

A COGNITIVE APPROACH OF THE REPRESENTATION OF PERFORMANCE: A STUDY OF THE RUGBY CLUBS

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Abstract

A topic for research

Performance is a polysemic notion which can be considered as a "strange attractor" in its ability to absorb many meanings (Pesqueux, 2004). From an organisational point of view, Bourguignon (2000) defines the performance as "the realisation of organisational objectives whatever the nature and the diversity of these objectives. This realisation can be understood in the strict sense (result, achievement) or in the broader sense of the process which leads to the result (action)...". Thus raising the question of performance sends us back to the necessity of defining beforehand the function target of the organisation and, the latter, in its turn refers to the question of the expectations of the parties present concerned. For performance does not exist as an objective reality which would exist as an object per se. It is rather a matter of "a contingent social construction" (Naro, 2004) in so far as it is not accessible separately from the prism of cognition of the actors present - assessors, stakeholders,... - and from the power relations which structure their relations.

Organizations like clubs of rugby are exemplar cases to investigate these questions. Indeed, traditionally the club seems to be the first place where competition takes place. However, with the context of professionalization of rugby, the club becomes a dual entity to answer the new constraints of sports as a show (Nier et al., 2004). Since then, two autonomous entities with a distinct moral personality coexist within the same structure. The first one is exclusively dedicated to professional whereas the other to non-professional sport. That is why, clubs become "bicephalous ». In spite of their status, the support organization is involved in the governance of the professional sector. Thus, professional and non-professional sectors are interrelated.

Did professionalization of clubs of rugby have a positive impact on global performance?

The aim of the paper is to investigate the concept of performance within both professional and non-professional clubs of rugby. Several research questions are related to this global one : what is the representation of performance for each actor ? Is it an athletic, a financial, an organizational or a social performance ? Is the concept of shared performance relevant ? Is it relevant to develop a synthetic indicator for global performance for each sector or, on the contrary for each club ?

Theoretical framework

Such investigation refers to contingency theories (structural and behavioral). Indeed, our research question is related to the debate between universality and contingency in clubs of rugby in both professional and non-professional sectors. Our attention is focused on their managerial practices and their reach of performance.

Methodology

Concerning methodology, cognitive cartography is used for this study in order to analyze the representations of the tested users, that is the structures formed from beliefs and opinions concerning performance by establishing causal maps of individual cognitive mapping. We shall retain the definition of cognitive mapping proposed by Cossette and Audet (1994), "A cognitive map is a graphic representation of the mental representation that the researcher has of a whole set of discursive representations voiced by a subject from his own cognitive representations about a specific object ». These authors then consider cognitive cartography as the concrete result of a series of operations calling on representations of the actors concerned, that is the researcher and the answering subject.

Our study is focused on clubs of the professional sector. In order to do so, in each club, we will interview in both the director of professional sport and the director of non-professional sport.

Results, discussion

The first results of the study show different representations of performance. Discourses of directors of the professional sector seem focused on athletic and financial performance. Indeed, Professional clubs take an industrial risk when they invest. Such investments force them to perform in terms of sport competition and in financial terms as well or at least to maintain the balance a Financial and athletic equilibrium (Bourg et Gouguet, 1998, 2001). On the contrary, in the non-professional sector, directors refer more to a social or educative performance. Education, training represent key dimensions of their mission. In that sense, sport enhance sense making and develop social networks. Nevertheless, directors do not forget that education in professional sector is important for the professional sector. Consequently, structuring the non-professional sector seems critical to reach an organizational performance.

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