
INSIDER JOB? INFORMAL RECRUITMENT PRACTICES AND WORKFORCE DIVERSITY IN GRASSROOTS SPORT GOVERNANCE ORGANISATIONS

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Type: Scientific
Category: 1. Critical Sport Management issues

Abstract

1. Aim of abstract/paper - research question

The aim of the paper is to explore the relationship between recruitment practices and the lack of workforce diversity in grassroots sport governance organisations. It is well established that positions of power in sport governance organisations in the UK – perhaps particularly at the grassroots, recreational level – fail to reflect both their local playing populations and their wider communities (Lusted, 2009; Sporting Equals, 2012)

The research questions guiding this paper are as follows:

1. What types of recruitment practices prevail in grassroots sport governance organisations?
2. How do these practices compare between the recruitment of voluntary Board members and paid employees?
3. To what extent might these practices contribute to the lack of diversity in grassroots sport governance organisations?

2. Theoretical background

The research is informed by a range of theoretical assumptions drawn from an eclectic mix of disciplines. Human resource management literature is used to propose the hypothesis of the potential role of workforce diversity in organisational efficiency and competitive advantage (Herring, 2009); studies in critical sport policy are used to locate the contingent embracing of equality and diversity issues in local sport governance as part of a wider process of professionalization of sport (Lusted & O’Gorman, 2010), while critical sociological theory provides the conceptual framework from which to analyse the findings. Specifically here, Bourdieu’s (1988) concept of social capital is applied to examine the importance of existing networks and prior knowledge of local sport governance in securing employment in this ‘field’.

3. Methodology, research design and data analysis

The paper draws upon data collected from a National Governing Body (NGB) funded online survey of the workforce in the regional County governance boards (RGBs) across the country. A series of questions were asked related to how current employees – separated into paid employees and voluntary Board Members – were recruited into their current positions at the RGB. Survey findings were collated using the Survey Monkey tool and transformed into simple descriptive statistics; several questions required open responses – this data was manually coded to identify key themes from the responses.

4. Results, discussion and implications/conclusions

Results indicate the presence of largely ‘informal’ recruitment practices; 95% of Board Members and 64% of paid employees heard about their vacancy through word of mouth or an internal organisational advert. 82% of Board Members and 55% of paid employees were encouraged or invited to apply by someone already at the County Board. It is argued in the paper that Bourdieu’s concept of social capital can usefully explain the ways in which existing networks and contacts inform recruitment practices in local sport governance organisations, while the concept of cultural capital can be applied to understand why this workforce remains largely homogenous and dominated by white, older males. A critical but balanced evaluation of these types of recruitment practices is considered; it is noted that the specific structural conditions of grassroots sport in many ways necessitates such recruitment styles, and yet these practices are unlikely to facilitate an increase the diversity of the workforce in the future.

References

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