

VOLUNTARY SPORT CLUBS AS LOOSELY COUPLED SYSTEMS – IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

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Aim of abstract/paper - research question

In response to increasing professionalization and commercialization, the preferred advice from many scholars to voluntary sport clubs (VSCs) is to implement classic management techniques.

Other scholars have questioned this advice. This paper builds upon this critique but suggests that we first need to understand the specifics of a VSC in order to decide upon appropriate management models. The aim of this paper is to explore possible benefits of conceptualizing VSCs as loosely coupled systems.

Literature review

Firstly, the paper will discuss suggested previous research on the solutions for VSCs. This includes scholars advocating the implementation of classic management techniques and scholars proposing alternatives. Alternative suggestions however have several flaws, which partly depends on a lacking insight into the everyday world of a VSC. Secondly it will discuss different ways of conceptualizing a VSC (e.g. Thiel & Mayer, 2009; Knoke & Prensky, 1984). Thirdly it will discuss the concept of loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1976; Orton & Weick, 1990). This reason for the choice of this theory is that it has been used in the context of organizations similar to VSCs, like cooperative, political and collegial forms of organizations.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

A five year action oriented ethnographic study of a VSC is used to illustrate the relevance of the concept of loosely coupled systems in a VSC context and implications of this for management. The author was involved in different functions in the VSC, thus having an unique insight. This led to results that is impossible without such close involvement. The chosen method is an answer to previous calls for close-up longitudinal studies of sport organizations.

Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

There was great development of the VSC during the study. The theory of loosely coupled systems proved useful for understanding this development process. One suggestion is that the key primarily is not whether classical management techniques is used or not, but how different techniques are mixed and matched to different challenges. This requires intimate knowledge regarding the specific organization. One implication is that this raises doubt concerning the appropriateness of recruiting board members and/or club managers lacking this knowledge when short term change is wanted.

References

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