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## VALUE-BASED QUALITY CONTROLLING OF A SPORT LEAGUE

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Type: Scientific

Category: 3: Governance of Sport(s) and Sport Organisations

### Abstract

Aim of abstract

A well-developed talent promotion of young athletes serves as foundation for a high quality in professional sports. That is why, various sports associations have installed professional junior leagues like the A- and B-Junior-League in German football. In general, the main goal of a junior league is the personal development of young athletes, because they have to get prepared for the challenges of the working life. The perceived performance level of a league is also important in order to assure a certain quality level.

Overall, there is a lack in research as well as in practical application with regard to the planning, managing, and controlling of the quality of professional junior leagues. Therefore, this piece of research addresses a central problem of sport management research and sport business: Analysis of relevant criteria for the quality controlling of a sports league.

Theoretical background

Controlling activities are implemented to monitor and support managerial decisions. For that reason, relevant information must be specifically procured and then consolidated into key indicators. The underlying value creation model is a prerequisite for a realistic monitoring of the status quo of a business. In service controlling literature several indicator systems have been developed that neither rely on value creation activities, e.g. performance measurement framework (Fitzgerald et al., 1991), nor integrate the relevant requirements of stakeholders in sports (Hudson et al., 2001).

The quality of a sports league is mainly influenced by the quality of its involved clubs. The competitive balance of the involved teams ensures suspense and promotes the competition for the championship in a league. Thus, the main goal of a sports league is to acquire the best clubs and athletes and to organize them in an appropriate competition (Woratschek et al., 2007). The league assumes the function of an

intermediary and coordinates activities. Its main task is to establish mutual relations between the league and the involved clubs in order to create various interactions that maximize the benefit between the diverse actors. Hence, the quality of a sports league must be analyzed under the assumptions of the value network (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998), but as its quality is highly depending on the quality of the clubs, it can never be analyzed separately. As a consequence we also have to analyze the quality of the clubs. The typical value creation of a sports club focuses on the ideal development of the own athletes and the acquisition of the best athletes from other clubs in order to reach the main goal sporting success. Traditional value creation analyses like Porter's value chain (Porter, 1985) fall short in that regard, because the improvement of the quality of a sports club does not follow a linear transformation process. In order to analyze the dynamic, integrative, and iterative processes in a sports club, the value shop (Stabell & Fjeldstad, 1998) offers an ideal theoretical basis to analyze value creating activities. Therefore, the value shop is the appropriate framework to analyze the quality of a sports club. Altogether, this theoretical background offers a comprehensive perspective of the value creation of a sport league.

#### Methodology, research design and data analysis

In sports management it is essential to reduce the number of relevant key indicators for quality management in order to keep the overview in that busy and fast-developing business. That is why, this research focuses on the corresponding value-based quality indicators of a junior sport league and its clubs. To collect insight information about the value creation activities we started with a qualitative analysis. From July 2013 until August 2013 we conducted 14 interviews with club managers, coaches, league representatives, and athletes. Independent researchers grouped the identified indicators of the clubs according to the value shop activities and the indicators of the league according to the value network activities. This qualitative analysis provides the basis for subsequent quantitative analyses.

#### Results, discussion, and implications

The qualitative analysis of the 14 interviews provides a good insight into the quality controlling of a junior sports league. In general, the identified quality figures refer to the following areas: daily collaboration between league and clubs, the medical and psychological support, the daily work of the sport managers, as well as diverse statistical figures about athletes, coaches, and physical environment. In a next step, causal relationships have to be analyzed to gain representative quality indicators as predictors of value (e.g. financial outcome, talent promotion). As a consequence, a key indicator system can be developed which focuses on the most important goals of junior leagues and clubs.

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