

Types of professionalization in national sport federations

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Aim of the abstract/study

In recent years, national sport federations (NSFs) have been facing pressure to professionalize due to increasing competition in the market, technological advancements and growing requirements in top-level sports. As a consequence, these challenges have produced a “transition from an amateur, volunteer-driven pastime to a more business-like sector” (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011, p. 108). However, according to Nichols and James (2008), increased formalization and professionalization do not meet the needs of all organizations. In fact, according to their preconditions and objectives, the NSFs follow different strategies in the professionalization process. Thus, it can be presumed that NSFs are at different stages of professionalization, even though they are located in the same environment and face similar pressures to professionalize from the umbrella federation.

The aim of this study is to classify Swiss NSFs in order to find types of professionalization, and then to test correlations between the professionalization types and other organizational characteristics.

Theoretical background

The theoretical basis for this study is the multi-level framework for analyzing forms, causes and consequences of professionalization of sport federations (Nagel, Schlesinger, Bayle & Giaque, 2015), along with a conceptual framework to analyze professionalization in sport federations (Ruoranen et al., 2016). The work of Ruoranen and colleagues (2016) focuses on forms of professionalization and can therefore be used to identify professionalization types. The analysis covers three aspects: “strategies and activities” (e.g. strategic planning, level of diversification), “people and positions” (e.g. profiles of paid employees) and “structures and processes” (e.g. formalization, differentiation). Causes and consequences of professionalization compiled in the multi-level framework (Nagel et al., 2015) are applied as possible variables to describe the characteristics of each professionalization type.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

Data was collected using an online survey conducted by the Swiss Olympic Association (the national umbrella federation of

Swiss NSFs). As all member federations of Swiss Olympic Association (n=84) are obliged to participate in the survey, the response rate was 100%.

NSOs with similar forms of professionalization will be grouped using hierarchical cluster analysis. To determine the professionalization of “strategies and activities” in each NSF, cluster variables of “strategic orientation” and “service orientation” will be used. The indicators “profiles of paid employees” and “shared governance” identify professionalization of “people and positions”, and for the “structures and processes” of the NSFs, “formalization of strategic orientation” and “formalization of service orientation” will be examined.

The second step of the analysis will be conducted using a variance analysis to investigate differences between the clusters relating to variables that may cause and result from professionalization, e.g. “size of organization”, “organisational values”, “relationships with external stakeholders” and “financial resources”.

Results, discussion and implications

Final results are not yet available, as the collection of the data has just been completed. A pilot study has revealed significant divergence in the variables mentioned, it can therefore be expected that further analysis will indicate different types of professionalization of NSFs. This typecast of NSFs could assist when consulting sport federations about their professionalization process. Depending on the type of professionalization, the findings may be used to identify the “ideal shape” of strategies and activities, people and positions, and structures and processes of a federation.

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