Board work for innovation: two cases of interactive research in Swedish civil society organizations

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore roles and behaviour of boards governing innovation in civil society organizations.

Within a qualitative and interactive action research project we worked together with two boards in Swedish civil society organizations by observing board meetings over two years. In order to gain new insights, theoretically grounded observations were continuously reflected upon together with the boards.

From the observed cases, we found that boards enact controlling, service and strategizing roles out of individual experiences and unstated norms. The lack of conscious deliberation about what needs to be done and how to do it, restrains the board from functioning as a team for innovation. In conclusion, board behaviour appears shaped by institutional logics of both member movements and a marketized civil society and the way in which the boards handle this tension shape how they work for innovation.

The study provides empirical observations of the understudied actual board work in civil society organizations and its prospects and problems with regards to innovation.

Keywords: boards, board work, innovation, civil society, interactive research

Introduction

Departing from the standpoint of a behavioural theory of board performance, the purpose of this paper is to tease out theoretically grounded insights on the theme of board behaviour for innovation. The study empirically investigates board practice related to efforts of renewal and innovation in Swedish civil society organisations. Through two interactive case studies of developing board practice, it addresses previously noted lack of qualitative studies on the practice of board work in non-profit organizations (Miller-Millesen, 2003; Jaskyte, 2012).

Our findings show two cases where boards enact controlling, service and strategizing roles out of individual experiences, ideas, and norms, rather than departing from a joint discussion in the board about what needs to be done and how to do it. As directors represent different perspectives on how to perform collectively, it restrains the board from functioning as a team. In the analysis of our findings, we argue that this board behaviour is shaped by underlying structures and norms from both member movements and a marketized civil society. The ways in which the board handles the tension between these two institutional logics (eg. Thornton *et al* 2012) determine how they work for innovation.

During the twentieth century, democratically governed membership organizations have played an important role in the Swedish civil society (Wijkström, 1997; Hvenmark & von Essen, 2010). The close and corporative role to the social democratic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990), is filled with ideas of representativeness, political discussions and positive relations to the public sector. But since the rise of a new century, shifts in political and economic circumstances, together with transnational trends, challenge both the role and identity of these popular movements (Reuter et al 2014). As a result, voluntary organizations in Swedish civil society experience a need for strategic change and innovations in order to find new ways of providing service in the welfare system or strengthening their voice in a changing political landscape.

The innovative role of voluntary and non-profit organizations as potential social change makers in a political landscape has been recognized by several scholars (Gamson 1992; Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998; Defourny et al 2014; Anheier et al, 2018; Howaldt et al, 2018). The actual processes and services that are needed to achieve such innovations require many various efforts from the board in these organizations (Jaskyte, 2018). Different efforts for innovation that include the recurrent task of building organizational culture that enables generation and/or adaptation of new ideas or behaviours in organizations (Gopalakrishnan and Damanpour, 1997; Martins and

Terblanche, 2003; Lindberg and Nahnfeldt, 2017). The various aspects of innovation described above pressurize non-profit and voluntary organizations and the way their governing boards behave to achieve the desired and, in some cases, needed renewal.

The very notion of a governing board marks a departure from a tradition in civil society organisations in an era of becoming more business-like (Maier et al, 2016). As resources, staff and management, increase in the marketized civil society, new practices, ideas and norms enter the organization. In this landscape of conflicting institutional logics, hybridization and organizational gaps, further possibilities for innovation arise (Ahrne and Papakostas, 2001). Here boards, of membership-based non-profits task themselves under institutional pressure, are expected from stakeholders, and are indeed being tasked by both members and management, to support and even direct innovation.

As civil society organizations engage in these processes of innovation, tension between member base legitimacy and high capacity from management turns up the heat in the board room. It thus becomes important to look further into how needs are identified; ideas are valued for improvement or a possibility to fulfil organizational mission; risks assessed and tested in practice; and if there exists both resources and a grounded ideology to let the new flourish to a full innovation.

In the next section, we present a behavioural frame of reference making sense of non-profit board behaviour in innovation. In the third section, our interactive case study methodology is presented. The fourth section of the paper includes results from the two case studies and an analysis of our observations and interviews. The paper then ends with our conclusions regarding board work for innovation in civil society.

Board roles

Based on decades of research in a number of scholarly traditions, the actual roles and potential organizational functions of boards may be theorized as threefold, namely as those of *control* of executive management and overall organizational use of organizational resources, of *service* by way of providing contacts, resources, and specialized knowledge to the organization, and of engaging in developing *strategy*, an emerging pattern of action related to the organizations' environment and potentially thriving within it (Forbes & Miliken, 1999; Stiles & Taylor, 2001; Huse, 2007). Although the link between board roles and innovation has been previously noted (c.f. Rejeb et al, 2019) their role in non-profit organizations would benefit from more empirical studies (Jaskyte, 2012).

Further, thorough research and theoretical reflection has led leading academics to the conclusion that board work is best theorized as both an individual and a collective craft. The qualities of practices in this craft explain performance, as opposed to any particular easily measurable quantity or formality. Performance springs from individual as well as collective cognitive and emotional competences, effort and a bit of good fortune regarding both environmental conditions and conditions internal to the organization (Daily et al, 2003; Hillman & Daziel 2003; Huse, 2007; Sjöstrand et al, 2016).

