

Profiling sports managers in Sporting academies

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Abstract:

The impact that Sports has on today's society stems from its relevance as a catalyst for human development in areas such as education, health, economy, among others of great potential. Nevertheless, its importance is proportional to the increasing complexity of the processes that regulate Sports, embodied in the decision-making and assessment of the contributions strategically outlined for the success of this sector. Indeed, it is urgent to continue studying the sports phenomenon to understand the role of leaders and their behaviors, as well as their importance in people's development within organizations. In this context, professions in Sports gain importance, among which the sports manager role stands out. Managers are pivotal to organizational success, performing a range of functions, orchestrating resources, and setting objectives. In the sports domain, this study aims to outline the skill sets of sports managers affiliated with various Sporting Academies nationwide. The study group comprised sports managers from Sporting Academies in Portugal. Data collection utilized an adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Marques (2015). Results indicate that experienced managers tend to place significant value on dimensions related to planning, recruitment, budgeting of resources, and monitoring of materials and equipment. They also emphasize the importance of defining goals, preparing specifications and financial plans, creating budgets, paying salaries, and controlling and monitoring activities. These managers prioritize a holistic vision of development, fostering changes in the organization's structure and functioning. There is no single profile for managers, rather, flexibility and suitability are essential, adapting to the specific needs of their intervention. The vision and adaptability of sports managers are considered crucial in the current paradigm.

Key Words: Human resources; Organizations; Skills; Sport Management; Team Management

Introduction

The social dimension that composes the human being is inevitable, just like the sense of belonging and the need to associate with others to develop all kinds of activities. These gatherings, when carefully organized and cohesively complexified, transform into organizations. In fact, from birth to death, man spends his entire life in organizations of various capacities. He is born in a hospital organization, is educated in a school organization, performs his functions in labor organizations, and even in his process of degeneration, turns to organizations to take care of his well-being. It can be inferred that organizations are constituted by groups of people who define objectives, direct skills, delegate functions, and create ways to divide and guide long-term work (Santos, 2019). According to Reis (2016), aggregation tends to meet social needs when in communion with others, socially circumscribed, so that everyone can achieve mutual benefits. The organization thus emerges as a mechanism to control the natural entropy imposed by the surrounding context, evolving in symbiosis with it. In this regard, one of the most important milestones in history corresponds to the process of social and economic transformation initiated in England in the 18th century, which we call the Industrial Revolution.

The concept of industry emerges at a rapid pace of progress, and, as a reflection of society, sports also evolve and "complicate." In an attempt to respond to this "chaos", Management emerges as a planning space that, according to Jacquinet (2019), consists of the administration of production factors to achieve set goals within the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness, influenced by factors such as social, political, economic, technological, and legal (Bradbury & Boyle, 2017). Management, as a practice, is intimately related to the notion of industry, corresponding to one of the facets of modernity (Musso, 2017).

In the field we operate in, Sports Management is considered by Teixeira (2019) as an area that governs the organization and sports activities planning in a rational and systematic way. It is also valued by Pereira et al. (2022) as an area of extreme importance and a "crucial" piece in the success of sports organizations, aiming at the development and optimization in the promotion of sports practice (Dias, 2021).

In the first instance, sports organizations can be defined as structured social entities related to the production of services or goods in the sports field, governed by objectives that align with the organization's mission (Slack & Parent, 2006). According to these authors, there are five necessary attributes for the

designation of a sports organization: 1) being a social entity, composed of people who interrelate in performing functions, establishing synergies for the best possible performance; 2) producing services and/or products in the sports field; 3) sustaining itself according to objectives that align with the organization's purpose; 4) organizing and managing resources in a "tuned" manner; 5) defining the levels of integration and specific attributes of its human resources.

In this line of thought, and although there is no clear definition on a Sports Management's concept (Teodora, 2020), it is considered by Retar et al. (2013, p. 4) as "the process of coordinating key resources and cooperating with key stakeholders to facilitate the effective achievement of organizational and sports objectives, both for the organization and athletes." In a more simplistic view, it can be seen as a process of arranging to function. In other words, the act of managing allows assigning meaning to an action while simplifying it in terms of understanding and rationale within the overall sports workflow.

