

Good Governance Challenges in Sport Clubs: a Cross-Country Comparison

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Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this study is to map the challenges that sport clubs face in using good governance and ethical leadership principles. The research question can be summarised as: what are the challenges that sport clubs of different organisational capacity face in implementing good governance and ethical leadership principles across European countries?

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

In recent years, much emphasis has been put on good governance and ethical leadership to halt scandals and safeguard the integrity of sport (Parent & Hoye, 2018). In the wake of this movement, governments have chosen to impose or encourage guidelines and principles of good governance on sport federations.

Few studies however have focused on how sport clubs implement good governance. One study concluded that local sport clubs were much less aware about the good governance guidelines than national sport federations (Sisjordet al., 2017). One of the mentioned key-reasons for this failure is the lack of participative decision-making of sport clubs (Bayle & Robinson, 2007).

In order to advance this status-quo it is thus needed to have a clear idea on how sport clubs view good governance and ethical leadership and what challenges they face to apply good governance and ethical leadership principles.

These views and challenges are expected to be different, depending on the size and organisational capacity of sport clubs (Balduck et al., 2015). Furthermore, these views and challenges are likely to be country specific, because of the different policies in place across various countries (Geeraert, 2018).

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

This study adopts an exploratory, inductive, qualitative research design. In each of the seven European countries (Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, UK and France), two focus groups were organised with six board members of voluntary, member-based sport clubs.

Initial selection was based on the size of the club (based on number of club members) as this has been linked with organisational capacity (Balduck et al., 2015). Organisational capacity of the sport clubs was further examined through questions related to human resources, finances, management, accommodation and external orientation (Hall et al., 2003). One focus group focused on voluntary sport clubs with lower organisational capacity, the other focus group included sport clubs with higher organisational capacity.

A couple of criteria were introduced for each focus group in order to have a comparable sample over the different countries that still allowed to diversify for different types of sports: each focus group needed to represent (a) a minimum of three sport clubs of the most five popular sports in the country (b) minimum two team sports (c) minimum two individual sports. The invited board members could be chair, treasury, or secretary.

In total 84 board members participated in the 14 focus groups. Starting questions were: What is good governance to you? What is ethical leadership to you? What challenges are you faced with to adopt good governance and ethical leadership principles (e.g. resources, political, educational)? What could motivate you to overcome these challenges? The moderator in the different focus groups probed for deeper understanding of the challenges and how to overcome them.

Data of the focus groups were transcribed and analysed with NVIVO. Each researcher in their respective country looked for emerging themes in the data through a thematic analysis approach. The main researcher checked for differences and similarities across countries and sport clubs of different organisational capacity.

Results/Findings and Discussion

By the time of the conference, the different challenges related to implementing good governance principles for the different types of sport clubs will be available. The results will both outline differences between the selected countries and between sport clubs with different organisational capacity. It will also provide suggestions from the sport clubs to overcome these challenges.

Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

The results of this study will enable governments, and sport federations to be more aware of the challenges that different types of sport clubs face, related to good governance and ethical leadership. This knowledge can and should be used to provide better tools fit to the specific needs of sport clubs to motivate them in adopting good governance and ethical leadership principles.

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