
LEADERSHIP OF AND IN ELITE SPORT ORGANIZATIONS – A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

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All authors:
Per Øystein Hansen (corresp)

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AIM OF ABSTRACT

The extent to which an elite sport organization or a national sport organization achieves success in international competitions is, among other factors, believed to rely on how individuals are led and managed (Fletcher & Wagstaff, 2009). But what do we really know about leadership and management of elite sport organizations? The purpose of this abstract and the presentation is to address how leadership of and in elite sport organizations are studied. The research question is: How is leadership of and in elite sport organizations studied and what type of research is needed?

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Leadership can be studied from a range of theoretical perspectives. The abstract distinguishes between leadership of and leadership in elite sport organizations. Leadership of elite sport organizations is captured in the theory of institutional leadership (Selznick, 1957), which addresses how leaders promote and protect key organizational values, and how these values influence the way an organization organizes their activities, i.e. the core process. In relation to this perspective, the abstract also discusses the role of sensegiving which addresses how leaders influence others' values and beliefs (Foldy, Goldman, & Ospina, 2008). Leadership in elite sport organizations is related to more relational aspects of leadership, which is addressed in the literature on organizational and sport psychology.

METHODOLOGY

This is a literature review. Data are generated from reviewing peer reviewed books and scientific articles in sport management and sport coaching journals. In addition, databases such as Ebscohost and Science Direct were used to identify relevant leadership literature within the field of elite sport organizations.

Central to the analysis was to identify research method, level of analysis, and theoretical approach.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preliminary results indicate that leadership in an elite sport context primarily is studied from a sport psychology perspective. This research focuses on the national elite team and individual level, and addresses the coach-athlete relationship in light of coach behavior. Only a few have studied leadership in elite sport organizations at the organizational level (e.g. Sotiriadou, 2012). Except a comparative study of the Nordic elite sport systems (Andersen & Ronglan, 2012), which to some extent addresses leadership of elite sport organizations at the system and organization level, leadership of elite sport organizations has received limited attention. There are very few studies of how national elite sport systems, national elite sport organizations, and national elite teams actually organize their activities to achieve and sustain international success and the role of leadership at the different levels in organizing the core process.

Modern elite sport organizations can be characterized as institutions as most of these are infused with values. Perhaps the best example of a value in an elite sport organization is the "athlete-centered approach". Such a value may increase the systems' or organizations' legitimacy in the wider society. However, we know very little about how values (e.g. "the athlete-centered approach") influence the way the organization organize the core process. The values direct attention to how the organizational actors, including the athletes, should behave and interact in order to achieve international success. In addition, the values also shape how the system, organization or elite team organizes for success. Insights into how leaders at different levels lead and organize for success in light of key values can increase our understanding of leadership of elite sport organizations. By studying leadership in light of institutional leadership, such studies can also have a theoretical contribution as there are very few studies of institutional leadership in the general literature on organization science and leadership. The concept of sensegiving can relate leadership of an elite sport organization with leadership in an elite sport organization by addressing how institutional leaders shape the organizational actors' values and beliefs.

CONCLUSION

The literature review illustrate that leadership is primarily studied from a sport psychology perspective at the elite team or individual level (coach). With a few exceptions, very few have studied leadership of elite sport organizations. Thus, there is a need for studies that investigates how elite team coaches, technical directors, and other leaders act as institutional leaders. This can be done by identifying: the key values, how these values are understood by different actors, how the leaders realize the key values, how the key values influence the way the organizations organize the core process, and what values are distinctive to an elite sport culture (performance culture).

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