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## CAREER STORIES OF THE ELITE FINNISH SPORT MANAGERS

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Synopsis:

The aim of this narrative study is to explore what kinds of career stories can be found among Finnish elite sport managers. The research material is based on 16 interviews of Finnish top-level sport managers by using narrative approach.

Abstract:

AIM OF THE ABSTRACT

The aim of this abstract is to present a qualitative, narrative study that explores what kinds of career stories can be found among Finnish elite sport managers. The research material is based on 16 interviews of Finnish top-level sport managers by using narrative approach.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In Finland, very few scientific studies of sport management have been made at all. Internationally, there are only a few narrative studies concerning sport managers (see Edwards, Skinner & Gilbert 2004; English, Danylchuk & Pastore 2000). This study aims to fill both those gaps by exploring empirically how sport managers experience and tell their career stories.

There has been an international discussion about the need to use different kinds of approaches and methodologies in sport management research (Rinehart 2005). There is a rather strong dominance of quantitative methods. Therefore, new, fresh approaches are needed. Compared to traditional methods of sport management research (positivistic, quantitative studies), which try to define and measure the content of career paths and career success, narrative research can provide different kinds of answers and give a deeper and better understanding of the lived experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The study includes narrative interviews of 16 Finnish sport managers. They are operational and governmental managers from the top of the Finnish sport management – the elite. Twelve of them were male and four female, aged

between 45-73 years. The 16 sport managers who were interviewed form quite a representative sample in Finland where, with the population of approximately 5 million, there are not so numerous top level/elite sport managers. The interviews were first recorded and then transcribed.

I used a data-based approach and the data was analyzed multi-methodologically. The interviews were read very thoroughly several times, one at the time, in order to categorise, to thematise and to classify the data. Then, the analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne 1995) was done by using the mind-map and applying the Greimas' actantial model (1966). With the help of the actantial model, we can see deeper than what just the plain narration shows us. The actantial model reveals values, socially and culturally related issues and unwritten rules.

#### RESULTS

By exploring sport managers' stories, the purpose was to find out how sport managers recounted and described the actions and events in their pathways to becoming sport managers and how they told their career stories in their own words. On the basis of the data of this study, four different kinds of career stories have been found: the story of growth, the story of drifting, the story of aspiration and the story of chance/ happenstance/ serendipity. These four career story types illustrate how the sport managers' careers are constructed in Finland as well as the social and cultural characteristics of Finnish sport management.

The data revealed also some unwritten rules and the belief that the good, believable sport managers ought to have their background in sports. A career in politics also seems to give justification in the field of Finnish sport management.

#### DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to explore how Finnish sport managers constructed their careers stories: what the stories contain and how they told their stories in their own words. In addition, I was interested in what kind of individual experiences (e.g. spousal and family's support), and through them, cultural and operational environments, sport managers create when they tell their experiences, actions and events in their career. The findings show that there are different kinds of ways to become a Finnish elite sport manager: it can be by your own will and aspiration but it can just as well be by chance. Hence, it is a multifaceted phenomenon.

The results also show that there are not so many people in Finland who are willing or competent to be top-level sport managers. So, it is important to pay attention to the education, management development and career practices of future sport managers. And it is vital to have more research based on information about characteristics in sport management.

By using narrative approach sport management researchers and practitioners have an opportunity to gain knowledge and understanding from sport managers' personal experience narratives as well as their autobiographical career spans. Narratives always produce contextual and situational, cultural knowledge. So we can consider these narrative stories as a part of the wider sociocultural context.

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