Leadership of Volunteer in Big Sporting Events

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Background

Big sporting events depend on volunteers (Hanstad, 2012). Due to volunteers, the event organizer gains an economic and operational value (Costa, Chaplin & Green, 2006; Solberg, 2003). Cuskelly, Hoye and Auld (2006) claim that the organization behind a sporting event cannot afford to arrange an event without volunteers. According to Hanstad (2012) a big event has high requirements regarding leadership. Research by Bozeman and Ellemers (2014) shows that leadership of volunteers is of great importance in terms of coordinating and motivating the volunteers' effort, but many questions regarding leadership of volunteers are still unanswered (Elstad, 2010). One explanation might be that little research has been conducted on the field of leadership of volunteers in big sporting events (Bozeman and Ellemers, 2014; Elstad, 1997; Parent, Olver & Ségain, 2009). Pearce (1993) found in his research that volunteers differ from paid employees. Thus, leadership of volunteers needs a different approach than leadership of paid employees (Nichols and Ojala, 2009). This paper explores leadership of volunteers in two big sporting events: World Cup Nordic 2014 and World Cup Biathlon 2014 in Holmenkollen, Norway.

Objective

The aim of this study is to examine to what extent volunteers were satisfied with their group leaders, and leadership qualities considered being of importance, during WC Nordic 2014 and WC Biathlon 2014 in Holmenkollen.

Theory

The concept of psychological contract has been used in this study to better understand the subject of leadership regarding volunteers. Volunteers are, according to this theory, considered to be employees, working without a salary. Nichols and Ojala (2009) found in a study that leaders should not communicate with volunteers the same way as paid employees. The researchers also found that the relationship between the leader and the volunteer was of greater importance to establish a good leadership, compared to the relationship between a leader and a paid employee. Based on these findings the researchers claim that the leadership of volunteers requires a different type of leadership than with the leadership of paid employees. Transformational leadership and the leader-member exchange theory will be used as a theoretical framework in this study. Seen in relation with findings from this study, descriptive leadership qualities from each of the theories have been selected to create guidelines for leadership of volunteers in big sporting events.

Methods

A triangulation of methods was chosen as approach to answer the research questions. The main method is of quantitative nature, based on a survey sent to all volunteers (N= 1745) after WC Nordic and WC Biathlon 2014. In all, 1100 volunteers from these two events filled out the questionnaire; 684 from WC Nordic 2014 and 416 from WC Biathlon 2014. The questionnaire involved statements regarding the volunteers’ satisfaction with their leader (volunteer with leadership responsibilities) in various contexts, using a five-point Likert Scale. To create a better and more in-depth understanding of the quantitative data, eight people from the two events were interviewed, respectively four volunteers (two from each event), two volunteers with leadership responsibilities (one from each event), and two employees in the event organizations (one from each event). The aim of the qualitative approach is to get variety of perspectives to the quantitative data. The volunteers will be interviewed regarding their satisfaction with their leader and what they consider to be important leadership qualities. The interviews with volunteers with leadership responsibilities concern their own performance as a group leader for other volunteers and which leadership qualities they found fit for leading volunteers in a big sporting event. The interviews with the employees in the two event organizations aim to examine which leadership qualities they emphasized when leadership responsibilities among the volunteers were allocated.
Results, Discussion and Conclusions
The data collection is in process and the results will be ready to present at the conference. This study may contribute with useful information to organizers of big sporting events in the future by creating an understanding of leadership qualities of importance regarding volunteers. Findings from this study may also be of value to other events involving volunteers. This information may contribute to increased satisfaction among the volunteers, which in turn may enhance the volunteers’ efficiency while working, and increase the chance of the volunteers wanting to participate in other events in the future. Due to little research conducted in the field of leadership of volunteers in big sporting events, this study may facilitate further research by developing more knowledge on the subject. More research is needed, however, to create evidence-based guidelines for leadership of volunteers.

References


