
THE PROFESSIONALIZATION OF MANAGEMENT AND THE EMERGENCE OF COACH DISMISSALS IN DANISH FOOTBALL – AN INSTITUTIONAL LOGICS PERSPECTIVE TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

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Synopsis:

Abstract:

AIM: Professionalization in sport has for some time been a topic within sport management research. Professionalization can be defined as “the process by which sports organizations, systems, and occupations of sport, transforms from a volunteer driven to an increasingly business-like phenomenon” (Dowling, Edwards, and Washington 2014, p. 527). Using this definition as a starting point, our study focuses upon the professionalization of Danish football in the period between 1978 and 2014. In particular, we use this development to explain coach dismissals as a singular and conspicuous organizational practice. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore how we theoretically can explain why dismissing the coach has become so common in contemporary professional football.

LITERATURE REVIEW: Recent research has emphasized coach dismissals to be an integrated practice of European football (Morrow and Howieson, 2014). However, despite appearing as a standardized managerial solution in periods of lacking results most studies have pointed to the fact that dismissing the coach rarely helps the enforcing club to improve its sporting performance (for a recent review, see Gammelsæter, 2013). Thus, in order to explain this apparent irrational practice, a theoretical framework founded on the institutional logics perspective (Thornton, Ocasio, and Lounsbury, 2012) has been adopted. We embed our study in a historical-institutional frame by analysing the professionalization of Danish football in a period ranging from 1978 (when professional football was introduced) to 2014. By incorporating insights gained from figural sociology (Elias, 1978) we analyse how shifting balances of power has affected the coach and his risk of being dismissed.

RESEARCH DESIGN: RESULTS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS:

Empirically, the study is based on articles from the weekly magazine *Tipsbladet* (N=555). Using a content analysis approach, we identify five signifiers of change characterizing the field that constitutes Danish football. Our methodology rests on a historical and a dialectical epistemology once we investigate organizational change (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2009). In the period examined Danish football has undergone a gradual process of professionalization and commercialization. The initial logic of community that dominated football prior to 1978 has been replaced by a market and by a corporate logic. The organizational field has become populated by new actors such as sponsors, shareholders, mass media corporations and associations related to particular professions. Increased complexity has affected the professions as a gradual process of intra-organizational division of labor has taken place in the clubs, e.g. the appearance of a new managerial leadership and specialized assistant-coach professions. In times of lacking sporting success the power ratio is no longer in favor of a coach and the corporate logic seem to further and legitimize the practice of dismissing. Opposed to traditional markets the 'football market' does not orientate towards profit, but towards sporting success, thus a market and a corporate logic focusing on market position (i.e. league ranking) pave the way for a powerful coalition that leaves the coach in a power inferior position. An implication of this study is that we shall see coach dismissals as part of a wider organizational change process where a changing inter-institutional system creates a basis for organizational dynamics that leads to a hire-and fire labor market dominated by a corporate logic. Our study emphasizes that power is a key element for understanding field complexity, and hereby we contribute with a perspective that has received limited attention in institutional research.

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