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ARTICLE

Characteristics of Voluntary Sports Clubs Management: a Sociological Perspective

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ABSTRACT The voluntary sports club constitutes an organization that differs considerably in its structural condition from economic enterprises. The aim of this paper is to discuss the general characteristics of voluntary sports club management. For this purpose, using a sociological management approach, the paper attempts to analyze the organizational structures of sports clubs. The analysis shows the following: the absence of explicit organizational objectives makes it very difficult to validate successful development. The incongruity of power and professional competence, and the ambiguous distribution of tasks hampers well-grounded decision making. Furthermore, recruiting managerial staff from within the club is a major factor that prevents organizational change. Consequently, specific management concepts for voluntary sports clubs need to be developed. In doing so, blindly transferring economic concepts must be avoided in order to ensure that public utility is not jeopardized in the long run.

Characteristics of Voluntary Sports Club Management

The demand on voluntary sports organizations to introduce professional management policies and practices has increased in recent years with the belief that these will better enable them to achieve their purposes. For example, in Australia and the UK, funding of voluntary sports organizations by government authorities increasingly depends on the introduction of more professional management (Schulz, 2005). This corresponds with the observation in other European countries that “in order to survive, traditional sports clubs are obliged to make a shift from mutual benefit association to a more professional service delivery sports organization”

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(De Knop, Van Hoecke, & De Bosscher, 2004, p. 58). When professionalizing management, the main expectation is that objectives will be achieved more effectively and efficiently by a paid staff that adopts the management models of companies, applies modern marketing concepts and regards members as customers (Bauer & Rothmaier, 1999; Wolf, 1999; Hermanns & Riedmüller, 2001; Galli, Wagner, & Beiersdorfer, 2002; Vogt, 2002; Freyer, 2003). In this context, the recommended management tools vary from total quality management (TQM) to the balanced score card. (Breuer, 2005; Breuer & Erdtel, 2005; Breuer & Thiel, 2005; De Knop et al., 2004; Heinemann & Puig, 1996; Heinemann, 1998a; Schubert, 2005; Thibault, 1998; Thiel & Meier, 2005; Horch, 2005).

However, can these concepts, developed in the field of business management, simply be transferred to voluntary sport organizations? Is there actually anything specific about managing voluntary sport organizations? If we analyze the actual duties of the managerial staff of voluntary sport organizations (Horch & Schütte, 2002; Horch et al., 2003; Schulz, 2005; Thiel et al., 2006), specific requirements and deficits become apparent. Even more than that: sports club managers seem unable to work efficiently without special knowledge about how voluntary organizations function. This observation is most relevant regarding the structure of voluntary sports clubs in Germany and many other European countries, which show significant differences when compared to economic enterprises (Heinemann & Horch, 1981, 1988; Horch, 1983; Cachay, 1988; Cachay & Thiel, 1995; Heinemann, 1998a; Emrich, Pitsch, & Papathanassiou, 2001; Baur & Braun, 2001; Meier, 2004; Thiel & Meier, 2004). Voluntary membership, an orientation based on the members' interests and needs, independence from third parties, voluntary services performed by members, and a democratic decision board are ideal characteristics of voluntary sports clubs on a descriptive level (Heinemann & Horch, 1988). Therefore, the term (sports) club refers in this paper always to voluntary (non-profit) sports organizations.

Various publications that focus on sports club management from a sociological perspective have repeatedly alluded to the necessity of taking the specific characteristics of sports associations into account when applying management approaches (Heinemann & Puig, 1996; Horch, 1996, 2005; Heinemann, 1998a; Breuer, 2005; Breuer & Erdtel, 2005; Schubert, 2005; Thiel & Meier, 2005; Breuer & Thiel, 2005). Heinemann's (1998a, p. 71) suggestion that "it is necessary to implement a careful mode of sports club management that goes beyond improving and optimizing economic decisions" exemplifies and summarizes this issue. The sociologist and management theorizer, Dirk Baecker, questioned the use of management approaches that do not consider the specifics of organizational structures:

Whoever believes that management is the ability to lead and organize, applicable to all kinds of organizations, is not aware of the fact that this management is the product of economic calculation. I don't argue that this is not possible, but emphasize that one has to

be sure whether this is really what is wanted and, if so, when and in which context it is wanted (Baecker, 2003, p. 15, author's translation).

