

# **The Balancing Act Of Conformity: Junior Managers' Response To Managerial Pressure**

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The aim of this study is to create knowledge about how organizational pressure suppress new ideas from being implemented in sport events. By comparing the differences and similarities in a multiple case study, this study obtains insights into junior managers' (here defined as paid manager on mid-level and volunteer teams managers aged between 25 and 35) responses to managerial pressure. Managerial pressure here refers to how the manager are pressured either by the concept owners of the event or by leader behaviour higher in the hierarchy.

## **Theoretical background**

Different institutional contexts have different expectations regarding conformity (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). The coercive pressure to adapt within Olympic OCs is well-known in the literature. Bodemar and Skille (2016) found that contemporary junior manager want to impact (agency) sports events; however, they are often hindered by institutional limitations such as institutional rules, governing bodies, and bureaucracy, all of which impacts their leadership.

The basis for examining design was guided by a critical performative approach of functional stupidity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). The framework is suitable to frame the reflections behind the conformity and extends the work of Paulsen (2016) who identified 10 rationales behind stupidity self-management, representing transient four reflecting modes of compliance — reflective and unreflective. These rationales represent different modes of reflections and explain employees' coping mechanisms. Acting functional stupid is not regarded as necessarily negative (or positive) and have nothing to do with stupidity, insted the interests are the pressures and the reflections that derive coping mechanisms and conformity. As this study show, junior managers may readily conform in order to do their job, but at the same time reflect upon the managerial pressure. The reflexive thoughts can show how this conformity come about. By taking on a critical performative view, the concerns are the reflexions on the pressure derived form the sport event setting and its top managers, in sense of coping mechanisms to stage a successful event.

## **Methodology, research design, and data analysis**

This study is guided by reflexive methodology using a combination of inductive and abductive qualitative approaches (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2011). A comparative case study design was chosen. Two cases were selected; 2012 Innsbruck Youth Olympic Games (YOG) and 2012 Oslo World Snowboard Championships (WSC) represent two different institutional contexts. Inclusion of cases were based on four criteria; young people in manager positions, inaugural youth directed major sport events, accessible in time and space, and distinct different degree of institutional context between the two cases. Assisted by MAXQDA collected data was analyzed consisted of semi-structured interviews with staff representing different organizational levels (16 junior mangers, 2 CEOs, 32 volunteers), documents (2 evaluation reports) and field notes (52 pages derived from 18 days with observations).

## **Results, discussion, and conclusions**

Similar to findings by Paulsen (2016) different shapes and rationales behind conformity was proven. The qualitative cross-comparison revealed three different responses towards conformity; straight, reflexive, and cynical. In YOG straight and reflexive conformity was dominant and in WSC the junior managers responded by cynical conformity. Further, the response highly depends upon the degree of institutionalization of practices, rules, and structures in the event. Conformity was caused by strong institutional framework in YOG and expediency in WSC. Junior mangers' response to managerial pressure to conform was found to correspond with the newly developed concept offunctional stupidity (Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Paulsen, 2016). Findings show that junior managers felt constrained because of coercive pressure deriving from institutionalized structures, rules, as well as orders from event owners and top management. These limitations can be both disturbing and useful for effective event organization (functional stupid). Firstly, effective and sufficient for the event organization in order to stage a successful event. Secondly, the junior managers increase the chance of obtaining new management assignments in event. This study contributes to understanding how junior mangers react to and reflect on organizational pressure to conform.

## References

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