Cruz (2017) emphasizes the increasing visibility that sports have gained as a tool for mass manipulation, with economic impacts giving rise to goods and services that drive this phenomenon on a global scale. Sports organizations are not immune to this constant change, and the people constituting them need to be prepared (Miranda et al., 2017). In this scenario, Chelladurai (2021) reflects on the sports industry as the process of coordinating resources to efficiently produce any sports service.

The author goes even further, advocating the need to train and qualify the human resources of sports organizations, equipped with multifaceted intervention tools, according to the needs of the structure in which they are inserted and the global sports context. The role of the sports manager takes shape and gains relevance in a world where employers seek specialists in sports market forecasting and their ability to react, even anticipate, cyclical trends in the surrounding environment (Azevedo et al., 2021; Retar et al., 2013).

Similarly to the concept of Sports Management, the role of the sports manager is not universal, possibly due to the fact that their role cannot be predefined (Teodora, 2020), as sports organizations have diverse and specific needs within their own environment. Miranda et al. (2017) share this opinion, pointing to the array of contexts in which sports managers can operate (clubs, associations, federations, gyms, private companies, public sector, professional or amateur competitions, recreational sports, university sports, among others) as the main cause of this diversity. Fahrner and Schüttoff (2020) highlight the context as a primary condition to inquire about the skills that the manager must possess.

However, Hoye and Parent (2017) approach the sports manager as the responsible agent for performing various tasks, carried out based on the (better) way in which sports services are provided to the customer. For Fahrner and Schüttoff (2020), the power of preparation and communication is indispensable for any sports manager, regardless of the context and/or assigned position. On the other hand, the sports manager "of the future", according to Gallardo and García-Unanue (2020), should have skills related to new technologies, while Chelladurai (2021) argues that it is the responsibility of the sports manager to use marketing techniques and other methods to capture and involve young people in sports. In fact, the intervention of a sports manager is distinctly multidisciplinary, gathering skills from various areas and varying from organization to organization, culture to culture, and policy to policy (Sesinando & Teixeira, 2022). "Decision-making, negotiation, interpersonal relationships, conflict management and people's interests" are highlighted as crucial for reducing constraints and the success of the manager (Arriaga, 2022, p. 7).

Assuming sports training can take place in various organizations, in football's context it occurs in the club, as this sports-cultural organization is essential as a reconciler of differences, a space for the creation of human and social values, essential from a pedagogical and educational perspective (Bento, Graça & Garcia, 1999; Magalhães, 2011; Morley et al., 2014; Reilly et al., 2004).

Building on this assumption, Academies gain prominence as sports training entities. In a broader interpretation, according to Martins (2015), Academies are "facilities or training programs designed to produce talent" (p. 16). Football training has gained increasing importance in our country, with clubs feeling the need to create strategies that allow them to have a greater number of young athletes, possibly becoming part of the main teams (Martins, 2015).

The author also notes that the training (development) and sale of new athletes have increased the economic power of clubs, as well as their visibility abroad, reducing the need to buy foreigners. This expansion and survival condition, along with the pursuit of profit, led to the development of Academies, which became training grounds for competition and development teams. Academies are a "synonym for a space of instruction, knowledge, values, and knowledge developed over several years by a set of collaborators and practitioners, equipped to enhance discovery, personal and professional training, and the inclusion of young people. These organizations are, in broader terms, facilities or training programs aimed at creating young prodigies" (Martins, 2015, p. 16).

In a paradigm where priority is given to improving management mechanisms and flows, the skills of human resources, the social, economic, and sports status of the organization, the study of sports organizations and their mediators becomes relevant when qualified managers are required for global sports success. Consequently, this study aims to characterize the skills profile of sports managers affiliated with existing Sporting Academies nationwide.

Material & methods

Participants

The study group consisted of sports managers from Sporting Academies in our country. The inclusion criteria were based on their membership, as human resources, in the hierarchical line of the organization, totaling 23 participants.

