Level Officials were selected and interviewed because it was felt that they would be able to offer alternative views and opinions on professional rugby, as members of the media and people involved with Irish rugby clubs are not direct employees of the IRFU.

3.3.1 Interview Coding

The next stage of analysis was coding of the interviews. The approach used was similar to that by Andrew Van de Ven and colleagues of the Minnesota Innovation Research Project (Van de Ven & Poole, 1990). The coding technique was developed by following closely methods suggested by Miles & Huberman (1994) where the authors outline an inductive logic approach to analysing qualitative data working back and forward iteratively between the interview data and secondary data to develop appropriate coding categories.

The coding process consisted of reading each interview transcript and assigning open codes to each interviewees response to the questions asked. The code assigned then represented the general message or themes emerging in the respondent's answers to questions. An example of the coding technique would be where if the interview answered the question "Why has Irish rugby been successful in moving to the professional era?" If the informants answer was heavily based on the common response "The provincial structures were important to our success" then that response was given a code, e.g. Prov 1. However, if the interviewee stated "We were blessed with a good crop of players emerging at the same time" then that would have been labelled with a different code e.g. Play 1.

The second stage was to group all the codes to each major question asked and then return to the secondary data to insure that the general themes emerging were consistent. Following this process the first order themes emerged. See Appendix 2 for full list of first order themes. The researcher then periodically returned back and forward from interview data to secondary data using an open coding approach to search for further emerging themes and concepts that may arise as the research developed and grew pace.

Once the data collection was complete the researcher then looked for linkages between first-order codes and developed second-order concepts that were more theoretical. For example references to the importance the role of the academy plays in preparing younger players for the demands of the professional game "Behaving in every single way as professionals do" was coded as *Earlier Introduction of Professionalism to Players*. Finally we organised and grouped these second order codes in theoretically distinct and meaningful themes representative of the mechanisms that aligned with the relevant theory.

Illustration 2 summarizes the data structure and visually represents the development of the theoretical model. The models starts with first order codes to second order concepts and finally

to the theoretical dimensions. We found that the IRFU's organisational renewal was achieved by three main mechanisms: Institutionalisation of professional logics through introducing the logics to players at younger ages, influences from foreign coaches and the use of specialist coaches and technology to speed up the transition. Secondly, we found that selective coupling and decoupling from certain stakeholder groups was a common practice during the renewal process and finally the business model and governance strategy was also fundamentally important.

3.4 Validity

Several steps were made to ensure the trustworthiness of our findings. The use of multiple data sources allowed for validation of the primary data through triangulation. Triangulation can be defined as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon" (Denzin, 1978: 291). Validity tests whether the study successfully measures what the researcher is setting out to examine. Criteria for insuring validity, has been outlined by Yin (1994) as tests for construct, internal, external validity and reliability.

Construct validity is the degree to which the researcher uses the correct operational techniques and measures that have been set out to be researched. Internal validity is the ability of the instruments used to measure what they are supposed to (Blumberg et al, 2005). In the case of this research, the interview method would provide the study with internal and construct validity, as all interviewees have had strong levels of either current or past experiences with the organisations in question.

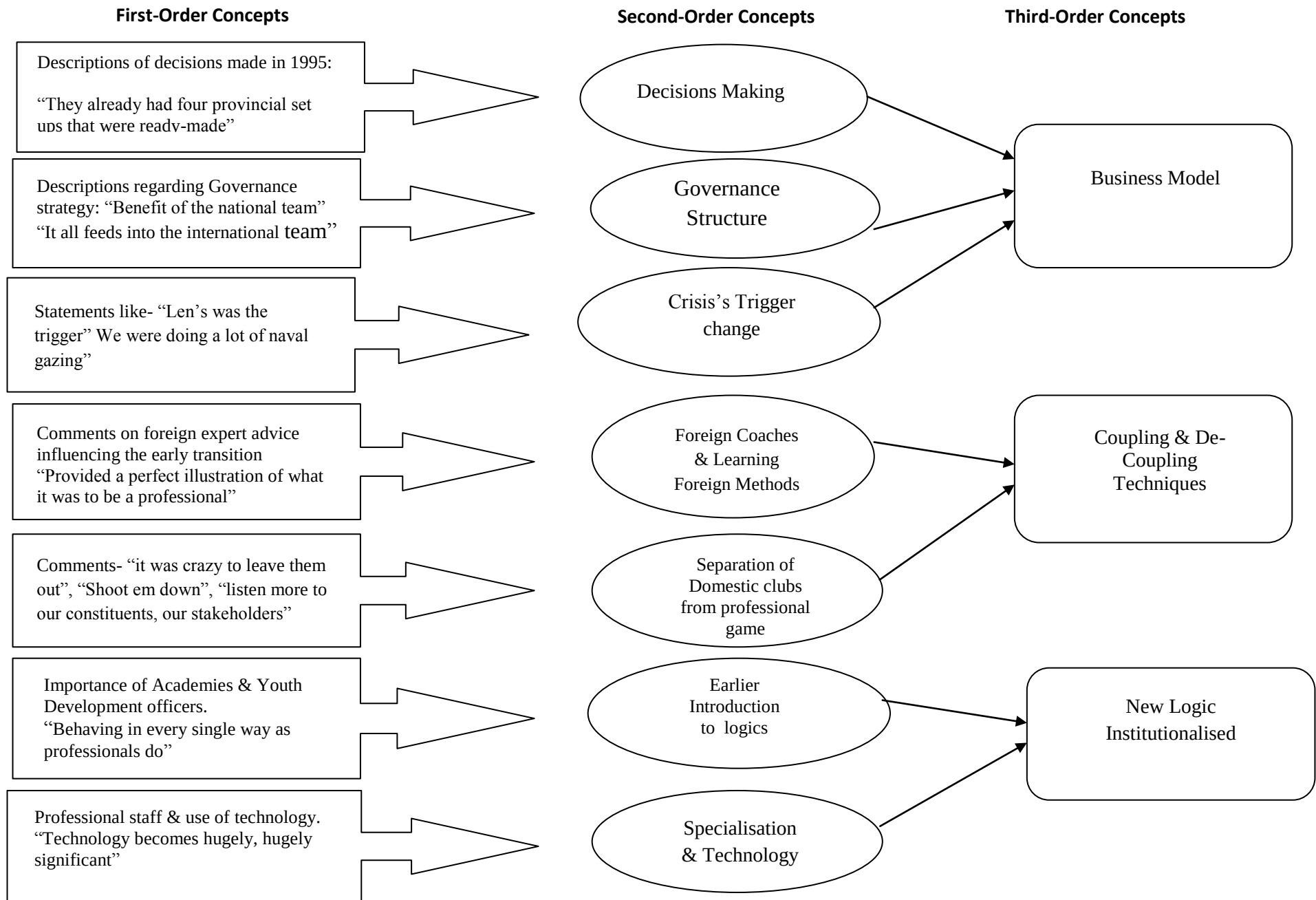
External validity refers to the data's ability to be generalised to other settings or populations (Blumberg et al, 2005). In this research there is strong external validity present as that study is focused at a micro level and the findings can be easily transferred to other organisational contexts who are undertaking strategic renewal journeys. Also, the extent to which sports teams conform to a common set of normative rules, procedures, and policies minimizes the influence of institutional environments on performance outcomes, assuring consistency in the options available to rival organizations across time (Holcomb, Holmes and Connolly, 2009).