Board social dynamics attributed to competences, effort norms, and interpersonal relations appear significantly related to the quality of role performance (McNulty et al, 2011), whereas proper self-evaluations of board practice may function as a fruitful force (Long, 2006). It may also well be that the average board is too large to fulfil its controlling function maximally (Hillman & Daziel 2003).

Of pivotal importance to board performance is the development from a 'bunch' of people into a 'team' dominated by trust, openness and conscientiousness with a shared sense of purpose geared toward organizational goal fulfilment (Katzenbach & Smith, 2008; Sjöstrand et al, 2016). In such teams, behaviours for well-functioning boards also promote innovation (Yar Hamidi & Gabrielsson, 2017).

In this paper, we 'operationalize' such a sense of purpose into an awareness of which role or roles - control, service or strategy - the board has and should have with regards to a particular issue or subject matter that it deals with and its relation to ambitions for innovation. We further propose that the quality of board processes generating such a shared sense of purpose, may be understood in terms of how the board actualizes a collective craft. We assume that the underlying norms and values in an organization are decisive in shaping board behaviour (Schein, 1990). Unravelling the mechanisms and structures of this behaviour helps us understand how previously described board roles of control, service or strategy are enacted, or how a bunch of directors in the board might work as a team when handling tasks related to innovation.

Methodology: interactive case studies

To address the questions arising from the introduction above the aim of this study is to explore board behaviour in civil society organizations when handling tasks of innovation. Specifically, we enquire into the following three aspects of board work when tasks related to innovation are on the agenda:

- How are board roles of control, service and strategy enacted?
- How does the board excercise a collective craft?
- What mechanisms and underlying structures shape board behaviour?

In this study we address the need for qualitative studies of board work in civil society organizations (Jaskyte, 2012) by engaging in the various roles that can be taken in processes for innovation. As the practice of control, service and strategy in civil society boards have not undergone much formal knowledge production, practice is translated from one board to another and from one director to another, often with influences from fields and sectors other than civil society. As literature on civil society board practice is heavily infused with the epistemological and methodological assumptions made in the traditions of *for-profit* corporate governance research (Miller-Millesen, 2003; Kreutzer & Jacobs, 2011; Donnelly-Cox et al, 2020), this study also aims to add context specific knowledge from civil society.

In order to gain insights about the underlying structures that shape board behaviour in civil society the study was designed around an interactive research design (Ellström, 2008) and conducted as part of a project of participatory action research (Argyris, 2005, Aagaard Nielsen & Svensson, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The participatory project aims to support boards in two Swedish nationwide member organizations *and* to build new knowledge about board behaviour in innovation. Thus, the study is driven by an interest from both practitioners and scholars. The design and cases are relevant as they provide access to an understudied field where the two organizations are well representative for important civil society organizations, tensioned between voice and service in a changing 'social democratic' welfare state.

The interaction between observations, abstraction and feedback from research and reflection, planning and doing in practice is at the core for the development process in the project, and a central aspect of mutual and collaborative interpretations. As the two parallel knowledge systems of practice and research engages in the same process, it also provides a

possibility for a close inside perspective of the practice with a rich and saturated understanding of the **research context**.

Based on observations of board meetings, board minutes and interviews with board members, behavioural aspects of board work in practice was analysed (cf. Stiles and Taylor, 2001). In a dialectic reflexivity process (Alvesson et al., 2008) over these observations and prior knowledge on the behavioural roles of control, service or strategy as well as the importance of board work as a collective craft, the research process included a series of theoretically grounded **observational feedbacks** to the practice development in participating boards. The feedbacks included a critical perspective on the notion of board work and of social identities of directors where differences between board work as self-understood and observed was an important area of analysis (Alvesson and Willmott, 2012).

The feedback on practice functions as a catalyst for development, where the general as well as more specific "mirroring" from observation of board practice has created new **insights and learnings** for the participating organizations as part of an experiential learning process (cf. Kolb, 1984). In this process, local understanding of problems and their possible solution could be put into action in practice.

The outcomes of these interactive processes give new insights on board work for innovation. Based on feedbacks and learnings, **mechanisms and underlying structures** that shape board behaviour can be revealed in a process of abduction (Danermark, 2002; Bhaskar, 2008).

In the study, the interactive research and practice processes described above were iterated over a period of two years in eight board meetings in each participating organization. As board meetings are inaccessible research settings (McNulty and Pettigrew, 1999; Huse, 2007), the access to an understudied field provided by the interactive research design was valued as central for this study even though the role as inside researchers implies limitations on objectiveness. However, while allowing for both feedback and ongoing learning in the project, the interactive research approach also provided ongoing opportunities for testing the validity of observations and interpretations.

Due to the close and inside perspective given by this design, we have agreed on anonymizing the participating organizations as well as the individual directors, and will refer to them as chair, directors and Secretary generals in organization A and B throughout this paper.

In the following sections, notes and comments from our observations and interviews are given to exemplify the general and shared understanding of what shapes board work for innovation in the two studies cases.

Results

In this section, results from the interactive research process in the two organizations are presented according to the following logic; first we describe the research context of each organization and board in terms of mission and operations, size, age and current stated ambitions. Then, we present the feedback and observations of the board roles of control, service, strategy and board work as a collective craft. Third, we present reflections and learnings regarding the underlying mechanisms and structures that shape board behaviour in innovation, preparing the ground for our final analysis and conclusions.