This aspect has been discussed in studies about non-profit management for some time (Paton & Cornforth, 1991). In a study on public, non-profit and commercial leisure service agencies, Yoshioka (1990) discussed the fact that motives differ significantly between various organizations, even though they work in the same general business. In contrast to the commercial sector, generating revenue is only of secondary importance in the public and non-profit sectors. The motives, stated in the purpose and expressed through managerial decisions, result in subtle differences in actual service delivery within the context of equity. According to Klausen (1995), the small voluntary associations, in particular, must consider specific organizational structures. This is because they are characterized by competing, complementary, overlapping values and specific rationalities and thus need to be evaluated in terms of specific criteria. Badelt (1999) even demanded that every function and sub-function of management be defined specifically for each individual organization. Applied to voluntary sport organizations, a number of assumptions can be formulated. First, the management of a sports club must decide whether there is a need for economic calculations—where economic can be understood in an abstract sense of effectively and efficiently achieving objectives. Secondly, if the aim is to calculate economically, meaning effectively and efficiently, then specific goals and characteristics of the organization must be established. Only then is it possible to determine what kind of management is most appropriate (Baecker, 2003). Against this background, the following claim can be made: the general characteristics of voluntary sports club management can be determined appropriately only if the structural features of the organization are investigated closely.

The following paragraphs deal with the deficiency outlined above. Before we discuss the structural specifics of managing voluntary sport organizations, we will address the definition of “voluntary sports club management” which, due to cultural differences, is by no means self-evident (Chappelet, 1996). Based on this definition, we will then attempt to clarify and highlight the specific characteristics of voluntary sports clubs management from a sociological perspective. In this context, we will also address the problems of voluntary sports clubs, which result from adopting the management style of economic enterprises.

Defining Sports Club Management

In the literature on sport management, there is no agreement on a general definition of the term sports club management, or a given direction of how to use and apply the term in research projects. Pitts (2001), for instance, stated that there has been no agreement in two areas: how sport management is defined and how the definition is applied. Similar arguments are formulated by Parks (1992), Paton (1987), Olafson (1990), Chelladurai (1992), Slack (1996, 1998) and Chalip (2006).

The main cause of disagreement may be found in the fields of business administration and the social sciences, where there is a rather vague use of the term, and many management theories, which vary according to the given context and purpose (Steinmann & Schreyögg, 1997; Staehle, Conrad, & Sydow, 1999; Macharzina, 2003; Wolf, 2003). In scientific literature, this problem is often avoided with the argument of multi-disciplinarity, which seems to allow a clearly definable understanding of management. If we take a closer look, however, it appears to be a mixture existing of contributions to general management, financing, human resources management, marketing, sponsoring, controlling, knowledge management and organizational learning.

This variety and ambiguity was probably one of the reasons why Klaus Heinemann suggested eliminating the use of the term sports club management from German literature (Heinemann, 1998b). This is not our intention. In our opinion, the term “sports club management” is too popular and thus overused in the field of scientific research in sports and in everyday situations. It is important to keep in mind that the general characteristics of sports club management can be determined only by clearly describing the organization in question, and by precisely defining and using the term “management”. A management approach has to be abstract enough to reflect that the reference to economic systems represents just one option among others. This is necessary when using this approach to analyze voluntary sports organizations and economic enterprises. The following approach fulfills both of these claims. It is based on Luhmann’s theory of organizations as social systems, in which the decision forms the basic unit of analysis (Luhmann, 2000). This theory is embedded in Luhmann’s general autopoietic theory (1984, in English 1996), in which recursivity, complexity, redundancy, differentiation, communication and decision making play central roles. In international organizational sociology, this approach has started to be recognized only recently (e.g., Hernes & Bakken, 2003a, 2003b; Seidl & Becker, 2005). According to the theory of organizations as social systems, management is not ascribable to particular people or positions. In other words, management is not about the sports manager or the person who leads and manages a sports club, but it is about the recursive process of achieving specific aims. The central question is how complex social systems achieve their objectives—not only in relation to economic efficiency and technical effectiveness, but also with regard to controlling, demarcation and alert introspection. Based on this systems theory background, we define management according to the works of Baecker (1999, 2003), who applied Luhmann’s organizational theory on management, as follows:

Management is a recursive process which *defines, monitors, and adapts or maintains* structures of a given social system to achieve its individual aims as effectively as possible.