When under taking case studies it is important to have internal consistency and validity. To improve the internal validity and the reliability in the research as the research is relatively inexperienced in academic research, the author had numerous meetings with the research advisor. These meetings were held at almost weekly intervals over the course of the research.

This limited the effect or potential for any biases that may appear in the interview questioning. Limiting the potential for biased research helped with the consistency in the overall study, as the advisor was more experienced in case study creation and qualitative data research techniques.

Reliability relates to whether the research instruments are neutral in their effect. If this is the case then one must ask the question if somebody else recreated the qualitative study would they get the same results as the previous research (Denscombe 2003:273).

Illustration 2: Overview of Data Structure



4. Results

4.1 Introduction

When the decision was made in 1995 by the IRB to move to the full scale professionalization of rugby union the IRFU were in a state of shock and crisis. The IRFU were aware that professionalism was on the horizon but did not support the idea. When the IRFU representatives Tom Kiernan and Dr Syd Miller left for the meeting of the IRB in Paris in 1995 they envisaged them returning with news that the amateur status was intact and at the very worst a diluted version of professionalism. When news filtered back from Paris it is no exaggeration to say that there was a feeling of disbelief among IRFU officials. The level of shock and the magnitude and speed of the change to professionalism is illustrated by the following interview quotes and:

“In or around that time we got on a plane in ’95 to fly to the world cup. The President of the union stood on the steps of the plane and gave an announcement that Ireland would never support professional rugby...” (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional).

However, there was underling regret that the amateur game was no longer sustainable in its current capacity. If players wanted to be paid for play they could find a way and means to do so as payment for play in other nations was becoming ever more apparent. Kerry Packer, the founder of World Series Cricket, that ran from 1977-1979 for his Australian broadcasting channel Nine Network was proposing to set up a similar competition for rugby. World Series Cricket (WSC) was a break away professional cricket competition. The matches ran in opposition to established international cricket. World Series Cricket drastically changed the nature of cricket, and its influence continues to be felt today. The series originated due to two main factors—the widespread view that players were not paid sufficient amounts to make a living from cricket, and that Packer wished to secure the exclusive broadcasting rights to Australian cricket, then held by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

It was felt that the fear of Kerry Packer’s plans that ultimately forced the professionalism of rugby union. The IRB in order to remain in control of international rugby had to embrace professionalism otherwise an alternative was on the horizon for players to earn a living from the game.

“We got an offer from Kerry Packer, have you come across that? No... This was basically to take the top 100 players in the world and pay them- I think it was – 175 grand each...” (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional Era).

The IRB were forced to react to the pressures being placed on them and they opened up the game to professionalism before the regulation was eroded by an alternative for players to make a living from the game of rugby.

"I greatly regret many of the recent happenings in the game and the attempts by those outside the game to hijack rugby for their own purposes. But we must be realistic and live within the current situation; however it has been brought about and survive within it..." (Dr Syd Miller, IRFU official, *Irish Times*, August 12, 1995).

It is at this point where the research question becomes paramount.

How and why strategic renewal and the choice of new business model in organisations can lead to new institutional logics?

It is very evident that professional rugby was forced upon the IRFU, they were left with no alternatives, and either embrace payments for players or somebody else was prepared to do this.

“The IRFU was dragged kicking and screaming into professionalism. We were opposed to it, there was a famous meeting in 1995 in Paris, and our reps were Dr Sid Miller and Ronnie Dawson. They came away and the game went open and we had to react.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Professional).

How the IRFU reacted to the change in the rugby environment forms the basis for the answer the research question proposed earlier. The business model selection forms the first major finding revealed by the research. Then findings show next how the IRFU’s decision making process has developed and evolved over time in the professional era. The last major finding explains how professionalism is now truly embedded in the organisation.

The following findings from the research are illustrated as the third order concepts on the overview of the structure illustration 2.

4.2 The IRFU Business Model

It was very clear to the IRFU that the business model that was in operation in the amateur era was not going to be feasible in the new environment with the demands that the new game will create. These demands would be financial along with structural. Findings suggest one of the main strengths of the IRFU, since the move to the professional era, has been the initial

business model structures that were implemented. The Union was faced with many alternative business models that could have been implemented.

The options that faced the IRFU are very well explained in the following interview excerpt:

“We had three choices, we could have stuck our head in the sand and do what Argentina did which is effectively saying that it’s an amateur sport here and if anyone wants to play professional rugby they can...do it somewhere else.”

(Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

The IRFU made the decision to pursue an elite professional strategy to stay in touch with the upper echelons of international rugby, rather than go down the road of nations such as Argentina. The Union moved fast initially to realise that the business model that was going to be most effective for Irish rugby was a centralised provincial structure that would allow them to maintain control and management of the game in Ireland.

“We have a centralised co-ordinated approach to the care for all of our players” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

The centralised approach meant simply that the professional players in Ireland are effectively employees of the IRFU and not the clubs of Ireland. The IRFU are the central pay masters and with this they have full control of the players as they are their employees. The professional players are based in the only four professional teams in Ireland funded by the IRFU where they play their non-international rugby. The advantage of this system is the control over the players as the IRFU are still effectively the paymaster and in control.

The IRFU could have implemented a decentralised structure as was chosen most notably by the English Rugby Union and the French Rugby Union. This option means that the players are controlled by the clubs and the paymasters are the clubs who then give use of the players to the national team for international matches. The advantages of the centralised approach are best described in the following interview.

