

Exploring The Management Of Collegiate Sport Clubs

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Aim of the research

Voluntary, non-profit sport clubs have been classified by different management functions, yet most clubs lack a clear management system (de Knop, van Hoecke, & DeBosscher, 2004). The literature distinguishes different types of international sport clubs by organizational characteristics (Balduck, Lucidarme, Marlier, & Willem, 2015), however the generalizability to collegiate sport clubs is limited due to its unique framework. For example, within collegiate sport clubs resources are often obtained from the institution, membership is limited to students enrolled, the executive board often experiences high turnover due to the transient nature of college, and club activities are scheduled around academic requirements. Collegiate clubs have the benefit of receiving support from recreation professional staff, which can be enhanced through greater understanding of the management practices of collegiate clubs. Therefore, the current study was designed to answer the following research questions: 1) How do clubs manage their human resources (e.g., selection, roles, training, and evaluation of board members)? 2) How do clubs manage their communication (e.g., communication content, channels, and stakeholders involved)? 3) How do clubs manage their finances (e.g., revenue, expenses)? 4) How do clubs manage their events (e.g., practice, competition, non-sport activities)?

Theoretical background and literature review

Thiel and Mayer (2009) present a three-level framework for characterizing the management of voluntary non-profit sport clubs. At level one, the central tasks of the organization are determined as well as the methods employed to achieve said tasks. Level two explores communication channels, focusing on the distribution of tasks, hierarchies, or processes. Finally, level three examines human resources, such as how positions are filled. This framework was adopted to guide the researchers' exploration of the management of collegiate sport clubs.

The majority of research examining the management of voluntary non-profit sport clubs focuses on European countries, Australia, and Canada where clubs act as an important sport provider for the community. Research has found strategic planning, marketing management, and infrastructure to be weaknesses among international sport clubs, with organizational culture and atmosphere considered strengths (de Knop et al., 2004). There is a need to extend research examining sports club management to the collegiate population in order to guide the managerial practices of student leaders and professional staff.

Methodology, research design, and data analysis

Straussian grounded theory was employed to allow for the development of a sociological construction of collegiate sport clubs (Creswell, 2013). Trustworthiness of the data was established through strategies addressing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981). Semi-structure interview guides were developed for student sport club leaders and professional staff overseeing the sport club program. The interview guides were reviewed by a panel of experts and subsequently revised.

The researchers recruited active sport clubs and associated professional staff from a large university in the United States. Of the 32 active sport clubs, 13 clubs (41% response rate) and two professional staff (67% response rate) participated in the study. Thematic analysis of the data was conducted by two researchers independently to enhance reliability (Creswell, 2013). The researchers categorized the data inductively then developed codes and themes deductively within each data category, achieving an inter-rater reliability of 82%.

Results, discussion, and implications

Thematic analysis revealed broader themes related to human resource management, communication management, fiscal management, and event management. Clubs shared a consistent executive board structure of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer, with clubs and directors suggesting the inclusion of Social Media and Fundraising Chairs. Regarding the selection of board members, multiple clubs identified use of voting and volunteer processes for a one-year term. Both clubs and directors identified a lack of internal training and evaluation of board members, yet indicated external training initiatives facilitated by the university.

The results illuminated diverse communication channels utilized, including face-to-face meetings with stakeholders, social media, group messaging, and email. With respect to fiscal management, multiple revenue streams were identified with several specific to the collegiate context (e.g., university allocations). Comparatively, most club expenses were similar to expenses incurred by international clubs (e.g., travel; coaches).

The clubs discussed consistent types of activities across teams — practice, competition, and social engagements — yet differential frequency, timing, and distance. Most clubs practiced less than three times per week, late at night, and competed in regional contests four to six times a year. Obstacles to event management included university rules and processes, governing body regulations, and availability of resources. With greater understanding of implemented management functions, sport club leaders will be able to identify and address organizational problems to enhance sustainability. Limitations and future directions will be discussed.

References

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