In this context, recursive means that the individual management functions (defining, monitoring, adapting or maintaining structures) operate in terms of an interactive relationship. These super-ordinate management functions

are linked with one another and, in management processes, can occur consecutively or simultaneously. Defining structures refers to determining and confining structures, which are functionally important to effectively achieve the defined aims. Monitoring structures alludes to the introspection of the system. This means, on the one hand, existing structures must be examined to see whether they contribute to the overall purpose of the organization. On the other hand, it refers to observing the demands of a changing environment and the need to test constantly whether the given structures meet these requirements. Finally, adapting or maintaining structures is concerned with the learning aptitude of organizations—adjusting the given structures according to the outcomes of the examination. This can be achieved either by reinforcement or adjustment (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1990; Kim, 1993). Hence, successful management is the ability of a system to set objectives, assign new tasks, observe discrepancies from defined aims and respond to them in terms of reinforcement or adjustment. This understanding of management is applicable not only to companies, but also to authorities, churches, families, clubs, and even to individual biographies (Baecker, 2003). According to the given definition, determining the characteristics of sports club management requires the structures of the organization to be analyzed, since these structures determine how a sports club addresses central organizational requirements, such as planning, organizing and realizing the sports programs, representing the members' interests or cultivating traditions.

From the perspective of social systems theory, organizations develop and are reproduced if decisions are communicated. Hence, the structures of any organization are different premises about decisions; in other words, decisions about decisions (Luhmann, 2000; transferred to sports clubs Thiel & Meier, 2004). These premises can be found first at the level of decision programs (*Entscheidungsprogramme*), which define the objectives of the organization and the methods used to achieve them. Secondly, they can be found at the level of communication channels, the distribution of tasks in the club. And, thirdly, the premises deal with human resources, for example by deciding how positions are filled.

Management and the Structures of Voluntary Sports Clubs

In the following, we will focus on an analysis of the decision premises mentioned above, since it is the analysis itself that determines the characteristics of sports clubs management. According to our definition of management, it is necessary to reflect these organizational structures against the background of super-ordinate management functions and the central tasks of the sports club (Figure 1).

Voluntary Sports Club Management and Decision Programs

Decision programs define the purpose of the organization and how this can be achieved. They can be distinguished in purpose programs (*Zweckpro-*

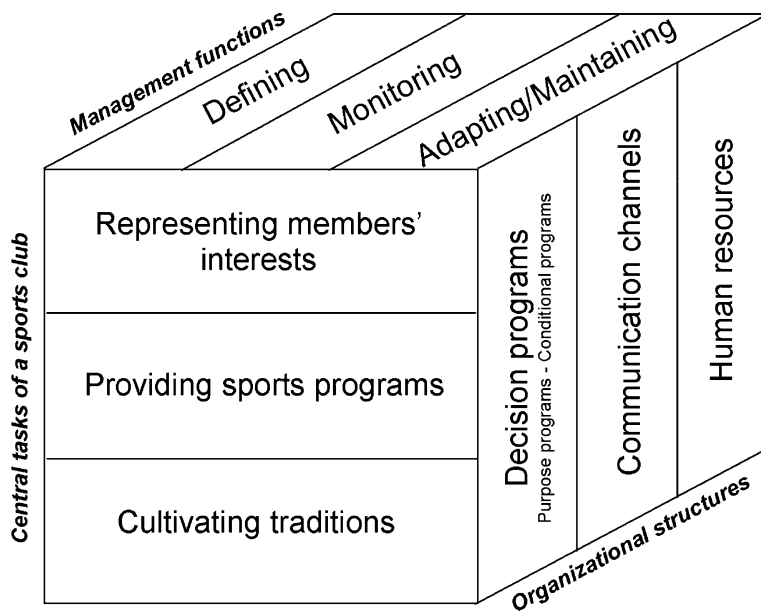


Figure 1. Heuristic for analyzing the characteristics of voluntary sports club management from a sociological perspective

gramme), which serve distinctive purposes, and conditional programs (*Konditionalprogramme*), which determine how to react in certain circumstances. Purpose programs describe the purposes and aims of the organization and determine which instruments to use to achieve them (Luhmann, 2000). Considering the purpose programs on the basis of our definition of sports management, there is one central management question to be asked: what is the actual purpose and what are the central tasks of a sports club? In order to answer this question, we must first look at the club charter or similar basic documents.