Organization A

Research context

We engaged with organization A, a rights-based Swedish non-profit organization founded in the mid-twentieth century. The organization works locally, nationally, and internationally and has approximately 10 000 individual members and 40 local departments spread across Sweden, pursuing a variety of activities and projects, including extensive international work. In addition, the organization performs ongoing advocacy, where it becomes an important task to succeed in bridging this with the commitment from an active and vivid social movement.

During the time-period studied, organizational development and desired innovation has focused on managing and developing methods to strengthen individuals' right to participate in society, while considering the balance between voice and service for the organization's own members. Importantly, a need for new ways in which the expertise in the organization can benefit the political advocacy, not only in Sweden but also in many other countries, has been identified. The board in organization A consists of eleven directors, and a full-time chair and part-time vice chair. Notably, the organization unexpectedly both recruited a new CEO and elected a new board and chair half-way through the project. The number of directors were reduced to eight in the new board. The board composition with directors' backgrounds from member movement and their professional background from non-profit, public and for-profit sector are described in Table 1. The board in organization A is composed of directors from the member-movement, with a strong connection to local and regional organizing. Both CEO:s have a background in the member movement. There are few directors with a professional background from the for-profit private sector.

	Membership background		Professional background		
	Prior experience of local/regional board positions	Membership prior to directorship at national level	Non-profit sector	Public sector	For-profit sector
Board 2018-2019					
Chair 1		X	X		X
Vice chair 1	X	X	X		
Director 1	X	X	X		
Director 2		X		X	
Director 3	X	X		X	
Director 4		X	X		
Director 5		X		X	
Director 6	X	X		X	
Director 7	X	X	X		
Director 8	X	X			
Director 9	X	X			X
Director 10	X	X	X	X	
Director 11	X	X			
Board 2019-2021					
Chair 2	X	X	X		
Vice chair 2	X	X	X		
Director 2 (re-elected)		X		X	
Director 3 (re-elected)	X	X		X	
Director 4 (re-elected)		X	X		
Director 12	X	X		X	
Director 13	X	X	X		
Director 14	X	X		X	
Director 15	X	X			
Director 16	X	X			
Secretary general 1		X	X	X	X
Secretary general 2		X	X	X	X

Table 1: Board composition organization A

Observations and feedback

During the study, the following observations have been presented and reflected on by the board:

Control

In organization A very little formal control of economy as well as of operations was observed. Initially, board meetings were organized with an uneven distribution between political advocacy, member movement and organizational governance tasks, with a risk for not paying attention to tasks given to the board by the bi-annual members' meeting. As a result, this inadequate planning, prioritizing and performance of board processes and meetings resulted in meetings regularly lasting over two and a half days.

In the earlier stages of our period of observation, board meetings were dominated by matters relating to political advocacy. This being one of the organization's formal aims, as decided by the members, some attention to these matters was to be expected. However, with a full-time Chair allotted with this responsibility and a head office with full-time employees, we as outside observers found the time allocation quite remarkable. Other duties of the board such as responsibilities for managing the organization's funds, developing the organization for members, or being an employer, were clearly disregarded.

The board also expressed a lack of trust in how senior management delivered on issues related to the member movement and political advocacy. This lack of trust resulted in detailed assignments which in turn resulted in micromanagement and waste of energy from the board.

Rather than checking if new ideas or projects, needed for the new ways of combining professional advocacy with a community-based rights movement, where in line with board expectations, the role of control in the development of new projects was executed as micromanagement and deliverance on the new tasks given to senior management.

However, during the project, efforts were made to rebuild trust between board and management by actively providing structures for reporting. In these efforts, senior management actively provides their ideas for how to do this:

> *"I have some ideas on how to provide*
> *the reports you need for economy,*
> *projects and our companies."*

(Secretary general 2, organization A)

But, when the acting chief executive explicitly asked the board to decide on an amount of money to be allocated to a particular task the board had decided on, the board did not manage to accomplish that, as if that were not for the board to decide upon. When reflecting on the introduction of new structures for economic control, our interviews also reveal a lack of formal competence regarding economy.

As the board, during this project, is faced with the possibility to take an active role in specific tasks, the need for control is seen as something basic that the board needs to perform, rather than what is preferred in order to achieve new goals.

New structures for reporting coincide with the board developing new formal structures for the board meeting. Together these structures did not only result in clearer expectations of reports on economy and operations, but also in meetings now lasting only one and a half day.

Rather than control of the marketisation of the organization, the identity expressed by the board in organization is that of lively "political" debates about rights and situation for members of the community. As one director reflects:

> *"Maybe we are and should be more of*
> *a think-tank than a managing board?"*

(Director 4, organization A)

Thus, we observed roles of control expressed both in terms of an activists' rights movement and an effective professionalized project management. As new ideas on how to increase advocacy is developed, control is mostly enacted by specific tasks either given to the CEO by the board or given by the CEO to the board.

Service
During the project we often observed how directors referred to the value of extensive contacts, formal and informal, with various parts of the member community. For example, one of the directors actively refers to how

personal contact means that more resources should be put on communication:

> *"I have met with [actors from a specific subgroup in the community], and we definitely need to make sure that these projects get communicated so their situation can be improved."*

(Director 3, organization A)

These stakeholders outside of the board acted as a source for both new needs that the organization should act on and of new ideas how to address those needs.

