

The Management Of Competing Logics In Elite Football

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Aim of the research

Popular elite sport typically attracts different stakeholders, such as playing and coaching staff, supporters, volunteers, media, sponsors and investors. With professionalization and commercialization of sport there has been an expansion of these stakeholders, with a continuous and intensified battle of power between them. This is perhaps best seen in elite football with its intensified focus on the business of football and how the clubs are organized and managed.

Increasingly, football clubs have attracted leaders from other industries to handle this development. Despite this, the turnover among CEOs in top tier clubs have been high since the mid 90's. The high turnover rate may indicate that managing competing logics in elite football is stressful and difficult, with lack of continuity as a result. In this article, we intend to study the challenges the CEOs of clubs face and explore how they perceive and deal with the institutional logics the different groups of stakeholders expose.

Theoretical background

We address the challenges of managing the complexity of stakeholders by applying an institutional perspective, focusing on institutional logics at an organizational level (Thornton & Ocasio, 2008). Gammelsæter (2010) applied this to develop a typology of seven institutional logics (idealism, identity, autotelism, entrepreneurialism, managerialism, bureaucracy, politics) in commercialized sport organizations, but he pointed out that the typology needs empirical research to confirm its relevance.

According to Gammelsæter and Senaux (2011), there are yet few studies on the organization and leadership in top football clubs. A notable exception is Kelly (2008) who studied club management in British and Irish football, Herskedal (2016) in British and Norwegian football and Skirstad and Chelladurai (2011), but none of these studies have showed the full complexity of a multitude of logics, and how it creates challenges in management positions.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

The article is based on data from a master thesis on challenges related to the position as CEO of top soccer clubs in Norway (Hauken, 2014), supported by the football league association, Norwegian Top Football (NTF). Data was collected through case analysis based on in-depth semi-structured interviews with three former and three then current CEOs of top tier soccer clubs in Norway. These six informants were selected by the researcher in cooperation with NTF. Important issues in the interviews were their expectations and job descriptions, the club's goals and tools, the challenges and stakeholders. Each interview lasted from 67–107 minutes, and was conducted face to face, with telephone, video conference or Skype.

Results, discussions and conclusions

Findings showed that six out of these seven institutional logics were experienced as relevant to understand the challenges of the CEOs role. Four of these institutional logics seemed to be especially influential, and CEOs connected their job related stress and challenges to this pluralism of competing logics. The CEOs must manage tension and conflict between competing logics, but also their interconnection and interdependence. Different stakeholders also carry different institutional logics at the same time, which makes it difficult to separate these logics from one another. This ambiguity makes it extremely difficult to explore which ends and means the CEO must address to cope with stakeholders' influences.

References

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