Procedure

Regarding the methodological aspects leading to the organization and obtaining data, we collected addresses, phone contacts and Academies' email addresses through research on their institutional websites. Subsequently, we contacted the responsible individuals of these organizations via email and phone to explain the study's objectives and, at the same time, request permission to contact the respective sports managers and provide them with the data collection instrument. After obtaining the necessary consent, all participants signed an informed consent, which contained the relevant details of their intervention, thus allowing them to make an informed decision before agreeing to participate in the study. Then, the questionnaire was sent online, ensuring the respondent's anonymity and the answers' confidentiality, with researchers absent during the completion period to avoid influencing the responses. The data collection was done between 15 to 30 days after the delivery process. The entire described process took a total of three months.

Instruments

The instrument used for data collection was an adapted version of the questionnaire developed by Marques (2015), consisting of two parts. The first part is informative and characterizing, including the identification and relevant information about the respondent, culminating in their placement in the organizational structure to which they belong. The second part focuses on the coordination mechanisms of work and how operations unfold within the organization, aiming to collect data on the respondents' perceptions involved in the sports process, reflecting the contexts to which the organization turns. In other words, the items in this part aim to assess the individual's level of agreement regarding the valuation of skills necessary in performing their role within the organization. This interpretation resulted in the creation of nine central dimensions, to be developed in the next chapter. Each dimension contains a set of statements on a Likert scale conveniently modified to measure the degree of agreement with the corresponding items, ranging from complete disagreement ("completely disagree") at level one to complete agreement ("completely agree") at level six.

Data collection and analysis

According to the study objectives, we conducted two analysis processes, descriptive in the initial phase to characterize the participants, and later inferential for comparison purposes, using version 28 of the IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). To enhance the intelligibility and understanding of the comparison process, variables such as "age" ("younger" and "older"), "working hours" ("fixed" and "variable"), and "duration" ("normal" and "above average") were recoded into two groups based on the mean as a cutoff value. Defining appropriate statistical techniques for the present context, we set the confidence interval at 95%, thus establishing the study's significance level (p-value) at .05. The use, when necessary, of non-parametric mean comparison tests was due to the sensitivity of the questionnaire items, as they did not meet one of the conditions for applying parametric tests, namely the normality of their distributions.

Results

Mostly male (88%), we surveyed individuals aged between 26 and 63 years, with educational qualifications ranging from Secondary Education (35.3%) to Master's (23.5%), while the majority had a Bachelor's degree (41.2%).

Regarding experience in the organizational context, although designations such as "sports director," "technical director," "sports manager," and "department head" were positively rated, 47.1% of our participants had no previous experience in the position, while 52.9% had experience in other organizations.

Referring to training in the professional field, our distribution is more heterogeneous, as 70.6% of respondents had sports training, while only 29.4% came from other fields of study. However, our participants did not report holding higher-level management positions in their Academies.

As mentioned throughout the work and, to facilitate the sports managers' perceptions analysis regarding the characteristics they value most in describing a typical profile, dimensions were created that group various areas of intervention (activities to be carried out) within a sports organization, related to: a) Administrative Activities (ensuring the organization's functioning); b) Marketing; c) Financial Management; d) Equipment Management; e) Human Resources; f) Functional Areas of Intervention (belonging to the core of the organization); g) Relevant Competencies (knowledge related to a scientific, technical, or technological disciplinary domain); h) Technical Know-how (operationalization of technical, technological, or scientific actions); i) Social and Relational Know-how (attitudes and personal and relational qualities, related to the disposition to act, react, and interact with others).

According to the variables under analysis, when comparing subjects, we found that older managers tend to significantly value the "Functional Areas of Intervention" and "Relevant Competencies" dimensions more than younger ones ($p=.026$). This means that our participants value activities related to planning, recruitment, budgeting of resources, and monitoring of materials and equipment, as well as consider relevant skills that

provide communication ability, leadership, solid knowledge of sports, sports law, protocol and etiquette, and sports psychology, sociology, and pedagogy.

Observing the experience that managers had in previous positions, we found that more experienced managers significantly value the "Financial Management" dimension more than less experienced ones ($p=.007$). These managers point to the importance of defining goals to be achieved, preparing specifications and financial plans, preparing and elaborating budgets, paying salaries, controlling and monitoring the organization's expenses, acquiring services, and, above all, increasing the organization's revenues, as well as projecting scenarios aimed at the structure's development.