“...at the time central contracting was the way to go...” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era).

Ultimately the key to the success of the IRFU business model when transitioning to the professional era was the decision to turn to the four provinces of Ireland namely Leinster, Ulster, Munster and Connacht into regional professional teams. Table 2 illustrates the importance of the IRFU’s business model? Not alone has the business model selected by the

IRFU been fundamental to the success of the IRFU in the professional era but it has also allowed the IRFU to have effective governance on the professional game across the nation. This is an advantage that a decentralised governance structure would not be able to accommodate because the IRFU would not be the paymasters as the clubs where the players play their non-international rugby would be the players pay master.

If the decision to implement a decentralised business model was chosen, then the governance that IRFU would have over the game in Ireland would resemble the governance model of the Football Association of Ireland, where the player's main focus is arguably their club competitions. In order for the FAI to be able to govern the game of soccer in Ireland in the same manner as the IRFU they would need to have a central contracting structure like the IRFU. Table 2 illustrates characteristics of the IRFU's business model structure.

Table 2: Representative Quotations on The IRFU's Business Model

They {Syd Miller & Tom Kiernan} came back {From the IRB meeting in Paris} and the Irish rugby football union decided that there would be three tiers, three structured tiers in order, the national team, the provincial structure and the club, OK? And that has more or less been retained ever since. (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional Era).

I would say is our structures and what I mean by that is we have four provinces. They're all answerable to the union, the union owned them, unlike France and England. (Interview with Management/Coach Amateur/Professional Era).

I don't think Irish rugby could have afforded to have 10 professional clubs, it just wouldn't have happened, you know, the right system is where we are at now. (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional Era).

They managed to be successful because their structures now are quite good... (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional Era).

It's a perfect business model, if you like, they all feed into the parent company if you like which is the IRFU. The IRFU are the ultimate paymasters and I think that's why it is successful... (Interview with Player Amateur)

"They followed the New Zealand model... they were fortunate then that there were four established provinces in Ireland already that people identified with...so that was a natural progression away from the club game. (Interview with Management/Coach Professional).

"The Irish took some very good decisions after the advent of professionalism, going into the provinces helped...concentrating as many of their internationals in Ireland..." (Nick Mallet {Italy Senior Rugby Team Coach} *Irish Times* February 14, 2009)

"...if we were to put our model in another sport, in another country it probably wouldn't be appropriate" (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

Even in the relatively short time since the game has turned professional the IRFU has had to review and restructure their business model in order to remain in a competitive position. The IRFU are generally an organisation that prefer evolution rather than revolution when making structural changes. Table 3 illustrates this organisational characteristic and supports

Proposition 5: In the process of strategic renewal the decision makers at the IRFU have chosen the strategy of late adoption of the best practices.

This characteristic has both strengths and weaknesses as an approach. The major weaknesses of this approach was revealed after the 1999 World Cup quarter final game to Argentina played in Llanelli, France. Ireland were favourites to win the match but were defeated by a team that was made up of primarily amateurs. This was deemed a major upset to IRFU and it acted as a “trigger” for reactive quantum changes to the professional structures that were being administered at the time. Table 4 illustrates the relevant data to support this finding.

This suggests that in order for the IRFU to implement reactive changes that are quantum in nature they do so when reacting to crisis events such as the poor performance at a major competition such as the World Cup and therefore supports ***Proposition 1: Business model renewal is required for strategic response to competitive and environmental forces.***

Major changes were made to the professional game structures in Ireland after the 1999 World Cup as it was felt that although the game was now professional, it was still being administered in an amateur fashion by the IRFU. The scenario that the IRFU were facing after the poor performance in the 1999 World Cup is best illustrated in the following quote;

“When the dust settles, Ireland must be ready to embrace the modern rugby era. Irish rugby will otherwise be stuck in a permanent eclipse, cherishing even a false dawn.” (*Irish Time*, October 21, 1999).

The most significant change after this event was more investment in the provincial structures. This involved offering better professional contracts to players and a conscientious effort to have all the best Irish players playing for Irish provinces. The defeat to Argentina revealed a major limitation in the strategic renewal process that the IRFU were undertaking as Ireland was slow to offer contracts to their players. Due to this fact in 1999, many of the best Irish players were still plying their trade with English based teams as the professional structures in the IRFU’s model were not yet at the same standards as English teams. This all changed after the 1999 World Cup as the structures and contracts on offer by the IRFU were improved and the best players returned to play with the Irish provinces.

Table 3: Representative Quotations on Renewal by Evolution

“I think the one thing is that the game in its professionalism evolved steadily it wasn’t a sudden quantum” (Interview with Player Amateur Era).

“The transformation took place was, over a long period of time ” (Player Amateur Era).

“They {IRFU} were ultimately trying to come to terms with something that they resisted until the last second. Yeah and it took a long time, 5 years really.” (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional Era)

“The only thing they {IRFU} could have done differently was to do it sooner, but what they did was a lot – once they got into the concept and said they’re going to do it, they done it well”. (Interview with Player Amateur Era)

“Again, they {IRFU} had bedding in period from around 1995 to 2000 on; they didn’t seem to know what they wanted.” (Interview with Management/Coach Amateur/Professional Era)

“We are generally a consensus-driven organisation and that lends itself to, you know, step-by-step-by-step progression and you know, there’s pros and cons to that and I’m sure some people would say. “ (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“The disadvantage of having revolution in a small, within a small organisation and within a small country is that it leaves a lot of ill-will behind and that can do enormous damage” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“The IRFU make decisions slowly but they get the big decisions right” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era).

“We’re conservative so we don’t rush into big decisions” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era).

“We live in a senate” {Reference to the IRFU}. (Interview with Management/Coach Professional Era)

“The IRFU in their nature are probably a conservative bunch ... I’d say there’s a hurry up and wait approach.” (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional Era)

“But it would have been a slow transition, very slow”. (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional Era)

“We had to go slow because the money and the revenues had to build up to allow us to do everything that we did.” .” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“On the one hand, they were saying, “Oh the game has gone open, here we are, we are playing professional rugby.” On the other hand, they were saying, “... I don’t really want to do this so let’s just slow the whole thing down.” (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional Era)

Table 4: Representative Quotations on Renewal in response to Trigger Events

“I suppose after the, in Lens, on the back of then against Argentina, it moved up another couple of notches.”

(Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“Was Lens 99 a trigger for change? It was, yeah, we had to beef up the administration. We moved to a situation where we had a management committee which acts like a board and it effectively steers the ship and we have them, an executive staff with a number of directorships.”

(Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“You really have to look at what you are doing and certainly in 1999, we had a good long hard look at what we were at, and then in 2007 we had another review and looked carefully at how we had prepared, the sort of structures that we had in place.” (Interview IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional)

“Lens was the trigger and we were also doing a fair degree of naval-gazing at the time in terms of strategic planning and we realised that not only did we need to invest on the pitch, but we also needed to invest off the pitch” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Amateur/Professional Era).

“Lens was certainly { A trigger for change} - any doubt was – it got to the stage where the only choice the IRFU had at the time was to either join them or leave them because it couldn’t continue the way they were.” (Interview with Player Amateur Era)

“We realised in ’99 that we had got it horribly wrong... So the consequence of ’99 was an immediate investment of somewhere between 10 and 12 million into professional rugby in Ireland.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era)

Our Jerusalem if you want to call it that was Lens in ’99, a realisation that you only play professional sport to win and if you have no money, gets out of it. (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era)

The second significant trigger for change was witnessed after a failure at the 2007 World Cup. This time the team failed to qualify from the group stages of the competition for the first time in their history. This was seen as a major crisis by the IRFU and sparked what was dubbed as “tweaking” of the system when a member of the IRFU Committee was asked during an interview how the change implemented after the 2007 World Cup differed to the 1999 review.

“And how has the change differed from ’99 and 2007, was it wholesale in 2007 or was it just a little bit of tweaking?.. It was tweaking, that’s all it was and, but having said that, it’s those small things that can make a huge difference.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional Era)

4.3 Decision Making Process

Along with the evolution of the IRFU’s business model, so did the decision making process co-evolve along with it. Over the years of professionalism, an effort was made by the IRFU at a decision making level to replace amateur staff with professionals. Another emerging trend in the decision making process was the use of outside experts in the decision making process, to help with reviews and major decisions. Following the failure at the 2007 World Cup a report was carried out under the guidance of the IRFU by the consultancy group Genesis. The following quotes illustrate the changes in the decision making process.

“...the reality is that the game is governed by a voluntary structure and voluntary committees and supported by a professional staff and we believe that it works well.”(Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional Era)

“...We’re not experts, we are experts in rugby but we know there are better ways of doing things. The people we’re bringing in for the summer deal with sport in the UK, top sports consultancy group in the Islands to help us frame where we go.”(Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era)

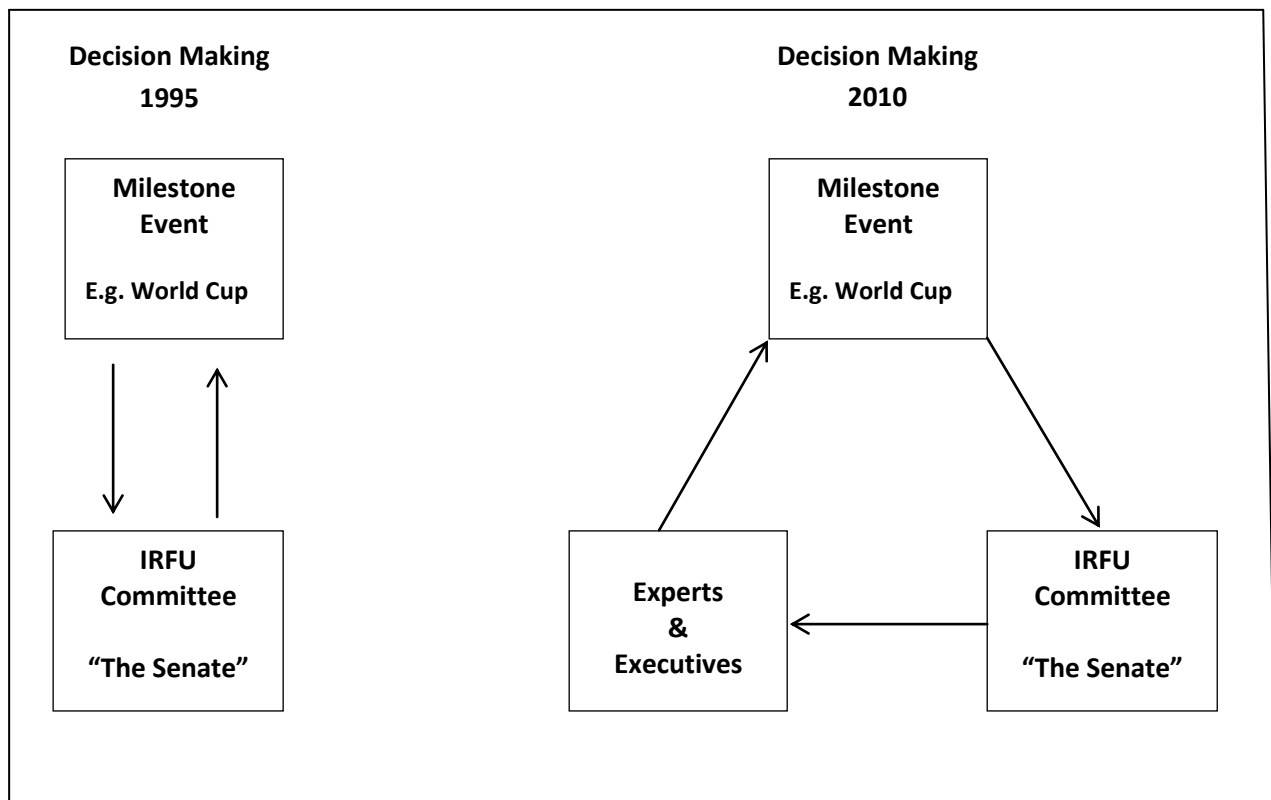
Illustration 3: Shows the change in the decision making process in the IRFU since the amateur era. The IRFU’s committee structures are referred to as a “Senate” as it best describes both the structure of various committees that make up the IRFU and the length of time it takes to pass motions through the various levels. The path of the decision making process is represented with an arrow. Both decision making structures are based around milestone events. In the

below diagram the World Cup is used. This however, could be substituted for the Six Nations. The IRFU's decision making process is based around cycles of years.

The world cup cycle is a four year strategy while the six nation's strategy is yearly, as it is an annual tournament.

