

Learning capacities of voluntary sport clubs in relation to external advisory

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Abstract

Volunteer research in sports clubs has paid little attention to the learning processes in sports clubs even though organizational change represents a major management challenge. Developing a clear understanding of restrictions as well as promoting factors associated with organizational learning in sports clubs is crucial for developing sustainable management concepts — particularly ones that can be applied by sport policy makers, or sports associations. To bridge this gap, our study uses explorative case studies in order to analyse the learning capabilities of sports clubs in relation to external advisory: *Which organizational factors can promote or detain learning processes in sports clubs?* The learning processes in the sports clubs were analysed in relation to an advisory programme of the Swiss Football Association (SFA). Before, during and after the programme, questionnaires and guided interviews were conducted with the project teams of the eleven participating football clubs to assess different learning processes. The findings indicate that learning processes in football clubs occur differently and both promoting and restrictive factors can be identified. Five promoting factors sustain the learning processes and lead to sustainable change: Internal support, an engaged project team, active communication, adaption of the external inputs and effective internal working processes. In contrary, five detaining factors can slow down or prevent change in the football clubs: No internal support, an uninvolved project team, unattended communication, low processing capacity and a lack of resources. Furthermore, it reveals that restrictors can also be a functional asset in order to handle existing problems successfully.