In an example charter for a sports club, this is expressed the following way:

The purpose of the club is to promote and maintain sports. The defined purpose is particularly realized by promoting exercises and performances in sports. The club only pursues purposes which are exclusively and directly charitable (non-profit) in terms of the paragraph on tax-advantaged purposes in the tax code. First and foremost, the club does not seek individual economic functions—it is altruistic (WLSB, 2006: author's translation).

The charter is most often concerned with promoting and maintaining sports. If necessary, the promotion of single disciplines or specific groups of athletes, such as children, adolescents, or top athletes, is mentioned as a special purpose of the sports club. The charters of some organizations also aim at cultivating traditions. In general, purpose programs of sports clubs are rather unspecific. According to our approach, this means that the management function of defining is very unclear. Ultimately, these programs are all

about making decisions to promote sports in general, specific sports disciplines, or target groups. Achieving this, however, must be exclusively and directly non-profit. Usually, the charters of sports clubs do not offer precise or comprehensive information about which social, material or temporal instruments should be used for which purpose, because there is no need for a more detailed differentiation to determine the purpose of a sports club. Additionally, no charter will show the use of entrepreneurial keywords, such as profit maximization, efficiency, modernization or market-orientation. This does not mean that it is generally not possible to define a multitude of objectives in sports clubs. In contrast to economic enterprises, whose purpose programs can always be derived from an underlying profit orientation, sports clubs have no explicit guidelines for formulating and achieving aims. Therefore, this promotes fuzzy multidimensional objectives (Brooks, 2002). Consequently, there is no clear guideline or point of reference for monitoring effectiveness and efficiency. This may be surprising for those who demand that a club must continually change or must even react and adjust according to the market in order to gain new members or be able to compete with commercial sports programs. The question of recruiting members serves as a very good example of this problem. Every club counts its members and an increase is usually equated with success. So far, it has generally been considered that “if a business is to make a profit, or a club to win members, it has to offer products or services which the customers or members are willing to pay a certain price or membership fee for” (Heinemann, 1998a, p. 72).

This, however, is mistaken. Indeed, the number of members is relevant for the sports club, since more members mean more membership fees. Yet, this does not mean that the primary function of a sports club is to build a large membership *per se*, because “a sports club with many members does not necessarily serve its purpose better than one with only a few members” (Thiel & Meier, 2004, p. 110: author’s translation). The following two examples clarify this aspect. Let us assume that a chair of a large sports club claims that club A has to grow and that a new structure of sports programs must be created to make sports available for everyone. In contrast, another chair argues that sports club B must not grow, but rather focus on its traditional sports program, such as gymnastics, to preserve the club’s identity. Who is right? Certainly both, since one argument is basically no better or worse than the other. A club does not necessarily fulfill its purpose badly if less people demand a particular sports program—possibly because they are not as interested in it anymore—as long as there are still club members who continue to participate in their sport with enthusiasm. This does not mean that such a development is not problematic, considering, for example, the secure existence of the club. However, even in the case of rapidly decreasing demand, it is not necessary to change the sports program unless the members demand this.

