

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN THE SUCCESS OF ELITE SPORTS IN FINLAND

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Aim

The aim of this paper is to identify what kind of leadership supports the success of national elite sports in Finland. The main focus in this analysis aims especially to identify Finland's Olympic Committee's leaders' notions about leadership relations. By connecting a theoretical framework and factors affecting leadership in elite sport organizations a managerial model will be suggested. This paper will provide recommendations that can be implemented to improve leadership in Finnish sport organizations.

Theoretical background

Finnish athletes' success in sports has a great importance for Finnish people and a strong impact on national identity. However, Finnish elite sport has recently been undergoing a process of change. The Ministry of Education and Culture set up a working group in 2008 in order to restructure the organizations in elite sport in Finland. This group finished its task at the end of 2012 and one of the outcomes was that all elite sport organizations in Finland should have a collective management system and an enriching, interactive and accomplished organizational management culture.

The importance of leadership as a foundation of successful elite sport has been acknowledged in the field of research as well as in practice. While leadership has been studied extensively, in Finland there is very little research in the area of sport leadership in particular. Much of the discussion and actions in leadership and management research have centered around the issues of practical management. Much less focus has been on the relationship issues as a meaning of trust, cooperation, innovativeness, transparency and significance of individualism. This study intends to define the leadership as a dynamic process in which the individuals aim at a common objective. Arnold, Fletcher & Molyneux (2012) identify five high order leadership themes for elite sport organizations' leaders to enhance the performance in leadership and management. These themes include situational, contextual, personal, team role and relationship issues. Fletcher & Arnold (2011) also stressed the importance of leadership as a basis for elite sports' success.

The theoretical frame of reference in this study is the transformational leadership and LMX (Leader Member Exchange) leadership since they emphasize the importance of interaction. Transformational leaders' primary focus is the success of the organization (Bass 1985). The expected outcomes of transformational leadership are uniformity of objectives, the growth of motivation of the individual and the productivity of the organization. The LMX leaders' primary focus is in the relationship development (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995). LMX could be described as a process between a manager and a subordinate in which they build a reciprocal and trust-based relationship in order to achieve high quality leadership practice and style.

Methods and research design

Three top managers from the Finnish sport industry were selected and interviewed during the spring 2013. These managers represent the Olympic committee board and manage different Sport Associations in Finland and have a long career in sport leadership. In-depth interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed. Analysis was carried out using manual coding techniques and appropriate measures. The complementary data for this study was research data collected by the Finnish Society of Sport Sciences. This data included eleven interviews of former top sport leaders in Finland and it was used as preliminary data in order to increase the understanding of the context.

Results and implications

The results of this study will provide specific knowledge about sport leadership in Finland and its effect on elite sports' success. We are developing an interpretative model based on empirical data and theoretical framework. The analysis of these results is not complete in time for the deadline of this abstract but will be presented in September.

References

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