

THE NARRATIVES OF THE FINNISH SPORT MANAGERS: HOW TO DEVELOP SPORT MANAGEMENT IN FINLAND?

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Abstract

Aim of the abstract

The aim of the present study is to examine through their narratives how Finnish sport managers experience being a sport manager: What are their conceptions of being a sport manager in the context of Finnish sport? What kind of contents and meanings do sport managers give to Finnish sport management? This poster focuses on only one part of the study: How should Finnish sport management be developed according to Finnish sport managers? This research will give new insight into the developmental needs in sport management. The study will provide new information to strategic decision-making, give answers to the equality questions and strengthen knowledge management in Finnish sport management. Through the sport managers' narratives we also have an opportunity to tap into tacit knowledge.

Theoretical background

This study will open a new perspective into the field of Finnish sport management both thematically and methodologically. In all, Finnish sport management has been studied very little: In the 1960s and 70s Heinilä (e.g. 1977, 1982) studied some aspects, for instance women's role, in Finnish sport management. Later on, Koski and Heikkala (1998, 1999) studied decision-making in Finnish sports. Aalto-Nevalainen has focused on women's role in Finnish sport management (Aalto 2003; Aalto-Nevalainen 2009). None of these studies have used narratives in their methodology. Internationally, although narrative studies are quite widespread in psychology and business management, for instance, there are only a few narrative studies concerning sport management (Edwards, Skinner & Gilbert 2004; Rinehart 2005).

In the narrative analysis, the analysis is based on the interpretation of the story and telling (Czarniawska 1998; Reissman 2001). The narrative is the central means by which people endow their lives with meaning across time: the narrative story is bound on time - it has the beginning, middle and end. This method examines how lives are lived

into existence and it provides models for practitioners and scholars of sport management to both experience and discover, model and use.

This study is based on the analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne 1995; Czarniawska 1998), i.e. on the analysis of the narrative story as a whole and its contents, themes and storyline (holistic content) (Lieblich, Rivka & Tamar 1998).

Methodology

The study includes the narrative interviews of 15 Finnish sport managers (11 male and 4 female) from the top of the Finnish sport management. Interviewees represent three different organisational levels: the governmental/public, private and the third sector (i.e. voluntary work). They are operational and governmental managers. The interviews were held in the spring and summer of 2010.

The interviews were first recorded and then transcribed (over 450 pages of text). Data will be read very thoroughly to categorise, thematise and classify the data. Further analysis will be done by using the core sentence method. In addition, there will be a network analysis, described as a sociogram.

Results

According to the interviewed sport managers, the actual management and leadership skills of the Finnish sport managers are not very high. Many of them are unskilled as managers, rather amateur than professional managers. Several of them had previously been professional athletes, but without any background in professional management. Furthermore, many chairpersons of the board, who work on a voluntary, unpaid basis, may have had their own, personal interests when running for the position.

It seems that sport management does not attract the best possible professional managers. Perhaps this is because sport does not seem to be very highly appreciated at the moment. Old political structures, traditions and connotations may also still burden the field. In addition, Finnish sport seems to live in a secluded world of its own. Also, sport management is neither recognized nor considered as a field of its own in Finland.

Discussion

Finnish elite sport is undergoing a major change. The field of sport management is a particularly challenging environment for a manager because of its special nature which differs from other fields of management quite significantly.

On the basis of the narratives, the manager must have good management skills to be a successful sport manager. However, that alone is not enough. One has to understand and internalize the substance, i.e. the field of Finnish sports and athletics and its meanings, principles and implications. Social skills and skills of modern management are also important: one has to have both the ability and the willingness to listen to one's environment. Sport management should thus be more versatile, horizontal and far-sighted. Further research and discussion about the state and development of Finnish sport management is vital in this period of transition.

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