“Well there's a number of underlying cycles, we have a strategic plan which is basically running for four years and it kind of overlaps on the World Cup cycle and then you have the World Cup cycle and then you have got the annual sort of Six Nations cycle.” .”(IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era)

Illustration 3: The Evolution of the IRFU Decision Making Structure



The decision making structure in 1995, when the game turned professional, as illustrated on the left hand side of the diagram, was a process where the IRFU committee, made up by predominately amateurs made the decisions and then implemented them. This process was highlighted and gathered lots of negative attention after the 1999 World Cup crisis. The evolution of this process now results in structure where the IRFU committee or as is referred to as “ The

Senate's" main role now is to act in an advisory capacity to a body or executive management that implement the strategies that are created.

This new system is shown in the following interview excerpt:

"The thing about a senate is that... it takes ages for a good thing to go through because everyone has an opinion and a political agenda... maybe not as quickly as you would want but eventually good things seep through." (Management/Coach Professional Era)

The findings on the IRFU's decision making process and its evolution show significant support for the following propositions.

Proposition 4a: In the process of strategic renewal the governance structure has to evolve accordingly.

Proposition 4b: In changing environments "The Senate" like collaborative decision making structure is more efficient than CEO centred approach.

The role of "The Senate" is quite important to act as a safety net against an agency that might creep into the decision making process of the executives or professionals that are now in important full time professional positions in the IRFU. "The Senate" in the modern structure now acts as a watch dogs to insure the longevity of the game and values from years gone past are kept intact and that the executive are not acting in the best interest of themselves at the sake of the organisations goals. Therefore, they limit the threat of agency behaviour.

This idea is depicted by the following interview piece, explaining that with the voluntary amateur board in place the organisation can never end up as a full scale PLC therefore forgetting about the amateur, domestic and grass roots levels of rugby in Ireland.

"It's a curious amalgam of a voluntary board backed up by a very professional staff and it works, it works reasonably well... you have, at one end of the spectrum you have a PLC; at the other end of the spectrum, you have a purely voluntary altruistic type organisation...I don't know if we'll ever get up to the PLC end of the spectrum...." (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional Era)

The members of "The Senate" are also very experienced and skilled individuals whose knowledge and experience is appreciated and utilised by the executive management.

"...the benefit of a board effectively and directors who have experience in business, commerce, the legal profession, all of whom have rugby experience and so I have all that experience available to me and my staff, and to try and buy that in, you couldn't buy it in" (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional Era)

These findings support and give weight to the following proposition.

Proposition 2: In an effective “Senate” structure board members should satisfy for the following conditions: 1) relevant experience in the industry and 2) willingness to engage actively in monitoring and decision making.

4.4 Coupling & De-Coupling

The second major finding in this research, unveiled is the role that coupling and de-coupling have played in the transition from amateurism. The findings suggest that coupling and de-coupling was used as a management tool effectively, at various stages in the IRFU’s renewal journey from amateurism. The Irish rugby community is an organisation that is made up of many separate organisational groups that have different needs and goals. This was hi-lighted in an interview where balancing the needs of different parts of the organisation may be a challenge. The interviewee was asked was it difficult to balance the professional game with the needs of the domestic game.

“With difficulty...there’s competition for resources...but the way in which it works, the only reason we are involved with professional rugby is because it generates a surplus and that surplus can be ploughed back into the club game and the schools’ game... (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur/Professional Era)

The research shows that a managerial tool that the IRFU used to deal with the problem of limited resources in the transition to professionalism, was to de-couple from the groups or sectors of the organisation that was either not cooperating with their strategy or couple with an outside source if it was deemed beneficial. Findings also suggest that the organisation at times also de-coupled from one sector of the organisation for a period and then re-coupled again at a later date.

Findings show two major areas where the IRFU selectively de-coupled from loosely coupled sections of the organisation early in the transition to insure that the interests of the change leaders were maintained. Firstly, in the early stages of professionalism there was a lack of knowledge about how to implement professional structures and professional methods to coaching. To get around this issue the IRFU de-coupled themselves from the Irish or indigenous coach and hired in experts from Southern Hemisphere nations who were industry leaders and were exposed much earlier to professional methods and ways. Table 5 contains support for the de-coupling from Irish coaches and coupling to coaches from foreign countries in the transition to professionalism. The findings suggest that the foreign influence helped speed up the transition to professionalism as the Irish players and coaches learned new methods and the ways of professionalism. The IRFU did not try to keep the players in Ireland during the

early years of professionalism as they did not have the funds or the infrastructure to compete with the U.K clubs. However, when the IRFU could offer the same if not better professional structures they made a considerable effort to bring the best players back to Ireland to boost the provincial game in Ireland. Table 5 gives support that the IRFU have de-coupled from Irish players and then coupled them back into the organisation later in the renewal journey.

Table 5: Representative Quotations De-coupling & Coupling with Players

{Irish players who moved to England to play}... should not have to go to England either to seek out a better standard of rugby nor to achieve the requisite financial rewards. Irish rugby should be able to offer the total package; that it does not is an indictment of the present system. (*Irish Times*, January 20, 1998)

... The earning capacity of the members of the senior squad will certainly be comparable and probably marginally better than this season. But there will be a very attractive package on offer at provincial level for players not on the senior international squad. In addition, some of those players currently playing in England will certainly be given a very worthy inducement to return home... I am aware of at least six players who are now playing in England who want to return to Ireland. (*Irish Times*, April 15, 1997)

Well the big thing was I think, apart from money, you know; offer them contracts to come back, that compared with what they had in England... (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional era)

Well it took them {The IRFU} a while, I mean, they {The IRFU} were sitting on their hands when the players left... So after a couple of years of this, they realised, ... if we're going to make a go of the professional game, we have to have a professional structure domestically so we have to get them back. (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional Era)

I think the first thing was they {the players} knew if they came back that there was a structure to come back to and the primary reason they came back was because of the cash. In the professional game cash is king. (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional Era)

Well nothing originally, they {The IRFU} left them there, left them off... then the IRFU actually... smelt the coffee and they realised they had to do something here about this and then they did, they set about bringing players home and they set about putting systems in. (Player Amateur Era).. The next generation of kids need to see their stars and their role models at home playing and they'll want to emulate that. ..I think that was very successful and a very good move on behalf of the IRFU. (Interview with Player Amateur Era)

So once the IRFU grasped the notion... of salary that needed to be paid to these guys, that was also a factor. (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

I think the IRFU... wouldn't put as much pressure on players to play matches, for the International players they would be limiting the amount of provincial games that they would play so while the money may not have been as good, the standard of life they would have and the wear and tear on the body wouldn't have been as much (Interview with Player Amateur Era).