However, the important sources of providing much needed energy to the organization was not actively handled on in an active service role by the board. Also, at no point did we observe an expression or act of a clear idea or addressed issue to what the CEO would need from the board to develop new processes or products in line with tasks given.

Strategy
During the project, the board in organization A did not engage in any real discussion about what or how the board could address strategic issues. We suggest that this was particularly remarkable in the beginning of our study. At this point, a senior employee in fact stated that:

> *"the board needs to develop the strategic competence needed for its task".*

(Secretary general 1, organization A)

Being an organization heavily driven by large projects, the board was experiencing little possibilities to direct change or influence operations.

*"We really should be able to decide
which projects we have, and why. But
they are all applied for, before we have
anything to say."*

(Director 10, organization A)

Instead, top level management retains control over strategic issues by developing new projects, business plans and external contacts.

During the project, the board needed to handle motions and their own propositions for the national congress. These are strategic tasks in any organization, and we observed a board that took this role by devoting time to working in writing groups rather than engaging in mutual discussions on what the strategic implications could or should be.

Also, the deeply rooted identity of threats expressed by members of the board, often changed focus from strategic issues to the need for better security and/or change of planned activities.

Board work as a collective craft
As indicated above, observations of the board in organization A is dominated by how individual directors and their various identities of the organization shape board work. In a non-explicit conception of rights based, political, community with both global and national agendas the social identities expressed by the board does not reflect a collective responsibility for ongoing operations and hired staff.

Throughout our period of observation, several senior staff members have quit the organization, dissatisfied with conditions of work. Within the board itself, psychic health has been poor, generating absences and severe interpersonal conflict.

Half-way into our study the incumbent Chair was not re-elected by the members' meeting, despite having been proposed by the nomination committee. With a small margin in the vote, the Chair was ousted, and a number of those proposed as new directors withdrew their candidacies. The members meeting decided on a new board composition, with all new candidates taken from those present in the room. As is indicated from the board composition, an interviewee critically notes that

> *"in such circumstances, white middle-aged men typically raise their hand".*

(Director 2, organization A)

This newly appointed bunch of directors elected over the ones originally suggested by the nomination committee, then restart the process of becoming a group over again.

Interestingly, the obvious chance to address this issue is not explicitly addressed. Instead a lively discussion about what a board should do and how, is sparked by the need to decide not only what the roles for chair and vice-chair should be, but also of the size of the vice-chair's remuneration.

In the struggles to develop board roles and behaviour a senior employee notes that:

> *"there are many images of what the head office is supposed to do. It is challenging that there are so many conceptions of what hired managers should do, what a board should do and what it means to be on a board. Power issues also muddles things. "*

(Secretary general 2, organization A)

Further, no clear role related to innovation can be observed in board structures or processes, and at no point during our period of observation does the board engage in a discussion of what innovative practices or projects the organization or the board itself might embark on.

Reflections and learning

During this project the board in organization A enacts all the roles of control, service and strategy, but with an emphasis on strengthening formal control and strategic capacity.

In order to achieve the wanted innovations for increased advocacy while maintaining a foundation of a strong member movement, the board struggles to handle and develop the professional organization. However, by introducing structures for control, the board does not only get information needed in order to point out new priorities of advocacy, but also it

challenges the norms and cultures of directors in a board meeting heavily infused by lively ideological debates and of issues directly related to individual cases in the community.

As the controlling role is developed during the project, there is however little or no discussion on when a task or area needs more of service or strategy from the board. Rather, the will to take a strategic role is reflected in the recurring idea that a board should be strategic.

The board also engages in active but indirect inclusion of stakeholders. At no point are others than employees from the head office included in board proceedings. Neither are various point of views from these stakeholders put to the table for a strategic discussion by the board or in decision making. It should be noted that this happens at the same time as there is a large focus on a changing external situation for organization A.

Thus, we observed an ambiguity regarding board roles arising from conflicting ideas between a mission of an activists' rights movement and the idea of an effective professionalized project management. The resulting on-going and active interpretation of various identities during formal tasks of economy, projects and employees is part of the board process, a process that results in decoupling of the board and the management organization.

In our observations and interviews we find little trace of any discussion within the board regarding reasonable ways to perform the joint task of governing the organization. Communication between individuals is occurring regarding several apparently important subject matters, such as whether or not the board has confidence in its Chair or vice versa. This apparent state of distrust does not prompt, however, any joint discussion about how to address this climate. Initial observations in the project revealed how the will to develop board behaviours for innovation lacked any actions to develop the board as a team. Combined with the existence of health issues and large turnover of both directors and senior management, little or no efforts are related to how tasks could be met by addressing team development as such.

When the need to develop the board into a team is further enhanced by the fact that a new board is elected, they start to dedicate time and planning to developing their mutual work. However, even though the idea of the board becoming a well-functioning team is easily accepted, the hard work needed and difficulties to actually prioritise when other tasks are put to the board's agenda, restrain such development.

The board behaviour in organization A can be described as largely shaped by the internal organizational situation. This means that tasks regarding high

turnover of personnel, difficulties recruiting competent staff and ongoing service delivery is always on the agenda. At the same time, the organization mixes its advocacy as a rights' movement with government-sponsored projects and business activities. A mixing occurring in an external organizational situation where stakeholders such as government departments and authorities expect a capable organization.