To summarize: the growth of a sports club is not a natural end in itself. This coincides with the fact that sports clubs do not depend on precise guidelines for monitoring the efficiency of achieving aims by constantly

examining the environment and the individual structures of the club. Due to an absence of direct criteria for examining the achievement of the organization's purpose, standards such as the number of members, success in sports competitions, the financial status are often used instead—for reasons of simplicity and transparency; they can be determined easily and are transparent when communicated to the members of the club. The process of evaluating success by means of the financial status is common in non-profit organizations (Hall, 1990). However, even though these criteria are identified easily, they are not appropriate for monitoring and determining whether the club is achieving its purpose or not. Generally, there are not even any consequences if these criteria are unfulfilled. Accordingly, the only important question for a non-profit organization is: are the members' interests being satisfied? Possibly also: is the self-image, meaning the tradition of the club, being cultivated appropriately? At this point, a decisive deviation from the management of economic enterprises can be recognized already: The management of non-profit organizations is not about the interests of potential customers or about making profit. The main concern is the interests of present members. For this reason, criteria tied to progression and growth for monitoring the efficiency of a club are only of subordinate relevance for sports club management.

We will now consider the conditional programs of sports clubs. Conditional programs determine how the organizational purpose should be achieved by predetermining how to decide in certain situations (Luhmann, 2000). Companies usually formulate very comprehensive guidelines and instructions, which define, for instance, how to react in case of a decrease in turnover or a stagnation of sales figures. Moreover, companies possess the necessary measures that allow these developments to be monitored. In sports clubs, such programs are found primarily in the field of high competition sports, for example, when the expansion of a football stadium is constituted in connection with the advancement of the first football team into the next higher league. Here, the crucial parameter is the team's performance according to its ranking.

In other areas, however, this is most difficult. According to the less defined purpose programs, the conditional programs in sports clubs are quintessentially unspecified. If there are no clearly defined aims, there can be no specified recommendations on how to react according to possible situations. A certain degree of insecurity is inevitable in this context, because without existing guidelines there is hardly any possibility of monitoring whether or not a decision contributes to achieving the organizational purpose. Hence, it is rather difficult to characterize certain developments as being positive or negative.

In clubs, these insecurities are compensated on a structural level by personalizing conditional programs (Thiel & Meier, 2004). That is, decisions concerning the future are delegated to single persons, such as the chair, or a group, for example the board of directors. This *personalization of decisions* in sports clubs involves enormous management obstacles. If there is no precise conditional programming, there are no defined guidelines on

how to react, for instance, if members suddenly stop coming or if nobody is available for the office of treasurer. Here, the only parameter for orientation is the leadership skills of the person chosen as the decision-making authority—such as the chair. Yet, this leadership competence does not depend on whether the functionary has had task-related training. One simply relies on the chair's ability to know what is best for the club in a given situation. Most often, this reliability is based on the fact that the functionary has been an active member of the club for numerous years and thus knows more about various programs and traditions than others (Thiel et al., 2006). Moreover, the decision of appointing a chair and, thus, the reliance on his or her competence, is often tied to skills acquired in important positions outside the sports club, e.g., in economics or politics, or to certain connections and contacts. This can lead to an advantage over other members of the club in terms of the person's competence.

If the subdivided conditional and purpose programs of the decision programs are analyzed in the context of the third management function—adapting or maintaining—more specific characteristics of sports club management arise. Since it is not possible to determine precisely how well the organizational purpose is being accomplished, adapting or maintaining decision programs can hardly be justified with arguments of efficiency. This makes it difficult to find concrete reference points for specific changes, especially because sports clubs are not structured to observe or respond to environmental changes—as economic enterprises would. This characterizes sports clubs as *lethargic organizations*, because demanding flexible, fast and continuous adaptation to a constantly changing environment does not trigger much reaction. Incidentally, this does not concern only European voluntary sports clubs. In an analysis of influences of global resource management on local sports organizations in Australia, Taylor and Ho (2005), p. 122) ascertained that “it is in some ways ironic that the challenge of limited human and financial resources is both driving the need for change and at the same time a most significant barrier to change”.

Thus, we can conclude that initially, at the level of the decision programs, defining development objectives is relevant for the management of sports clubs. On this basis, the proportion between the formulated aims and their realization in terms of staff funding, materials and financial resources can then be determined. In this respect, it is important that decisions are made according to the members' interests. This means that the members have to be asked whenever development objectives are formulated. A voluntary sports club is not an economic enterprise and its management is not about maximizing profit. Accordingly, so-called financial management in sports clubs is only of secondary importance, although it seems to be the most easily quantifiable measure of performance (Hall, 1990). Furthermore, an organization that does not aim at maximizing profit needs to reconsider the very purpose of financial management or controlling in the sports club. Arguably, the most important task of the financial sector—the calculation of gains and costs—is not yet a management function in the actual sense. It is valid to desire strategically orientated financial management and an

extensive financial control. However, the questions of how this can be realized without knowing the objectives of the club, which resources it is willing to spend to achieve these aims, and how to react to certain situations in case of need, remain to be answered. Financial management without defining how these questions should be answered remains guesswork.

