

SKILLS GAPS AND SHORTAGES IN THE ITALIAN BASKETBALL INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

The availability of professional and voluntary workers is considered as a key success factor for sport services organizations. Nevertheless, the specific match between human resources skills and availability, organizational structures and conditions, and clients' needs has been seldom investigated in specific national or sporting contexts. The objective of this study is to investigate the main trends affecting the basketball industry in Italy, with a special focus on the processes of professionalisation, specialisation and concentration and on the existing skills gaps and shortages in the employees. The study has the objective to analyse the effective impact of the professionalisation process in Italian sport and to verify the frequently hypothesised change trend from simple structure to executive-office like structure (Kikulis et al.1992; Koski and Heikkala 1998; Madella 2001; Theodoraki and Henry 1994). On the basis of the results, significant consequences in terms of workforce development and related actions will be drawn. The Italian basketball industry includes a whole range of establishments (around 3.800) engaged in delivering primarily opportunities for basketball practice and entertainment normally on a membership basis.

METHODS

The study has been carried out within a European-wide project (EUROSEEN), aimed at analysing four different sports in five different countries. A representative sample of 160 basketball association has been selected from the national database and data from 128 have been obtained. A Computer Assisted Interview (CATI) has been used, sub divided in 5 different sections

Organizational structure and status

Facilities and services provided

Human resources and recruitment policies

Perception of skills gaps and shortages

Professional development and lifelong learning

RESULTS

The result of the study show that the majority of the Italian basketball clubs operate within a rather traditional model, with simple structures, where only very rarely specialised professional profiles different from the coaches and instructors are available. The rate is 4 managers every 11 coaches instructors with some variation according to the level of competition and size of the organization. Basketball clubs are usually middle size: with 40% with less than 100 members and only a very limited number (15%) with 200 or more members. The services offered are targeting a very young population, but the working conditions in many cases are affected by strong limitations in the availability of the facilities. The perceived trends for the future indicate a substantial stability in the number and composition of the human resources; only 20,6% of the clubs plan substantial investments for the future and very little as far as professional training and lifelong learning is concerned. Perception of skill shortages ($4,68 \pm 0,64$ vs. $1,79 \pm 0,49$ on a 6 point scale) are stronger than for skill gaps of the workforce already employees and the critical professional roles are the management functions and the head coach of the adult team. No specific problems are indicated for youth coaches and other occupational roles.

However very few club have a formal human resource policy and their effort seem focused more on the search for traditional sponsors (normally with very low financial contribution) rather than on new ways of interacting with the local systems and stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

With reference to the numerous popular models advocating a clear and irresistible trend toward the professionalisation and specialisation of the sport organizations, and the correspondent generalisation of a full managerial logic, the result show a contradictory situation still characterised by the dominance of rather traditional management styles and modes of operation. In most of the cases, in spite of the increase in the members, there is a perception of a stagnation of the sector and a clear incongruence between the perceived need to compete in an ever more competitive market of the sport services and the reluctance in investing in the professional development of the human resources. This is associated with a limited capacity to interact effectively with the local stakeholders and to modify the organizational processes. However, innovations in the training process of the workforce alone do not seem appropriate to produce any substantial change in the system if not associated with new organizational models and working systems together with new forms of mobilisation of the employers.

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