Also, the identities and values of an activist organization within the board leads to informal structures with little outspoken exercise of control, service and strategy in board processes. Instead, extensive time is devoted to self-acceptance and concern as well as organizing within the board. This is further enhanced by the fact that a new board and chair is elected halfway through the project. Therefore, there is very little trace of the board itself as an actor.

In addition, the lack of trust in management expressed by board seems related to extensive staff turnover among senior managers in the professional organization. Specifically, the recruitment of the new CEO half-way through the project reveals a lack of stability in roles regarding ongoing operations.

Towards the end of our study, the question of whether the board has engaged in any deliberation on the fact that it is composed in a highly conflictual manner had admittedly not yet been a matter of discussion. A question such as: "How should we go about dealing with this situation?" was yet to be asked openly. In our interpretation, us pointing in the direction of this possibility functioned as something of an eye-opener for the directors.

In summary, for the most part of our study this board must deal with matters of control, of service and of strategy. However, the choice of which role to fulfil in relation to which matter or how this might be done, is evidently not a matter for conscious deliberation to any particular degree. This role performance of the board is significantly impaired by board processes lacking in both trust and openness. The shifting external and internal situation of the organization, along with discussions of notions of effectiveness, are overshadowed by attempts at re-structuring the board and its board work.

Underlying norms and culture of how a board works are influenced by tradition and by the individual directors' experiences from engagement at the local level. The strong influence on new needs and ideas from external stakeholders seems to shape the agenda for innovation, revealing how the board needs to handle both the importance of member movement and the growing marketization of professional management.

In this difficult situation, even though the roles of control, service and strategy are all needed, the board does not embark on what and how they should address the sought for renewal. Instead, traditions and individual norms shape the board work, as individual directors bring identities of activism and one's own personal rights to the board. As this is filled by different social identities, self-experienced threat and issues with psychological health, the work of the board becomes decoupled from ongoing operations. Thus, the board resembles a cloud, hovering around projects and companies controlled by the organization. The board room is filled by lively political and ideological discussions, but also by individuals and their interpersonal conflicts. It seems like this active and egocentric board is decoupled from the professional management organization. The situation becomes an obstacle for innovation, and at the end of this project, new ways of combining professional advocacy with the membership movement are yet to be achieved in organization A. However, dedicated efforts for more effective board processes, structured tasks of control and an initiated process of becoming a team has started the development.

Organization B

Research context

In the project we also engaged with organization B, a global rights organization that has existed since the beginning of the twentieth century. The organization has over 75,000 members and is organized locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. It is politically and religiously independent and rests on international conventions and declarations. As part of addressing new challenges in Sweden, organization B strives to achieve innovation by exploring new roles in welfare provision. In addition, there is a perceived need to renew the understanding and role of organization B as an international actor. In organization B, the board consists of twelve directors and the Chair. The board meeting, however, often consists of up to twenty people, as different participants from the hired staff are expected to join in for presentations and discussions. The board composition with directors' backgrounds from member movement and their professional background from non-profit, public and for-profit sector are described in Table 2. The board in organization B is composed of directors with a broad professional background from the non-profit, public and private sectors. However, several directors were not members prior to their engagement in the board.

	Membership background		Professional background		
	Prior experience of local/regional board positions	Membership prior to directorship at national level	Non-profit sector	Public sector	For-profit sector
Board 2018-2020					
Chair	X	X	X	X	
Director 1	X	X	X		X
Director 2					X
Director 3	X	X	X		
Director 4	X	X			X
Director 5	X	X	X	X	X
Director 6		X		X	
Director 7			X	X	
Director 8			X	X	X
Director 9					X
Director 10	X	X	X	X	
Director 11	X	X	X		
Director 12			X	X	X
Secretary general 1			X	X	X
Secretary general 2			X	X	X

Table 2: Board composition organization B

Observations and feedback

During the study the following findings and observations has been presented and reflected on by the board:

Control

In organization B the board acts heavily on the role of control. Management is often present in board meetings; their role is mostly to present and inform the board about economy and operations. These managers are often highly educated with an acknowledged expertise in different areas.

As various points of view come to the surface, control is combined with ongoing shaping of identity as both a global rights-based organisation and a growing enterprise. While processes of 'brand positioning' and strategic planning were ongoing, a sudden drop in revenue appears to have heightened a sense of the organization being in crisis. At one stage, a director outspokenly talked about the situation.

"We are really a business in crisis".

(Director 4, organization B)

In this notion of both the organization as a business and an ongoing crisis the need for control increases, resulting in extensive demands of reporting from senior management. A demand that is questioned by senior management as this use of resources hinders onward development and innovativeness.

"We have to provide written reports, presentation slides and participate in person to present the same report up to three times."

(Secretary general 2, organization B)

This triple reporting is a result of committees where directors of the board and senior managers work together. A structure that also moves important discussions and strategic roles away from the board.

There appears to be little planning of board roles in relation to specific tasks in meetings. At no point was it articulated which role the board agreed on to have with regard to different issues. A controlling role appears to have been something of a default mode, but never was this agreed upon after principled discussion.

The role for control is further enhanced by an internal accountant that is delivering more tasks than management can handle. Initially in the project, all of these were expressed as a lack of trust from the board in top management. With the recruitment of a new CEO, initial strands of rebuilt trust were expressed, but little or no relief of controlling functions was given.

In summary, even if much controlling is asked for by both directors and in committees, there is little or no discussion in the board of how and what to control. Rather, this results in much 'red tape' for the professional organization.