It is not unusual for people coming from business backgrounds to ignore the need for a distinctive differentiation between a strategic development of clubs and for-profit organizations. This does not mean that existing strategic concepts of various clubs, for instance, concepts for financing the employment of a full-time manager, the modernization of club facilities, or offering a sports program, are of no use (Thiel et al., 2006). If the members' interests are respected, strategic concepts can be absolutely beneficial for confident decision making when planning the development of the club. If, however, these concepts mean that the sports program offered can no longer be distinguished from commercial sports companies, they put the common public interest at risk. A report for Germany, published on 8 August 2006 by the Scientific Advisory Committee of the German Federal Finance Office, stated that tax relief, especially in connection with sports clubs, must be questioned due to too strong a customer and for-profit orientation. In this case, the definition of such concepts is a case of mismanagement.

Voluntary Sports Club Management and Communication Channels

If we were to draw a model of an organization, communication channels are basically nothing but a horizontally and vertically differentiated network, which determines the distribution of tasks, hierarchies or processes (Luhmann, 2000). In economic enterprises or in administration, each position encompasses specific tasks and responsibilities. By defining positions, an economic enterprise enables itself to find the most competent person available. On the other hand, clearly defined positions also enable the enterprise to react according to changes, e.g., changing markets, as quickly as possible. This is different in sports clubs. First, the central tasks are linked to honorary posts (*Ehrenämter*)—not to positions (*Stelle*) (for more information, cf. Meier, 2004). However, this distribution of tasks and responsibilities is not regulated clearly in voluntary sports clubs or in non-profit organizations, in general (Paton & Cornforth, 1991; Brooks, 2002). Even though there is a chair, treasurer, sports coordinator etc. in the managerial board, there is considerable ambiguity and overlap with regard to responsibility for specific tasks. Hence, many important decisions must be made collectively.

Looking at the hierarchical structure, sports clubs are organized differently to economic enterprises. In clubs, it is not the professional competence that determines the hierarchy. Consequently, a high level of knowledge does not imply a high level of decisive power. This becomes particularly apparent when looking at full-time staff members who are really only an extension of an honorary post, even though they are highly qualified for their tasks. Yet, even top officials in clubs are not necessarily independent and autonomous

in their decisions, because they are committed to the general meeting and thus have to justify their choices constantly. This can lead to circular decision making. Moreover, it can lead to a general meeting blocking or reversing a realistic and reasonable decision for emotional reasons. *Top-down decisions*—decisions made by leading positions in enterprises, which are compulsory for all employees—are not characteristic of sports clubs. In fact, due to its organizational structure, the sports club deals with *quasi-bottom-up decisions*. This means those holding honorary posts represent the interests of the membership only and must therefore present the illusion of being the executive agency of the general meeting, since every member has a voice in central decision-making matters.

It is no surprise that communication channels in sports clubs are hardly defined. Quite often, they are informal and, to a high degree, characterized by transience, spontaneity and variability. An unstable distribution of tasks and an undefined hierarchy make planning processes difficult because there is a high degree of uncertainty about who is responsible for which task and who is to make the decisions in which situation. Furthermore, the need for extensive temporal coordination of appointments and the non-existent obligation for honorary decision-makers to attend important meetings lead to the latent risk of communication channels being interrupted. If current events require decisions to be made faster than usually expected in a sports club, they inevitably become informal and less transparent.

At the level of communication channels, the management of voluntary sports clubs is notably distracted by so-called *information oligarchies* (Schimank, 2002; Thiel & Meier, 2004). The term information oligarchy describes the exchange of knowledge in a sports club as being controlled by only a few people who can access information exclusively. In turn, this means that the possibility exists for honorary post holders to distort or obstruct information (Argyris, 1990). Dealing with knowledge can, thus, be controlled primarily at the discretion of people who have access to this knowledge. This jeopardizes the power of transparent objective arguments as well as the co-determination of the actual highest decision-making entity—the general meeting.

