Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) of Sport Governing Bodies: A Method on Ways towards High Performance

Mathieu Winand, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Thierry Zintz (Advisor), Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
Benoît Rihoux (Advisor), Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium
David Qualizza, Université Catholique de Louvain, Belgium

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Organizational performance is a central theme in organizational analysis (Cameron, 1986; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Fiss, 2007). Bayle & Robinson (2007) pointed relevant approaches to organizational performance in the sport management literature (Frisby, 1986; Vail 1986; Chelladurai, Szyslo & Haggerty, 1987; Papadimitriou, 1994, 1999; Papadimitriou & Taylor, 2000; Koski, 1995; Madella, 1998; Bayle, 2000; Bayle & Madella 2002; Wolfe, Hoeber & Babia, 2002). These approaches consist of the identification of dimensions of performance and range of indicators measuring them. However, little research in this field has focused on ways to reach performance. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how organizational aspects of sport governing bodies act and interact to produce performance (Bayle & Robinson, 2007).

This papers aims to address this gap by proposing an innovative method called Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (Ragin, 1987). QCA is part of the configurational comparative approach in which cases are considered as complex combinations of dynamic characteristics. This approach takes a systemic and holistic view of organizations where patterns or profiles could be related to performance (Fiss, 2007). Furthermore, the benefit of QCA is that it develops a conception of causality that leaves room for complexity (Berg-Schlosser, De Meur, Rihoux & Ragin, 2008).

We focus on the 49 French speaking Community sport governing bodies from Belgium (CSGBs). One of the strengths of QCA is that it is appropriate for small -and intermediate- N research designs (somewhere between 5-6 and 50-60 cases) (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008). According to "causal regularities", our research intends to highlight key combinations of necessary and sufficient determinants (called conditions in QCA terminology) observed in high performing (called outcome in QCA terminology) CSGBs. In order to do this, we emphasize, according to literature and experts analysis, the constituents of the organizational performance of CSGBs: their missions (elite sport, sport for all and customers missions) and ten possible determinants of success.

We measure the achievement of the 3 missions of all 49 CSGBs using performance indicators for the year 2005, so to distinguish high performing CSGBs from low performing ones. Afterwards, we select 18 CSGBs depending on their level of performance, their sizes and their olympic sport orientation so as to obtain a large diversity of cases. We interview the Chair and the administrative manager of each selected CSGBs in order to understand the way their organization has operated before the year 2005 (Zintz, 2004), according to the determinants highlighted.

We perform the crisp-set QCA (csQCA) technique (dichotomous data), based on “Boolean algebra” (Quine-McCluskey algorithm, Tosmana software). It highlights the minimum necessary and sufficient conditions that can "explain" (non)occurrence of the outcome (Rihoux & Ragin, 2008). The achievement of the three missions of CSGBs is observed in CSGBs that combine elites’ training structure and development of activities for their membership or centralization of their governance, with only one or two volunteers, for small size ones or governance with involvement of paid staff and development of membership for big size ones.

Several recommendations could be addressed to CSGBs and National Sport Governing Bodies. They might reach performance according to three pathways. The first one is being proactive. They should provide sport and non sport services to give added value to their members and elites. The second one is both to involve paid staff in the decision making processes and to develop a project shared by volunteers, paid staff and sport clubs. And the third one, for small governing bodies which have no sufficient resources to organize various sport activities, is to delegate these to their sport clubs and to involve volunteers.

QCA has proven to be an adequate method to tackle the “black box” of sport organizations such as CSGBs. It allows for complex causation. Furthermore, combinations of factors are useful to understand and to "explain" high
performance of these kind of complex nonprofit organizations. The complex relations between actions and results can be highlighted as well as the interactions between the first thanks to the focus on the combinations of necessary and sufficient conditions of the QCA.