Service
In organization B, the board's role in providing service is dominated by how individual directors act as cognitive experts. This role is also enacted both in various committees and outside the boardroom. There are several examples of individual directors providing the service they believe is needed and engage in.

"With my background I can really see that we must improve our risk assessment, and that is what I devote my time in the committee to."

(Director 5, organization B)

In this role, there is a tendency to operative management in the board. In discussions regarding the 'brand positioning' of the organization and in matters pertaining to the organizational constitution, the board devoted much time to detailed hands-on work, reformulating slogans and paragraphs of text at the very board room table.

To maintain contact with and legitimacy within the member movement, some of the directors often refer to contacts with members at the local level:

"At our local department, the members often express the importance of standing up for human rights at the international association, and it´s really important for me to be able to tell them that we stand for this."

(Director 10, organization B)

However, even if the need to develop the member movement is expressed openly in the boardroom, the board does not engage in any discussions of how to shape ideas and legitimacy in this direction. Rather, this is a task performed by management.

Another example is when directors recognize their own networks and relations as possible service for the organization's development.

"Just let me arrange a meeting [for the responsible staff] with this company."

(Director 12, organization B)

Together, the various individual efforts to provide service from directors to the organization does not necessarily result in an experienced service to the organization but rather as extra work and a lack of resources.

> *"It´s not a good idea that they [the other directors] do this, but I don´t know what leadership to execute in order to change this situation."*

(Chair, organization B)

Together with these acts of individual directors, the resourceful and competent management and staff also have major input on board decisions.

The board meetings were to a large extent composed of staff members presenting background material and proposals, as well as taking part in the discussion. In major decision areas, the knowledge asymmetry between the majority of the board and these staff members was obvious. On repeated occasion, and regarding a number of re-occurring themes for decision-making, board members asked for further opportunities to learn more about what had been decided.

During our period of observation, there were also a number of new partnerships and forms of welfare provision endeavoured by the organization. These initiatives and formulas emanated from staff proposals.

Notably, the many different efforts to help and service the organization do not emanate from a joint discussion on what the CEO needs from the board in order to achieve targets and goals set for the organization.

Strategy
During this project the strategic role taken by the board mostly consisted of rudimentary collective work relating to a changing external context. Here, individual directors often refer to anecdotical observations as part of their social orientation.

> *"I have myself talked to a person that describes how the situation [for this group] has become much worse."*

(Director 4, organization B)

When a director makes an anectodical statement such as this, the point of view is often strengthened by other directors relating similar experiences. However, combined with the already described strong positions of and competence among management in these complex issues that require

strategic efforts, this positioning based on a single personal experience appears to diminish input from the board.

Rather, the structures, planning and agendas for the board that are based on norms of member organisations do not stimulate discussions on what or how the board should address the strategy needed for a specific task. A situation that leaves more room for management to lay out strategic initiatives.

Board work as a collective craft
In our observations of organization B, board work is dominated by actions of individual directors rather than the board exercising a collective craft. This means that well-developed reflexivity of individual directors does not come into play in board meetings or in the board as a group. For instance, strong convictions based on complex reasoning has apparently led several directors to the conclusion that new forms of welfare will not be realised.

> *"I don´t believe that this [new role in welfare] is something that we will continue, but it is ok that management explores this in a controlled manner."*

(Director 8, organization B)

The stable culture and norms in board meetings make changing of board behaviour slow, something that further restrain innovative board processes. As an example, the idea of becoming a learning group by the use of self-evaluation seems hard to implement in board meetings.

After our initial period of observation, our feedback to the board included allusions to the importance of reflective self-evaluation as a means to enhancing quality. This theme was brought by the Chair to the discussion at one board seminar, in conjunction with treatment of results from a formal board self-evaluation. The results of the formal self-evaluation were not discussed at all. The Chair's initiative to engage in reflective discussion generated sceptical and hesitant discussion with sceptical points from other directors.

> *"It feels strange to discuss each other in this manner"*

(Director 7, organization B)

During the project, the idea of the board becoming more of a high-performing team is actualised. Thus, time and recourses are put into group sessions and leadership development during board meetings. However, at no point is the question of what and how the board should do it opened for discussion in the entire board.

Reflections and learning

In organization B, the board work is heavily dominated by tasks of control. Even if there are efforts both to provide service and to take strategic positions, these roles are only individual actions and not developed by the board as a whole.

The organization is conceived by one interviewee as a popular movement, an activist organization anxious to make a mark and develop its "brand", and as a fund-raising organization, "with a huge potential for development" in all dimensions. Something that highlights the possibility of strategic alliances with other similar organizations. The organization is furthermore claimed to be quite heavy administratively, with a board basically sanctioning proposals from the employed staff at headquarters. This particular interviewee does not necessarily believe that this is a view that would be shared by all and s/he is furthermore clear that there is no "common vision" in the board regarding the appropriate role for the board in the organization. Another interviewee describes the situation as getting stuck in discussions on marginal matters. Yet another, describes it as a matter of there being "fractions" in the board, preventing strategic discussion about how to enable action on the part of staff and members. Decision-making, according to one director, is a bit "ad hoc" and s/he further notes that the mission of the organization is rarely touched upon in board discussions.