If they think that they can get game time back home in a successful club and also there is a financial incentive then I think that you have got the perfect circumstances to retain them. (Interview with Player Amateur Era)

The final example of coupling and decoupling shows that the IRFU de-coupled from the domestic club game in Ireland in order to implement their business model of having the provinces as the professional teams competing annually in the European Club Championship (The Heineken Cup). This decision was much contested by the Irish All Ireland League (AIL) club teams at the time, as many of the clubs felt that they should have been the professional representatives of Irish rugby in European competitions. The basis for this was based on the much popular and successful league structure that was in place in Ireland at the time. Domestic club games in the early to mid-nineties in Ireland could draw large crowds and with this came large sponsorship deals from businesses who wanted to support the club rugby game. The decision by the IRFU to turn the provinces into the professional teams upset the clubs at the time considerably. At the time, the Interprovincial series between Munster, Leinster Connacht & Ulster ranked third in order of importance for the Irish player after playing for Ireland and then his club.

“It was widely accepted club rugby would suffer most from the IRFU's pyramid model.”(Irish Times, April 28, 2007)

Put simply at this time in Ireland before professionalism, the club game was the be all and end all. The Provinces only played a couple of minor games each season and the level of interest in them was not where near as popular as it is in the modern professional era. In response to the IRFU's plans the AIL clubs united together and made a proposal to the IRFU to amalgamate clubs into professional city teams to compete in the European Cup competition. The IRFU did not except the proposal on the grounds that it would be difficult to select which cities to select each year to play in the European Cup. Another reason they refused it was on the grounds that the clubs would not be able to effectively fund themselves.

As the years past the interest levels in the AIL competition dwindled as the provincial game went from strength as the star players were now rarely playing for their home club teams in the domestic competition and as peoples main focus turned to the European Cup due to the huge levels of exposure through television and general media. Findings discover how the IRFU strategically decoupled from the club game to insure that they could effectively implement the centralised strategy where the provinces were the professional entities as they felt was the best

model long term. Table 6 illustrates the decoupling process from the domestic club game and the subsequent coupling with the provincial game.

“Clubs are no longer the bedrock of the IRFU; they became dispensable for the greater good” (*Irish Times*, April 28, 2007)

The findings on coupling and decoupling and the quotations illustrated in Table 5 & Table 6 show strong support for the following proposition:

Proposition 3: In the process of strategic renewal the mechanisms of coupling and decoupling was used by decision makers to drive the new business model forward.

Table 6: Representative Quotations De-coupling from Clubs & Coupling with Provincial Structures

“The IRFU called a meeting and ... it was clear that they were having none of it. I was detailed to stand up on behalf of the First Division clubs and report... as soon as I stood up, the President, he pulled out a, “Who authorised you to speak on behalf of the clubs?”... that was the start of “shoot ‘em’ down” and clubs being what they are. (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Amateur)

“They had to make that decision... so once they contracted the players, they had control of the players and that was the end of it as far as the clubs were concerned because the clubs couldn’t contract them.” (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional)

“The key thing is that clubs have to realise that they are there to provide a facility for people to play rugby, for recreational reasons.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Amateur/Professional)

“I think the emergence of the club and the club game and the AIL frightened the union and felt that maybe the clubs themselves were becoming a bit too powerful and maybe potentially bigger than the union.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Amateur)

“For around 3-4 years we had to deal with the very definite aspirations of some perceived – I won’t call them owners because they weren’t owners – but perceptions of some people in clubs.” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Professional)

The AIL which was, supposed to be a tier below professionalism 15 or 20 years ago, it has now just disintegrated through a lack of interest, funds, thought and development”(Interview with Club Official Amateur/Professional)

“I don’t know if we’ll ever get up to the PLC... I think we may do at some point in time, in the professional game, if the professional game is split away from the from the amateur game” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Amateur/Professional)

We have got to get organised to negotiate the business of our clubs and to safeguard them... We are not seeking confrontation with the IRFU... we want to work in the best interests of the game in this country. There is no question of splits or revolution, but we just cannot accept or exist with the current situation.”(Frank Hogan Garryowen Club Chairman, *Irish Times*, September 17, 1996)

“The reality is that the clubs are downgraded in the current situation” (Paul Inglis, Lansdowne president, *Irish Times*, September 17, 1996)

4.5 New Institutional Logic

The results from the research carried out shows how the change in the IRFU's business model created a new institutional logic that spread throughout the organisation. The change in institutional logics has resulted in the professionalization of the governance structure. The question that must now be asked is how is the institutional logic is maintained and renewed within the IRFU's organisation. Research by Purdy & Gray (2009) focuses on how competing logics can persist and by identifying mechanisms through which competing logics differentially diffuse. The findings suggest that the mechanisms used by the IRFU to limit the influences of competing logics along was decoupling and coupling techniques as illustrated earlier, the IRFU's professional structures in the modern era target the next generation of players at a much younger age and then supporting them with professional infrastructures so that there is no alternative or competing logics in the organisation to dilute the professional institutional logic.

4.5.1 Earlier Introduction to Logic

How this is done by the IRFU is through the Academy and a vibrant grassroots underage structure. This allows introduction of professional logics to younger people therefore speeding up the diffusion of the new institutional logic as rugby players are more likely to adopt subsequent practices consistent with the logic, regardless of the adoptions of their network contacts (Shipilov et al 2010). The Academies ran by the IRFU target the best young rugby talent in Ireland from an early age (14-15 years of age). Once these players are identified they are then given advanced coaching through the team of Youth Development Officers (YDO's) that the IRFU employ across the country. The YDO's run training camps and other training sessions to insure that the next generation of professional players are being prepared for professionalism during the early stages of their development.

The academy system works in conjunction with IRFU guidelines through the Elite Player Pathway Programme which is a blueprint for the development of the potential future professional players. The Academy system works with the next generation right up to around 18 to 19 years of age when they leave academies by either moving onto becoming full professionals if deemed good enough or otherwise they pass out of the IRFU Elite Player Pathway process. Through the academy strategy the IRFU are in a position to both recruit the best talent available to them and then through their effective professional structures are in a position to expose the player to the new institutional logic that is professionalism, this is done

at a far earlier stage than in the amateur era. Table 7 provides basis for the importance the role of the academy in the maintenance of the IRFU's professional structure.

