

Professionalisation and governance in Swiss sports clubs – Establishing a club office

Raphael Stieger / Romano Keller-Meier / Grazia Lang / Siegfried Nagel

Institute of Sport Science, University of Bern

Keywords: professionalisation, governance, organisational change, sports clubs, club office

Introduction

Sports clubs in Switzerland face increasing expectations and challenges from internal and external stakeholders. Therefore, more and more sports clubs professionalise their structures and processes, e.g., by establishing a club office with (part-time) employees. Since there is little knowledge in the sports management literature about the causes, forms and consequences of establishing a club office, this study answers the following research questions based on the multi-level framework from Nagel et al. (2015): Why and how do Swiss sports clubs establish a club office? What are the consequences of establishing a club office?

Methods

We selected five Swiss sports clubs in the context of a multiple case study design (Yin, 2014). Case selection aimed to include sports clubs of varying sizes, sports and professionalisation types. Data were collected through document analysis, expert interviews with decision-makers and focus groups with club members. Data were analysed using causation coding (Miles et al., 2014).

Results

Findings show different causes for establishing a club office. The main reason was to relieve volunteer board members. The various causes imply different roles and responsibilities of the established club office. While in some sports clubs, the club office is primarily responsible for administrative tasks, in others, it is also responsible for sponsorship. This circumstance explains why some sports clubs did not have to increase their membership fees to finance the club office because they could increase their sponsorship revenue. Although the club office staff is paid in all sports clubs, the volume of work varies. However, the paid staff often works more than agreed (“volunteer professionals”). Regarding the consequences, all sports clubs that established a club office are satisfied with their decision. Positive consequences are that a “place to go” was created for internal and external stakeholders, and many club processes are more efficient now. However, establishing a club office with (part-time) employees raises the question of strategic and operational responsibilities and decision-making power.

Discussion/Conclusion

The findings offer several implications for sports clubs that want to establish a club office. At the same time, the study provides further research perspectives. First, it might be insightful to analyse if there are any relevant differences in whether a sports club transforms its secretariat into a club office or establishes a club office for the first time. Second, there are further changes regarding the organisational structures and processes that are worth looking at when analysing the establishment of a club office, such as creating an

executive/management board or employing a (paid) CEO. To conclude, it might be interesting to analyse sports clubs that have established a club office but shut it down after a while.

References

- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis. A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd ed.). SAGE.
- Nagel, S., Schlesinger, T., Bayle, E., & Giaque, D. (2015). Professionalisation of sport federations—A multi-level framework for analysing forms, causes and consequences. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 15(4), 407–433. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2015.1062990>
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (5th ed.). SAGE.