A major event that appears to have cast a long shadow during our period of observation/interaction was a modification in the budget made late in the preceding budget year. Revenues that had been budgeted simply would not come through and the then senior executive presented a modified budget, apparently to great distress at least to some directors who perceived this as overstepping the mandate of the hired official. There clearly are others for whom this was not at all a dramatic event other than the distressing fact that revenues would be lower and cuts to costs (and staff) would therefore occur.

The fractionalization of the board is indicated also by testimonies that many strategic conversations take place outside the boardroom, including less than all of the board members. Overall, the agenda of the board appears not be a matter of any discussion in the board as such; risks associated with partnering with corporations – perhaps seeking to whitewash their brands, the difficulties of recruiting new members to the organization and the lack of

investment in such activities, or risks of losing wholehearted commitment to rights as conceived by the organization when collaborating within an international federation.

In support of such a rather "critical" view of the board in organization B, we have also observed a relatively large board, often with several staff members attending meetings. After a year in place, the newly appointed board still gives off the impression of being "air-dropped" in the external organizational situation of an international federation, a national membership organization and major strategic issues regarding non-profit domestic welfare provision. When it comes to board processes this newness means that the board's skills deficit is filled by office staff and the directors' prior experiences rather than a focus on organizational mission or the member movement.

In line with previous research, the large board appears to impair strategic and controlling roles, instead handled in committees, e.g. a working committee, and an auditing committee. Although there are some examples of directors providing service to management, e.g. in interacting with members, the service role from this quite large board has never been articulated nor planned within the board.

In relation to a changing external organizational situation we note that the directors of the board bring a large variety of stakeholders to the board rather than a tight coupling to the membership organization. However, when individual directors do meet with representatives from within membership ranks it is suggested in our interviews that these meeting may have an air of "campaign" to them, implying that promises are made with an eye to securing further nomination. At no point is input from the membership and their representatives treated as vital input to board decision-making.

However, the gradual decline in membership and the fact that the member's meeting is the apex of the organisation is a matter of concern. On several occasions, directors agree that very little resources are allocated to development of the membership in terms of services or opportunities to engage in practical work. In fact, it appears to dawn upon some that this resource allocation is in the hands of the board. Although the budgeting process would perhaps have to be managed slightly differently if the board were to accomplish change in a direction not proposed by management.

In an ambition to improve organizational performance, the directors use their personal experience and resources through different committees.

Furthermore, the struggles of finding and appointing a new CEO is conceived as a crisis, and clearly stresses the board's efforts for efficiency.

In this situation, underlying values and assumptions of the individual directors are revealed. As directors apply their own resources, different norms and languages are applied. In this board process, the sense of the board as a group is questioned.

The recruitment and arrival of a new senior official marked a significant turning-point in our observations. In the beginning of our project, much effort from the board was put into a lack of trust in senior management and the need for extensive control. With a new CEO, recruited by the existing board another tension rises. Even if s/he is perceived as a competent and high-performing leader, the existing tasks of control, often addressed in committees, are difficult to end. Now, the board both expresses new trust in the new CEO and requires extensive actions of control.

This means that individual directors focus both on strengthening and controlling management. Thus, the relatively large board is divided by the many interactions between directors and staff. Their mutual tasks lead to a tighter coupling between the board and the rest of the organization. However, due to a lack of mutual discussion of what and how to address various tasks, the efforts of control, service and strategy do not reach full potential. Rather, they become something that draws resources, are criticized by management, but still not discussed in the board.

Thus, during this interaction with the board in organization B, the board hardly appears as an actor in the organizational drama. Regarding one major strategic matter, there appears to be, in fact, quite a unanimous view in the board that certain development projects since long under way will not and/or should not be pursued. In a full year of functioning, this particular board does not reach the point of clearly identifying this situation and addressing it.

As a result, identified needs, new ideas, and testing of new operations of providing welfare are driven by the new CEO and senior management rather than by active role-claiming from the board. A situation that leaves the board to handle the member movements opinion on such new roles.

Analysis

From the observational feedback, reflections and learnings in the two studied cases, we now return to the aim of this paper and discuss board work for innovation.

How are board roles of control, service and strategy enacted upon when tasks related to innovation are on the agenda?

Our findings show two cases where boards enact controlling, service and strategizing roles out of individual experiences, ideas, and norms, instead of departing from a joint discussion in the board about what needs to be done and how to do it.

In line with previously noted development of non-profit organizations becoming more business-like, the studied cases are both examples of marketized civil society organizations, highly specialized staff, managerial professionalization, and economization (Maier et al, 2016).

This development does not seem to have led the board to an active decision on which roles are needed. Instead, it is the individual directors' previous experience and the practice of managers that shape board behaviour. Primarily, there appears to be a strong sense among directors of being expected to "control" the organization. As practices of control are introduced, they are hard to let go of, even if more focus would be needed on service or strategy.

Agendas of innovation are clearly articulated by the boards, and the roles taken are mostly in line with previous findings to increase efficiency of the organization (Jaskyte, 2018). Here, directors focus on providing their services when opportunities arise, rather than after a joint discussion on what the situation or the CEO needs. At the same time, the increasing capacity of professionalized staffing, programmes and projects are believed to strengthen the possibilities of achieving these innovations through instrumental rationalities.

Further, even if the boards certainly agree in the notion of their organizations being part of what in previously research has been described as important member movements, communities and local engagement (Wijkström, 1997; Hvenmark & von Essen, 2010), this is not given attention in terms of service or any specific role from the board as a whole.

