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**Networking for Gold: A multi-level analysis to explain network
organising dynamics**

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Abstract

The primary aim of this research is to understand how the multiple levels within networks influence the organising dynamics in an intentionally formed network through the measurement of tie strength. This is a significant contribution because previous research is based on network studies in which only one level is considered, most of the research is conceptually undeveloped in the area. The research also addresses the measurement of the strength of relationships rather than just their existence or non-existence. Furthermore, this study examines intentionally created networks – an area where there is currently very little research. Thus the study is significant because the new data contributes to the marketing research environment and can be presented to examine findings in other research contexts, including the social policy and not-for-profit sectors.

To address the aim and context of the study it was necessary to understand a national programme which had global objectives. The research involved a multi-method approach that utilised a single case-study strategy with multiple embedded cases consisting of three interdependent, intentionally formed networks, each with a central broker, in the elite and high-performance sport sector in New Zealand.

The overall contributions of the research were: (1) The identification of a new network type, termed here as a *structured* network. (2) The finding that networks that are intentionally created and managed can be durable and effective, and this is dependent on the role of the central broker. This finding has obvious implications for practitioners involved in such networks and for governments that are interested in creating them. (3) The finding that cross-level pressures influence network effectiveness. (4) The finding that relationships developed at the pre-network formation stage contribute to network effectiveness. (5) And finally, the identification of a new stage of intentional network formation. This stage was taken by the New Zealand government issuing a tender in order to gauge the level of interest and the resources available to provide a network of services before establishing it.

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Glossary of terms

Actor is the term used within this study to describe an organisation that is a member of a network (Brass, Galaskiewicz, Greve, & Tsai, 2004; Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Wasserman & Faust, 1995).

Carded sport refers to National Sport Organisations (NSOs) that are supported by the New Zealand Academy of Sport (NZAS). The carded NSOs identify athletes who are then also 'carded'. Being a 'carded' athlete means the athlete has access to the range of services provided by the NZAS. Most NSOs have four carding levels: level 1 is world class, level 2 is international, level 3 is development, and level 4 is junior. Each level offers a different entitlement to the athlete in terms of the amount of support they can expect to receive in their development within that NSO (K. Sadleir, personal communication, May 11, 2004; NZAS – Central, 2003).

Central broker coordinates the tasks of the network, connects actors to other actors, mediates between actors, acts as a gatekeeper for information and chooses who to pass this information on to (Borgatti, Everett, & Freeman, 2002; Hanneman, 2001). Central broker in this research study is used to refer to NZAS – North Inc., NZAS – Central Inc. and NZAS – South Island Inc.

Core actor is an actor located centrally within the network (Gulati & Gargiulo, 1999; Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2007).

Elite sport within this study is defined as the international level for that sport. *Elite sport system* includes the organisations and processes to develop elite-level athletes within a nation (K. Sadleir, personal communication, May 11, 2004; SPARC, 2005).

Focal actor is the specified actor in the network that is the main focus of the network activity. The network taken from the focal actor view point is referred to as its *ego net* (Mitchell, 1969; Van den Bulte & Wuyts, 2007; Wasserman & Faust, 1995).

High performance sport refers to national and international level of sport competition.

High-performance sport systems comprise the organisations and processes which include sports science, sports medicine and talent identification that develop athletes at a national and international level (SPARC, 2005).

National Sport Organisations (NSOs) are the organisations responsible for the governance, regulation and overseeing of a particular sport in New Zealand (SPARC, 2003c).

Network within this study comprises of organisations and the connections or links that exist between them that represent relationships (Emirbayer & Goodwin, 1994; Johannisson, 1987a; Mitchell, 1969).

New Zealand Academy of Sport (NZAS) is Sport and Recreation New Zealand's (SPARC's) branded high performance strategy comprising of three interdependent, intentionally formed networks and a national office responsible for the delivery of high performance sport in New Zealand. SPARC owns the brand name 'New Zealand Academy of Sport' and funds the three networks. Each network is coordinated by a specially set up organisation for this task, the organisations being NZAS – North Inc., NZAS – Central Inc. and NZAS–South Island Inc. Each is an incorporated society which acts as a focus organisation for the coordination of elite and high-performance sport delivery within a separate geographic area within New Zealand. Each of these incorporated societies has developed its own unique network for this purpose (NZAS - Central, 2003; NZAS - North, 2003; NZAS - South Island, 2003; SPARC, 2003a, 2006).

Olympic Games refer to the Summer Olympic Games unless otherwise stated.

Sport and Recreation New Zealand (SPARC) is the governing body responsible for sport within New Zealand (SPARC, 2002).

Regional Sports Trusts (RSTs) are sport and recreation education charitable trusts. There are 17 RSTs in New Zealand (at the time of this research). Their role is to promote healthy, physically active lifestyles and to provide sport and recreation expertise to the regions that they serve (Sport Canterbury, 2006c, 2006e; Sport Wellington Region, 2006c).

