

Process Consulting for Organizational Capacity in Voluntary Sport Clubs

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Aim

Dutch voluntary sport clubs (VSCs) are facing several challenges in perceived consumerist behavior by members (Van der Roest, 2015), demands by the government to attribute to the social policy agenda and declining number of members in complex contexts (Wollebæk, 2009). Therefore, Dutch VSCs are often supported by approximately 300-500 professional sport club consultants funded by local governments or sport associations. These sport club consultants are successful in short term problem solving, but struggle to accomplish long-term development of organizational capacity (Dijk, De Vries & Slender, 2014). Organizational capacity within nonprofit literature is referred to as a set of organizational attributes which an organization needs to accomplish its mission effectively (Misener & Doherty, 2009). The aim of this study is to develop a competence framework for sport club consultants building on existing consulting frameworks in organizational development (Crawford & Nahmias, 2010). When these sport club consultants are better equipped they should be able to perform better in raising levels of organizational capacity of VSCs. The research question of this study is: What competences and repertoire does a sport club consultant need in order to raise the organizational capacity of VSCs?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Thiel and Mayer (2009) found that managerial approaches from the business sector are difficult to translate to the specific context of VSCs. The VSC is a locally based, significantly autonomous, volunteer-run, nonprofit organization which is democratically governed by the members and in which the members perform most of the activities voluntarily (Van der Roest, 2015). The development of organizational capacity requires the consultant to interpret the organization as a dynamic open system and to facilitate development in a process-oriented role together with the people in the organization and on various levels in the organization (Schein, 1999). In this study this process consultation role is compared with the more common expert role (Dijk et al., 2014).

Research Design and Data Analysis

A mixed-method methodology is used to provide fuller understanding of the approaches and competences used by consultants from different backgrounds within the VSC context. A questionnaire was developed by which sport club consultants (n=52, 41% of 125) scored their abilities on 56 abilities within 10 competence dimensions. A multiple case study on four very different consultancy projects, using observations and interviews, gave more in depth insight in how these abilities were used in varying approaches. Finally, a focus group with consultants (n=6) was carried out to define the most important competences for a process-oriented approach. Based on the findings from the survey, case studies and focus group a new competence framework for sport club consultants has been developed.

Results and Discussion

Consultants classified themselves evenly in three roles (expert, process oriented, executor). Within these roles sport club consultants who were more experienced (more than 6 years of

work experience, 61% of the respondents) scored themselves significantly higher on the requested competences than the junior club supporters (0 - 5 years work experience, 39% of the respondents) on 19 of the 56 abilities. The case studies showed that the projects and approaches used are dissimilar, but that especially the soft skills and process abilities (facilitating, being adaptive, bonding, coaching, activating) are important to be successful in the context of a VSC. It is also important for the sport club consultants that they are able to switch roles easily, from expert role to process role within minutes when they are consulting at a sport club. Therefore, a wide variety of consulting competencies are needed to be successful in developing organizational capacity at VSCs.

The necessity of both process and expert competencies was confirmed within the focus group. Especially the development of soft skills is important in a sport specific context. For the development of the framework of competences for the sport club consultants these results mean that attention has to be paid to a wide spectrum of competences and specifically to the ability of switching roles during sessions at the VSC. From this framework of competences, a masterclass programme is developed with the focus on using experts and process-oriented roles and delivering interventions which are effective in developing organizational capacity.

Conclusion and Implications

The findings showed that the current competences and repertoire of interventions used by the sport club consultants is not enough to develop organisational capacity in VSCs. Retraining their soft skills, develop more process-oriented competences and the ability to switch roles during a consulting session are needed. These findings are implemented within the project by developing a series of seven masterclasses in which junior sport club consultants are trained in these soft skills and the process consulting role. The forthcoming months evaluation research will be used to determine whether these skills are trainable and what the impact of the retrained consultants is on the levels of organizational capacity of VSCs.

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