

# COERCIVE ISOMORPHISM ON BELGIAN FOOTBALL CLUBS: STRUCTURAL, ECONOMICAL AND SOCIAL EFFECTS OF A CENTRAL IMPLEMENTED QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

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## Abstract

### Aim of the abstract:

In recent years various actions has been taken by many sports federations and leagues to improve the quality of Belgian (youth) sports clubs (De Knop, et al., 2004). With the aim of continuous improvement of these sports clubs, a specific quality management system has been used in order to increase the degree of professionalization of the clubs. In this paper the impact of the top-down implementation of this quality management system on sports clubs has been examined. The purpose was to look at the causes and consequences of this implementation within the Belgian football clubs. Furthermore, there has been researched to what extent the system affects structural, economical and social variables in these football clubs.

### Theoretical background:

The theoretical background of this paper analyzes the principal of coercive isomorphism on Belgian football clubs (DiMaggio & Powel, 1983). There has been explained how the principles of quality management and performance management have led to a (r)evolution in the Belgian football clubs. Since the Football Federation is using an objective quality system to control their clubs, it can be stated that going out from this federation there is a sort of (in)formal pressure on the football clubs to change towards a more professional organization (Slack & Hinings, 1994). One way the Football Federation has been encouraging the clubs on participating the evaluation audit was by distributing financial benefits. This extrinsic motive have led to a second theoretical approach, namely the affect of an intrinsic/extrinsic motive on the external/internal goal of professionalization.

### Methodology, research design and data analysis:

The sample used for the study is a set of more than 300 Belgian football clubs which has been audited by Foot PASS (Van Hoecke, et al., 2009) between 2008 and 2011. The research started with two focus group interviews of seven random academy managers, with the intention to find out their opinion and experience regarding the audit. The findings of these interviews have been used for the construction of a survey, which examines the effects of the audit on the inner workings of the club on one hand and the entering or maintaining of external relations on the other hand.

### Results, discussion and implications/conclusions:

The results indicate that the clubs certainly want to develop in the direction of the higher quality and more professional sports organizations. This is reflected in the fact that the main reasons why most of the clubs participating the audit are "to know how professional their club is" and "to receive an objective report that can be used for improving their youth development". These intrinsic objectives seems much more important than extrinsic motives like "obtaining financial benefits", which are given to clubs that participate or "in order to achieve a quality seal of approval to profile themselves to the public". Other conclusions coming out of the in-depth interviews are that a participation in the audit provides a structural improvement in the club and will lead to better associations with the local authority, schools, other sport clubs and to a smaller extent with other football clubs. Regarding the effort and the follow-up of the audit there is a clear discrepancy between the management of the academy and the board of the club.

The contribution of this paper can be showed on micro, meso and macro level. On micro level the results of the audit may change a lot for the participating clubs and can contribute to adapt the audit tool on the demands of the clubs. On meso level, there is the aspect of a changing policy environment in Belgium with emphasis on improving youth development. In line with this, the contribution of this paper is important for the policy. On macro level this analysis finds its international character in the fact that also other foreign federations and leagues (wanted to) use the services of this audit tool.

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