Table 7: Representative Quotations on the Earlier Introduction to Logics

"I think our academies are only now where they need to be. We now have an elite player development programme, Pathway which starts from the age of 15 right through." (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

"...{When The IRFU Gets Access To} a professional player at a young age you're not just showing him how to play rugby, you're talking about a lifestyle, you're talking about how to manage his life handle... so I think there's been a very good policy ().

...the academy structures and that added a new impetus (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

...the level of the player entering the professional team, the academy players are at a much higher level. That means that they have been trained from 16-19, four years, that's a lot of training behind them and then they're ready for professional rugby (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

...the academy is very important because it, first of all, it helps you identify the players when they are younger but as a sub academy. Second of all, it puts them into a pressurised situation to see are they going to be able to live that type of life" (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

...the academy and all those things were put in place is something that he started the ball rolling (Interview with Player Amateur/Professional)

"... The academy players are now expected to be of the standard of the pro players because they are being integrated with them". (Interview with Player Professional)

"Getting the development officers out there to not just schools but to every club in the country and working on the kids. I think that is a good organisational move." (Interview with Player Amateur)

"You couldn't run Irish rugby without the academy structures" (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

"..{Academy Players} they are the future professionals, and they are now behaving in every single way as professionals do" (Interview with Player Amateur)

"...academy so we had systems and structures from under-15s, 16s, 17s, 18s, 19s and 20s which fed into the academy..." (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

4.5.2 Specialisation & Technology

Along with maintenance through the introducing the logic earlier to actors, the IRFU have maintained the professional logic through effective usage of new technologies and by setting up an organisational infrastructure that is conducive to professionalism. The IRFU's infrastructure has developed in the professional era by appointing specialist staff in the area of nutrition, strength and conditioning, video analysis, and specialist skill coaches to form a professional background environment that over time forms rituals in the organisation that over time socializes participants into particular norms and values while also teaching members of the organisation the key roles they are expected to play or carryout (Dacin et al, 2010) These specialist roles are also backed up with state of the art equipment and technology to help the players maximise their performance for example monitoring their fitness levels through Global Position Systems or through self-analysing their own match performances through video-analysis.

The findings on the increased levels of specialisation and the increased usage of state of the art technologies have created a professional infrastructure that helps maintain the institutional logic created by the IRFU through the creation of routines and rituals that socialize new members in the organisation. In short through the introduction of specialized staff and professional technology, players in the IRFU are now surrounded by professional practice and professional staff therefore the institutional logic of professionalism is maintained because as new members enter the organisation there is no longer a competing logic and the players entering the system have been operating already through the academy structures.

These findings which are illustrated in Tables 7 & 8 give credibility to the following proposition.

Proposition 6: In order to maintain new institutional logic from strategic renewal, the organisational infrastructure was set up in order to socialise new members in the organisation.

Table 8: Representative Quotations on Specialization & Technology

Specialization

“...there are some great backup coaches there and by all accounts they are doing a great job I think there is more, definitely more support now, you know, you have several skills guys ... they would have one coach for four players so he is watching their technique the whole time” (Interview with Player/Professional)

“...Oh it’s unbelievably technical {reference to the standards of coaching}” (Interview with Media Amateur/Professional)

“{Importance} ...for the young lads coming in, that they have all specialist coaching” (Interview with Player Professional)

“When I started I was a specialist in speed and that was my role people had their own areas and that’s the routine...so you were in the gym, you only went to the gym. I was speed and I only did speed” (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

“{The role of the Head Coach} it’s more of a managing a team now and being less of a specialist, where as in the amateur era the coach kind of does everything. But now through getting a backs coach a fitness coach, a front row coach, a conditioning coach it’s now more a role of a MD with your specialists “(Interview with Player Amateur)

“It has definitely changed...they had a forwards coach, a backs coach and a head coach. Now they have a backs coach, defence coach, strengths and conditioning coach, player analysis and if you can afford it, I don’t think it’s a bad thing” (Interview with Player Professional)

“It is a measure of rugby's fledgling steps into the professional era that the week's technical staff included two American specialists in what is known as plyometrics - strength and speed training designed to improve explosive leg power.” (*Irish Times*, August 9, 1997)

“{Ulster Rugby’ investment in the professional game 2008}...new dieticians, a sports psychologist...doubled their medical and physio staff... there's also a new skills coach...” (*Irish Times* August 23, 2008)

Technology

“..they {IRFU} got the mix right between the old school hard knocks and the sports science side of things...that was the biggest thing you’d see from the sports side of view and the technical point of ... from when I came in there in 2005”(Interview with Player Professional)

“The ability for player preparation looking at the way other teams are setting up and preparing for that it has been invaluable” (Interview with Player Amateur)

“Technology has become important... the video analysis is massive, sports code or some software is used to organise or tally certain aspects of games...” (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

“Now we have training during a match or training sessions or whatever and we have a 10-second delay from the laptop with the analysis” (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

“Yeah, I think, you know, they use technology as definitely, professional is the thing, it gives it more of a professional attitude and a work ethic... computers, player analysis rooms, all the technology is there, , they have player analysis rooms... so all that has just come in, in the last 6 year..” (Interview with Player Professional)

“..You could go in and just see your clips from them, so you didn’t have to sit through the whole thing {video of the full game} so it was easier to do it, the barrier to do it {performance analysis} was less... (Interview with Player Professional)

“We certainly had a video to watch a certain amount but nothing like there is now... I think that’s fantastic, it’s brilliant for the players because they understand what they have to fix so... from that point of view it’s very good” (Interview with Management/Coach Amateur)

“...you have fellows coming into you saying “this is the latest bit of technology, what do you think”, we do all that ourselves. The latest thing you may have seen is the guys {coaches} running around with I-Pads... The whole technology stuff, in the main it emulates from NFL {American Football}” (Interview with IRFU Committee/Provincial Committee Professional)

“No, we had one or two games where you’d have a video tape of a game but it was some guy with a shake in his hand, as regards a technical video, we never had that” (Interview with Player Amateur)

“I mean, in terms of the science of the gym, they use it {Technology} really well.” (Interview with Management/Coach Professional)

4.6 Summary of Results

The findings from the research show that through the strategic renewal process the IRFU embarked on resulted in a new professional institutional logic that has been maintained. The findings from the research go further to suggest that the logic is also maintained and renewed through the infrastructural advancements that were made along the way to creating professional routines and the introduction of the logic to players at a younger age and these findings show strong support for the propositions derived in the literature review earlier in Chapter 2.