Both studied cases are examples of organizations that frame contextual changes of welfare services or professionalized advocacy in terms of needed innovation. But any strategic roles needed to navigate in these changing landscapes are not explicitly enacted on by the board. Instead, input of needs, and ideas and how to address them are mostly given by management and sometimes from other actors in the member movement.

The board roles of control, service and strategy appear not to be explicitly enacted in innovation. Rather, the ideas and inherent practices of individual directors decide the actions of the board. Not seldom are these decisions also acted upon outside the board room. It might also be that the roles are not enacted as separate roles. Instead, the strategic position needed for the marketized organizations could be believed to be achieved as directors provide their service as experts on control.

In neither of the organizations, however, are any observed societal innovations driven by the board. Instead, new innovative programs, processes and services are driven by the management level, mostly as a means to improve efficiency.

How does the board excercise a collective craft when tasks related to innovation are on the agenda?

As directors represent different perspectives, it restrains the board from functioning as a group. As previously noted, effort is required to create the conditions needed for individual and collective cognitive and emotional competences to function as a group (Huse, 2007; Sjöstrand et al, 2016).

As noted, the changing composition of directors in the board, election of new Chair and recruitment of new CEO´s are all factors that put the observed boards in early phases of group development. However, such processes of renewal are well known parts of the democratic processes to put a board in place in a Swedish member organization. Thus, the process of developing a collective board work ought to be a well-known practice in these "mature" organizations.

But in our findings, we see only initial activities to achieve this. The question of how the transition from an outsider to a well-established board member should be handled never appears to be on the table. Nor is there a concerted effort at agreeing on which role the board is to take in relation to particular tasks. After several interventions in this project, toward the very end of the study, we did see signs of a growing acknowledgement that such conscious choice of board role might be of value.

In the studied cases there are not many observations of collective board work and little or no explicit reflection about what or how the board should address innovation. Central aspects of high performing teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 2008) or enabling forces for innovation (Yar Hamidi & Gabrielsson, 2017) are yet to be achieved by the studied boards. Instead, in both organizations studied, perceived external and internal stress is observed together with boards with a weak status as unified actors in the organization. Instead of collectively acting as a team, the boards appear largely as individual directors with strong recourses or with individual agendas. In turn, this leads to fragmentation of the boards. A finding that is not at all unlike findings from studies of for-profit companies (Huse, 2007).

As a result, board work for innovation in the studied member organizations, are more shaped by norms and ideas from individual directors and traditions of Swedish popular movements, than from a board acting as a collective craft. Perhaps, it is even conflict and opposing ideas that drive innovation in these situations.

What mechanisms and underlying structures shape board behaviour when tasks related to innovation are on the agenda?

We argue that board work for innovation to a large extent is shaped by underlying structures and norms from both member movements and a marketized civil society. The ways the board handles the tension between these two fields, determines their behaviour for innovation.

Acknowledging the importance of the importance of membership organizations in Swedish civil society (Wijkström, 1997; Hvenmark & von Essen, 2010), of which the two studied and well-established organizations in the study are examples, we take a final perspective on what mechanisms and underlying structures shape board work for innovation.

Rather than engaging in mutual efforts to discuss the process of innovation in terms of identified needs, new ideas, risk assessment, testing and spread, the boards seem to be tensioned between member movement and professionalized management. The tension between these different logics should open up organizational gaps and possibilities for innovation (Ahrne and Papakostas, 2002). But even if there are clear institutional collisions and pressures in both organizations, there seems to be little active work to find new ways of board practices in these gaps.

Rather, the mechanisms and underlying structures that shape board behaviour in innovation seems to be closely related both to norms and cultures of Swedish member organizations as well as ideas and networks of individual directors and management staff. In these structures, the directors need to relate to both the highly professional work done by the management level and the ideas and anecdotes from the community surrounding the organizations' mission and activities.

Thus, board behaviour becomes tensioned between member movement and the professional organizations growing as part of a marketized civil society. This results in a need to actively address what and how to enact board work or become a passive actor in innovation.

Conclusion

Responding to calls for in-depth qualitative study of civil society board practice, and in line with previous research on (corporate) boards and board performance, we found ample practical validation for the notion of generic board roles – control, service and strategy – and the practical value of engaging in conscious deliberation of which role to take with regard to particular tasks, including innovation. Our interactive research approach, allowing for in-depth access, helped us unveil a strong preponderance for rather superficial control and an ensuing lack of clarity regarding that the board may take many different roles, along with multiple self-understandings and identities there are significant obstacles for the board in innovation. Regarding innovation, the process of developing a board from a bunch of individuals into a team engaging in collective action also poses a significant challenge which limits active and deliberate role-taking in tasks of renewal and innovation.

At least in the studied Swedish civil society organizations, practices related to innovation are primarily proposed by competent and resourceful management. The boards of these organizations appear to be struggling with ongoing contemporary expectations of governing boards in civil society organizations becoming more business-like. As marketization increases in these member organisations, the boards are tensioned between on one hand the ideas and legitimacy from members, and on the other hand, the trust in resources and competence of management to deliver innovations in line with the organizational mission. Ultimately, the way the board handles the tension between these two fields, shape how they work for innovation.

It is our hope that our work contributes to heightened attention to this challenge and that such attention consequently may spur both research and development on board practices and continued innovation from civil society organizations.

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