What is required for voluntary sports club management at the level of communication channels? Guaranteeing the utmost transparent exchange of information and knowledge for the members of the club, by avoiding information oligarchies, is of particular importance. Yet, as long as there are no knowledge-based management systems, it will be difficult to achieve this. The reason for this is that communicated information is aimed at the board of directors, which serves the function of protecting the members from *information overload*. Hence, members will be just as unable to monitor the flow of information as full-time staff members, who, due to the structural conception of clubs, do not possess sufficient authority over volunteers. Consequently, volunteers and honorary post-holders are forced to evaluate their own work if they want to ensure that the distribution of tasks, responsibilities and information is actually effective and fulfills the club's purpose. To encourage a quick yet democratic decision process, it is

necessary to develop intelligent negotiation and meeting systems. In this context, aspects of motivating volunteers and honorary post-holders are of significant importance. Here, benefits, honors or granting powers of autonomous decision making in particular fields of action can offer possibilities for self-fulfillment (Horch, 2005; Thiel & Meier, 2005).

Voluntary Sports Club Management and Premises Concerning Human Resource Decisions

Premises concerning human resource decisions are concerned basically with assigning persons to different fields of action and responsibility by identifying their qualifications as best as possible. In a general sense, human resource decisions create the highest degree of uncertainty. When a vacancy is filled, it is no guarantee that decisions will always be made the same way in the future, because the character of a position is formed by the person who holds it. Moreover, staff recruitment becomes very important, since it must be assumed that different persons make different decisions (Luhmann, 2000). In economic enterprises, positions are usually filled based on certain requirements and skill profiles. However, in sports clubs, this mode of allocation is of little importance. Here, since the board of directors consists of honorary posts, the choice does not depend primarily on task-related competence but rather on the applicant's personality traits (Grosskopf, 1967; Digel, 1997; Meier, 2004). These personal attributes are very unspecific, which makes sports club management at the level of human resources difficult. Accordingly, if we ask which skills are required for managing a sports club, we get diverse answers. For example, these include the manager's ability to deal with the members, a certain talent for organizing and planning, a commitment to the needs and interests of the club, cultivation of the club's relationship with sponsors, or proper representation of the club.

Personal attributes are generally difficult to operationalize. To be able to recognize these characteristics usually requires extensive contact and interaction with the person in question. For sports clubs, therefore, an interview is not the appropriate setting for establishing a candidate's suitability for an honorary post, such as chair of the board. The best proof of a candidate's qualification for an honorary post is a longstanding membership or, even better, a club career. The consequence of this practice is that whenever a certain post must be filled in a sports club, there are only a few people who can be trusted to manage the club appropriately. This recruitment strategy is what Baur and Braun (2000) called a mechanism of social closing (*sozialer Schließungsmechanismus*). It aims to make sure that the leadership of the club corresponds with the interests of the present membership and the club's traditions, and takes some pressure off the club in terms of complex recruitment procedures. Here, an interesting characteristic of sports club management becomes apparent. In companies, the orientation on professional expertise, as acquired through education, is of central significance. In sports clubs, inevitable insecurities when filling vacancies can

be avoided only if staff recruitment is tied closely to high levels of trust in, and reliability of, the applicant. In this context, a trustworthy person is one who is not expected to behave in a surprising or deviating manner.

Which requirements arise for voluntary sports club management concerning premises of human resource decisions? The main problem sports club management faces is how to secure reliability and trust when forced to recruit non-members. In this context, it is essential to develop strategies that serve as functional equivalents for building trust and confidence in someone entering a position without a club background. One strategy, as exercised in some non-profit organizations, could be the use of “charters and by-laws” of the organization as a “blueprint for board and staff conduct”. Therefore, these documents should not only be revised and updated, but placed in the hands of every committee member as he or she joins the organization (Hall, 1990). Another possibility is to involve external candidates in various social settings and activities within the club environment. This is very skillfully practiced at times in voluntary sports organizations and makes it easier for members to perceive external candidates as “one of us” (Thiel et al., 2006).

