

Are Sector Specific Competences Of Sport Managers Needed? - The Perspectives Of Labour Market Experts In Germany

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Aim and Research Questions

Alongside an increasing professionalisation, a growing number of graduates of sport management programmes seek to enter the sport labour market. The question arises as to whether this workforce possesses the competences, which sport organisations need in an ongoing functional differentiation caused by processes of commercialisation, internationalisation and digitalisation. The aim of this study is to (1) examine qualification requirements of sport management graduates in different sectors and (2) to find relevant similarities and differences across these sectors.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

To date, we lack a conceptual framework to define the field of sport management. Kaiser and Beech (2012) as well as Dowling, Edwards and Washington (2014) emphasise the need for a specific approach in labour market research in sport. Agency theory serves as our analytical framework and assumes a metaphorical contract between the labour market (principal) and higher education (agent) (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). The contract assigns higher education institutions with the task to train graduates of sport management programmes according to labour market needs (Nagel, 2006).

Research Design, Methodology and Data Analysis

Based on the results of a previous quantitative survey and a comprehensive review of literature, we developed an interview-guide. We then conducted 12 semi-structured interviews between December 2018 and February 2019. The interview partners represent sport organisations from the public sector, private sector, professional sports clubs, and non-profit sports clubs and federations. All interviewees hold senior positions in their organisations, such as Managing Director, CEO, and General Secretary, which is why we consider these individuals experts or key informants.

We transcribed and proof-checked the interviews before performing a qualitative content analysis according to Mayring (2010). The first author of this paper read the transcripts repeatedly and coded segments using *MAXQDA-Analytics-Pro 2018* according to theory-based categories (deductive) and new categories, which emerged from the transcribed interview materials (inductive). The qualitative data analysis resulted in 67 specific codes and 927 coded segments. In alignment with post-qualitative perspectives on research, we acknowledge that theory-free knowledge does not exist (Smith & Hodkinson, 2009) and as such, our interpretation is partial and situated.

Results/Findings and Discussion

In terms of qualifications, the interviewees concluded that there were no hard qualification requirements for general jobs in the sport organisations in the four sectors. A sport management degree does not prove to be a unique quality characteristic. In addition, there are no preferences associated with a Master's or Bachelor's graduate when filling job vacancies. What weighs more for the sport organisations in all sectors is work experience, for example gained in internship programmes.

Concerning competences, the interviewees emphasised the necessity of socio-communicative competences. Teamwork appeared to be the single most important competence. Next to this, interviewees of professional sport clubs and private sector organisations highlight customer/service orientation and networking. The affinity to sport emerged as a crucial personal competence in sport organisations across all sectors. In addition, we found leadership to be an important personal

competence in all sport organisations except those from the public sector. The interviewees from non-profit sport organisations highlighted the importance of special leadership skills, since future sport managers need to lead two types of employees: paid staff and volunteers. Considering methods and professional competences, three main pillars emerged, which are relevant across all sectors: digital competencies, analytical skills and specialised (sport management) knowledge. The interviewees from non-profit and public sector sport organisations perceived specialised knowledge to be especially helpful. Generic IT-skills are regarded as important competencies across all sectors. However, more specialised digital competencies appear to be less important for sport management graduates, since the employers seem to prefer IT/digitalisation specialists for jobs in this regard.

Conclusion, Contribution and Implication

Concluding, we found various differences across all sectors and within the individual sectors. The findings offer interesting avenues for further research, which include the perspectives of graduates/employees, the role of institutions of higher education and more profound accounts of expectations of employers in all sectors. Despite some limitations in our methodological approach, we collected interesting findings for each of the sport organisations and sectors examined. These findings may be beneficial for further developing sport management curricula. Although our findings show different focal points for the four sectors considered, we do not see a need of specialisation of study programmes. Instead, we recommend a generalist education with many opportunities for students to enter into specific, practical situations that help them acquire the specific competences needed in the different sectors. Internships, case studies and co-operations with sport organisations can lead into this direction. Furthermore, we recommend alternative assessment methods within sport management programmes, away from examining specific knowledge and towards a universal assessment of competences acquired in specific modules.

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