

(PP) THE STRUCTURE OF THE PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL CLUB

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Introduction

Students of organization structure and strategy have long constructed more or less abstracted models or types of organization based on empirical observation. One modernist strand is characterized by the ambition to carve out from empirical material the most efficient forms of organization with the purpose of establishing universal organization design rules (Clark 2000) or best practices (Morrow 2003). Other students regard them as descriptive constructs developed to highlight the organizational dynamics of different kinds of organizations, including the mechanisms of transition that operate in the interactive relationship between organizations and their contexts. To the latter strand can be included Max Webers ideal-typical depiction of the bureaucracy, Burns and Stalker's mechanistic and organic management systems (1961), Mintzberg's much cited organizational configurations (1979) and the archetype theory developed by Greenwood and Hinings (1988 a,b, 1993) and their colleagues (e.g. Cooper et al. 1996). Although the latter strand has been accused of being basically functionalist and generalist in its approach to explain organizational change (cf. Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd 2003), there is little doubt that this tradition has stimulated the inquiry into organizational dynamics and change.

Nevertheless, it is not only the modernist strand that is burdened by the problem of universalism. Once constructed, there is a tendency for such constructs to be abstracted and taking on a life of their own. In particular, Mintzberg's five structural configurations are often the focal point of discussions when organization structures are on the agenda in academic settings. One question is whether these configurations are really exhaustive in typifying organizational structures. Another is whether they are really stable, in contrast to structures that feature structural elements from more than one of them.

Moreover, another question is whether the North American picture of the organization landscape that dominates the configurational and archetype theories applies to other contexts. A group of organizations that has hitherto been hardly described in the organization literature is, for instance, the sport(s) clubs. Sport is a field where there are some big differences in organizing across continents, nations, and of course across different sports, and as such the description of organizing must be contextual. Slack and colleagues (i.e. Slack and Hinings 1992, Amis et al. 2004) have contributed to this by their analyses of archetype transition in Canadian national sport organizations, but apart from their contribution scholarly descriptions of sport organizations elsewhere are hard to find.

Methods

In this paper the intention is to embark on a description of the organization structure(s) of the professional football club (soccer), departing from the much cited configurations of Mintzberg (1979). Is the organization structure of top clubs adequately reflected in Mintzberg's dominant typology or are top clubs organized differently from other kinds of organizations? Despite the obvious differences that exist across clubs and nations, we presuppose that there are some common features that make football clubs similar insofar as organization structure is concerned. The paper is *theoretical* and essayistic in the sense that it is not drawing conclusions from

one specific study that is set out to measure elements of organization structure, yet the endeavour to answer the research questions is based partly on available data from one ongoing multi case study of some Norwegian football clubs (Gammelsæter and Jacobsen 2006), and partly on other European accounts found in books and articles on football, some of which are more anecdotal than academic. Our knowledge of organizing and management in football clubs is then juxtaposed to some of the central elements of Mintzberg's configurational theory to judge if their organization type is indeed described in the organization and management literature.

Discussion

The paper concludes that albeit configurational theory is valuable in providing some adequate concepts to describe the professional football club, the structure of the latter is also distinct to the extent that the configurations depicted by Mintzberg hardly cover its specifics. In terms of age and size, the dynamics and complexity of environments, the idea of production, and coordination mechanisms, football clubs differ from all other known types of organizations. It is likely that the same will hold for other team sport clubs that experience fierce competition, since the distinction of football clubs most likely emanates from the structure of the game(s) itself and the appeal that it has on its fans. Consequently, sport organizations and scholars should note down their references to professional sport clubs reflecting the commercial firm and instead study what it is that set team sport organizations apart from organizations that produce commodities or services.

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