5. Discussion

The results from this research suggest that firms often embark on strategic renewal journeys in response to competitive forces and or environmental forces. In the context of the IRFU the management responded early and definitely to the environmental shift by establishing a centralized governance structure, then choosing to change the business model through a process of evolution rather than revolution. The resulting evolutionary renewal strategy resulted in a business model renewal journey that took place over a period of years. During the renewal process the governance structure remained centralized but the decision making structure evolved where the amateur board members were moved into advisor and monitoring positions where they can effectively insure that the executive management are not acting out of self-interest therefore limiting against agency if. Findings suggest that the governance structure used by the IRFU and resembles a “Senate” and is a very effective way to govern an organisation. The IRFU is not a PLC, however, the IRFU’s governance model is congruent with what agency theory assumes and limits the probability of self-interest happening through monitoring by “The Senate”.

The findings also show the IRFU require crisis events to trigger changes that make them go outside their normal evolutionary conservative governance strategy as witnessed by the wholesale changes that were undertaken after the 1999 World Cup failure. An interesting note for the field of management derived from this study is the strategic coupling and decoupling that was used by the IRFU as a management to limit the influence from conflicting ideas when renewing the business models. The de-coupling from the domestic club game and coupling with the provincial game effectively swapping each sectors role in the organisation was a major decision that was made and implemented with success as the Irish professional business model is envied today by rival rugby unions.

Overall findings suggest that institutional logic theory is also heavily connected and related to the business model literature as business models have the ability to create routines through developing infrastructures that support and reinforce the desired logic.

There are also limitations to the research carried out. As this case study is the first study of its kind to investigate the IRFU from a strategic renewal perspective therefore it requires further research to further to develop the concepts introduced in this study. Also due to the tight time

boundaries of this study namely three months, using primary data sources had both strengths and weaknesses. The major weakness is that to collect the data was quite time consuming as sourcing, interviewing and transcribing the volume of interviews to get a broad data source consumed most of the time limit available for the project as this ran right up to the last week of the research. As a result of this the researcher was very limited to the time that could be dedicated to becoming consumed deep into the literature for theory development.

Another limitation of the study is that as the time period wound up on the project, the researcher had to turn his back on data collection and this left some very interesting interview opportunities uncollected.

However the major benefit of this is that this research on the IRFU's and their strategic renewal journey is really only the tip of the iceberg in terms of future research. As this study is focused at a micro level there was copious microprocesses that emerged that could not be developed in this research. I challenge strategic management researchers to re-enter the field and discover other interesting research questions derived from the interesting empirical setting the IRFU's business model offers.

Future research is required to fully tease out the economics associated with the IRFU's renewal journey. I challenge scholars to research the identity strategy of the IRFU because the business model is based around the four Irish provinces meaning that it is identifiable to people all parts of the country. An interesting approach to replicating this study would be looking at the IRFU's business model through the lens of stakeholder theory to see how the IRFU manage their stakeholders at both a professional level and then at the other end of the spectrum at the domestic game. Studies that look at the sustainability of the IRFU's business model could also be interesting and add to strategic management literature .

6. Conclusion

Previous research has studied strategic renewal from the perspective of responding to environmental changes and in response to competitor's actions (Barr and Huff, 1997). There has also been a wealth of studies that have investigated what is a in a good business (Johnson et al, 2008). This paper answers a gap in the literature for a study that bridges both business models and institutional logics in strategic renewal. The research also answers the call strategic management research for more studies at a micro level, while also answering a call to investigate individual sports organisations confronting field level changes (O'Brien and Slack, 2004).

The findings suggest that the change in the IRFU's institutional logic was as a result of professionalism of the business model and evolution of the governance and decision making structure. The strategic renewal of the IRFU's business model resulted in the creation of infrastructures that could maintain the new professional logic and continue to allow Irish rugby model to be the envy of other nations.

The goal of this research was to answer the question - how and why strategic renewal and business models in organisations can lead to new institutional logics? This study advances professional sports and strategic management by explaining in a longitudinal setting at a micro level by identifying the key processes that lead to a change in institutional logic can be created during strategic renewal through effective governance an effective business model selection.

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Worm has turned as Irish enjoy rude health, The Irish Times March 6, 2007

Appendix 1: Summary of Books Accessed during Data Collection

Title	Author	Type	Publisher	Year
Poppy Time To Ruck & Roll	Nick Popplewell	Autobiography	Hero Books	1995
Irish Rugby A History 1874-1999	Edmund Van Esbeck	Review	Gill & Macmillan	1999
Munster Rugby The Phenomenon	Eoin Murphy	Review	Maverick House	2006
From There To Here Irish Rugby In The professional Era	Brendan Fanning	Review	Gill & Macmillan	2007
Trevor Brennan Heart And Soul	Gerry Thornley	Biography	Red Rock Press Hachette Books	2007
Axel A Memoir Anthony Foley	Anthony Foley	Autobiography	Ireland	2008
Leinster Conquering Europe	Peter Breen	Review	Penguin Ireland	2009
Eddie O'Sullivan: Never Die Wondering	Eddie O'Sullivan	Autobiography	Centaury	2009
Jackman Blue Blood	Bernard Jackman	Autobiography	Irish Sports Publishing	2010

Appendix 2: Interview First Order Themes

First Order Themes
Success of pro game
The emergence of the professional game
Choosing province over clubs
Attitude of the clubs towards the provinces
Management of new resources in the pro era
Bringing the players home from England
New competitors the professional game brought
External Pressures
Practices to help adaption to professionalism
The role of the academy to speed up transition for players
Differences between IRFU's transition and other nations
Influence of foreign players & coaches on the transition
Technologies influence on the professional game
IRFU Governance model and professionalism
The development of the backroom team
Separation of the pro game from the amateur game
Is our model a good benchmark for other nations?
Policies for life after rugby
The importance of IRUPA
Connacht in the professional game
World Cup 99- Major Trigger for change
Sustainability of the pro game
Replacing amateur staff with professionals
Benchmarking from others
IRFU Planning & Decision Making Process
Learning from past mistakes