Conclusion

When analyzing voluntary sports club management from a social systems perspective, a whole array of characteristics become apparent, which need to be taken into account.

1. Based on their organizational structure, it is not necessary for voluntary sports clubs to operate effectively and efficiently. This completely contradicts the fundamental orientation for managing economic enterprises. Charter documents of clubs do not usually state how the purpose of the club or its mission is to be achieved. For example, promoting and maintaining sports programs requires the funding of appropriate temporal, social and material resources. However, the applicable means to secure these resources are limited, due to the principle of common public interest on the one hand, and the need to preserve traditions, which actually constitute the club, on the other hand.
2. It is certainly possible for a club to aim at optimizing the available resources to create the best possible conditions for its members. This type of club management requires development objectives to be formulated and the connection between purpose, means and conditional requirements to be defined—that is, to define decision programs. Studies about non-profit administration have already begun to tackle this multidimensional problem by developing multidimensional assessments of performance (Brooks, 2002). Thereby, it is important to avoid blindly transferring economic concepts. At present, the favored strategy for developing a model is only useful if, first, it does not conflict with the non-profit status; secondly, it is developed together with the members; and, thirdly, it is monitored regularly with regard to the members’ needs. Using the professionalization of American amateur sports as an example,

Whitson and MacIntosh (1988) demonstrated the importance of considering the individual needs of participants in peripheral contexts when a professional expertise is accomplished. Moreover, at the structural level of human resources, it is not advantageous to recruit a full-time administrative employee if their tasks and responsibilities cannot be defined clearly. It is fundamental to avoid succumbing blindly to the sex appeal of economic growth imperatives, since management concepts for economic enterprises and those necessary for non-profit organizations are simply incompatible in many points. Even though the catchword financial management promises to improve control, we must remember that money is merely a means to an end in a voluntary sports club. If clubs are operated too much like economic enterprises, they put their public utility and non-profit status at risk. Competing with professional sports entities, such as fitness studios or commercial sports facilities “requires a management style that is strongly sales and marketing orientated” (Heinemann, 1998a, p. 72). This is exactly what can put the existence of a voluntary sports club at a risk.

3. Self-monitoring is of vital importance for sports club management. The aim is to avert a boomerang effect due to the personalized system of decision making, which should protect the club from information overload. This also means protecting the club from efforts to increase growth by motivated full-time staff or honorary posts with backgrounds in economics and politics. Creating a growth strategy and moving to professionalize club management by creating full-time employment is justified, but only if this is desired by the majority of the membership (Horch & Schütte, 2002).
4. The goal of closely monitoring volunteers and honorary post-holders must be abandoned, since human resource management must remember that voluntary engagement is not an obligation and there is no relationship of economic exchange that could work to stimulate labor. Rather, the most important stimulus for voluntary work is the volunteers’ motivation, for example to represent and attend to the members’ rights and interests (Stichweh, 2000). Moreover, in contrast to economic enterprises, it is not possible to sanction post-holders except by voting them out of office or refusing to re-elect them (Heinemann & Schubert, 1992). Consequently, comparable practices and experiences in companies are only slightly helpful in guiding voluntary sports club management in the field of human resources. In this context, it is essential to develop creative approaches to motivate volunteers and improve their possibilities of self-evaluation and self-monitoring without jeopardizing the non-profit status of the club.
5. Looking at the structures of voluntary sports clubs using the theoretical approach of Luhmann’s organization theory, management of a voluntary sports club is not limited to the chair of the board and the board of directors. By virtue of the very structure of the sports club, every member can actually be an active decision maker and thus be part of the goal-setting process. Even though management suggests satisfying something

like a desire for regulation (*Gier nach Ordnung*), as expressed by Willke (2006), managing a voluntary sports club can ultimately be nothing other than a democratic handling of disorder.

This systematic discussion of the characteristics of voluntary sports club management has shown that it is important for future sports management research to focus on the organizational structures of the clubs when developing management approaches. In addition, this research should be used to contribute to the further development of general management theories and to studies on non-profit management. As Horch (1996) stated more than ten years ago, for-profit organizations can definitely learn something from non-profit organizations, such as the voluntary sports club.

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