New Leadership for Organized Sports

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Management - Leadership (Other)  
Poster  
Abstract 2018-290  
Saturday, June 9, 2018  
9:20 AM  
Room: Halifax

Late 19th century, in the Netherlands, a pyramidal structure of sports organizations was established, consisting an international ‘umbrella-federation’, a continental federation, a national sports federation and many associated sports associations. This structure allowed for regional, national and international competitions to be organized. The National Olympic Committee & National Sport Federation (hereafter: NOC*NSF) is the umbrella-federation for organized sports, its mission is connecting the Dutch and inspiring the power of sports. During recent years organized sports however is losing participants, while overall-sports-participation remains unaltered. (Brands, Hiemstra, Kalkman, & Kusters, 2016). Expectations are that sports association memberships will fall from 33% in 2015 to 19% by 2030 (Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau & Rijksinstituut voor Volksgezondheid en Milieu, 2016). Apparently recruiting & retaining athletes for sports associations are the biggest challenges for Dutch sport associations (Brands, Hiemstra, Kalkman, & Kusters, 2016). According to NOC*NSF sports organizations are being challenged to transform from traditional management & control governance style organizations into developing and innovative institutions that are more in line with the developments in society (NOC*NSF, 2016). In addition, NOC*NSF is claiming this transformation calls for ‘new’ leadership within the organized sports, implying that at the administrative/governance level it is obvious that the current administrative leadership styles within the organized sport no longer fit the leadershipstyle the individual athlete is looking for, thus driving the athletes away from organized sports. Up until now NOC*NSF hasn’t gathered any scientific knowledge relating to leadership-style(s) which could potentially contribute to the sustainability of organized sports, to the extent that sports-associations would actually leverage the sports participation.

The aim of this research is to provide the (umbrella) organized sport with insight(s) into the way in which applied characteristics of leadership(style) developments can contribute to the sustainability of organized sports by matching the needs of athletes based on societal developments. The research ultimately led to new knowledge in the field of leadership for organized sport in the Netherlands.

From relevant literature on changing societies in general and the sports world in particular, the conclusion that organized sports in The Netherlands is still based on ‘managerial capitalism’ (Zuboff, 2002). This is a closed and controlled, institution focused system that does not connect directly to the individual or to other (social) organizations in capitalism (Zuboff, 2002). Implying that, in the eyes of the (new, athletic) individual, organized sports currently does not add value in the new ‘distributed capitalism’, in which no longer the institutions are key, yet the (new) individual who wants to participate in sports. The (new) individual, acting primarily as a consumer, seeks (immediate) satisfaction, i.e. value added. This has a direct impact on his/her sports environment in which self-fulfillment is the key. In distributed capitalism, many new organizations contributing to the needs of the (new) individual have emerged, so competition to attract athletes is fierce.

The literature study on characteristics of leadership developments was focused on the emerging leadership theories of the 21st century. Keywords for this leadership style are: Binding, Shared, Invisible, Serving, Complex and Adaptive. This is based on leadership as part of a dynamic, complex and adaptive eco-system configuration with emergent properties. In addition, it is indicated that leadership is increasingly regarded as a collective feature (Dijk, 2014). Leadership is found at every level and everyone has agency: the potential to influence, lead and contribute. Peters (2016) translates leadership in this context into being able to deal with an outside world with sudden, unforeseen or unpredictable events which requires organizations to be able to deal with an ever increasing degree of complexity. Emerging complex issues do not have unambiguous cause-effect relationships, and there is a high degree of interdependence (Peters, 2016). These developments in leadership can be translated directly into organised sports
in a distributed capitalism-world: dealing with an "outside world" that directly influences the organization, making it necessary to be aware of everyone's potential to influence, direct and contribute.

In addition to the literature study, appreciative inquiry style interviews were conducted among knowledge-bearers relating to leadership developments to determine how leadership developments could contribute to the sustainability of organized sports in the context of distributed capitalism. Appreciative inquiry was chosen as the research is aimed at finding a vision of the future of leadership for the organized sports in which growth, change and improvement are incorporated. Ultimately, all the characteristics of literature and empirical research were brought together into a six factor development and competence model (Peters, 2016): Intellectual leadership, Work management, Communication, Interpersonal leadership, People management and Self-management. Based on these factors, it is concluded that leadership development could aid sustainable development of organized sport, that is in four specific stages, as indicated hereafter.

1. Realize awareness in the organized sports-field of 'distributed capitalism', in which the organized sports no longer evolve around institutions, but rather around the new individual athlete. In this (business-)model, other and new athletes have become an added value to each individual athlete, thus gaining a place in the world of sports (through free market).

2. Reassess the added value of organized sport through the entire network of sports providers, and determine the added value of the organized sports for the (new) individual athletes in the distributed capitalism-world. In addition, the organized sport makes contact with the (new) individual athletes and the other actors in the network (reaching out to the outside world).

3. Organize sports in programs rather than by departments. It is of crucial importance to assess which people have the potential for working this way. This could be current employees, but only if they have the (proven) suitability to associate sports organizations with individual consumer/athlete needs within the new dynamics of the social field. Alternatively this can be achieved through people who are currently not involved in organized sports, but who have insight into the new social dynamics and needs of individuals.

4. Continuous investments in the development of people both intellectually and emotionally. In addition, in monitoring your role as an organization, by retrieving results from the (new) individual.

Essential precondition for the realization of these four steps turns out to be that they need to be initiated by the current (i.e. old-style) sports managers at the top of the sports organization(s). Only if they are truly motivated to realize the aforementioned transformations, the organized sport will acquire its sustainable place in the distributed capitalism ecosystem, which is essentially focused on creating added value for the individual athlete, using the sports-product and thereby creating a sustained existence for organized sports. If the organized sport continues to work in 'managerial capitalism' and thus in the existing setting (closed, managed and controlled system), only incremental change or adaptation of the current system will occur, and athletes are more than likely to keep moving away from organized sports, as it will not fulfil their needs as a consumer/athlete.

Finally one might wonder if in future, organized and 'non-organized' sports will co-exist, or that this becomes a(n irrelevant) paradox, implying we should rather envision an outside world, committed to the inner world of sports: the 'athlete' acting in a role as consumer; an assignment willingly fulfilled by society.

The research provides solutions, directions and guidelines for NOC*NSF, the 74 sports federations in the Netherlands, the regions/districts and the almost 24,000 sports associations. Leaders in these organizations can respond way better to the needs of the individual athlete, the sports consumer, based on the results of this research. Also for organizations that have now taken their position in the new business model, outcomes of this research can be of added value for an even better position and collaboration in the network for the "sports" product. Because we have arrived in an emotional society who have fun with each other, helping each other and interacting with each other, it is extremely important that the product 'sport' continues to develop. Sport lends itself very well to this.