Related to working hours' (duration), our results indicate that managers whose working hours are above average significantly value the "Marketing" ($p=.013$), "Financial Management" ($p=.025$), and "Equipment Management" ($p=.038$) dimensions more than the others. Previously presented the intrinsic activities of the financial dimension, those related to the "Marketing" dimension aim at defining the organization's mission and policy(ies), giving priority to its promotion, and seeking partners and/or sponsors to attract institutional support from other relevant organizations/groups. In summary, these managers estimate a global vision development, fostering changes in the organization's structure and functioning.

In the "Equipment Management" domain, the associated activities involve creating computerized databases of the organization's activities, supplying sports equipment, sports materials, and merchandising, coordinating the use of sports material resources and evaluating their state of profitability, and finally, creating projects for the acquisition and remodeling of equipment and infrastructure to support sports practice.

Discussion

Studies in our field have a long history. According to Reis (2016), national investigations date back to the late 90's, increasing over time. The author notes an increase not only in the number of publications but also in their diversity focus, given the sports manager's profile versatility that can vary substantially depending on the surrounding context (municipality, club, association, among other organizations). In fact, the results of Pereira et al. (2022) reveal that in 2000s' first decade, about 1.3 studies were published per year, with this ratio growing to 2.5 per year by the end of the third decade. Notable studies in this domain include those of Vaz (2001) and Costa (2002) regarding manager profiles, Maças (2006) for the sports directors' analysis, Silva (2007) for contributions to human resources management, and more recently, the studies of Soares and Teixeira (2020) and Sesinando and Teixeira (2022), both focused on manager profiles in sports organizations.

Internationally, most work focuses on the specificity of sports manager functions. However, the analysis becomes more comprehensive as these agents operate in different realities, whether in Education (private schools, public schools, polytechnics, universities, among other institutions), associative (clubs, associations, and sports federations), or even municipal. The sports managers' samples here selected are generally more extensive, highlighting, for example, the studies of Bastos (2006), Chelladurai (2014), and Horch and Schuette (2003).

While earlier investigations focused essentially on the leadership and motivation capacity of human resources as an almost mandatory profile trait of the sports manager, recent studies have pointed to the importance of teamwork, facility and event management, and finally, the organization of sports events. In fact, it is inferred that studies, even with different scopes, have commonalities, such as the importance attributed to teamwork and the need to integrate the human resources available to the organization, as well as the concern to distinguish sports manager profiles based on their surrounding contexts, even though there are invariant characteristics, such as the ability to communicate, plan, and make decisions.

The results we have obtained contrast with those pointed in the study by Gomes et al. (2014), where 76.6% of participants are male, with an average age of 37.8 years. The surveyed managers were in the age range of 20-29 (female) and 30-39 (male). Neves (2015) found, in his study, 69% male and 31% female. Regarding educational qualifications, the authors placed their sample up to a Bachelor's degree. Soares and Teixeira's study (2020) also noted the same trend, although with a greater emphasis on a Bachelor's degree.

Concerning experience in the organizational context, Maciel (2009) revealed that sports managers held middle management positions, with higher hierarchical levels occupied by professionals with training in administration and psychology, related to people management and/or general administration of the organization. It is important to emphasize that the formative development process should be continuous, spanning the entire professional life of the manager, not only through the experiences gained and exchanged with others but also through training provided by third parties (Filus & Martins, 2004), regardless of their basic training (Rezer & Fensterseifer, 2008; Silva et al., 2009). Anchieta (2010) indicates that it is necessary to consider the level of knowledge to bring the manager closer to the top of their qualification, which culminates in optimizing the sports management process.

Naturally, and as previously confirmed by Batista et al. (2016), the importance given to each of the function/competency dimensions, as well as the perception of time spent on each of them, varies according to the manager's own experiences.

Similar results were obtained by Batista et al. (2016), noting a significant proportional relationship between managers' experience and the importance attributed to functions/competencies; that is, the greater the experience, the greater the valuation, specifically in activities related to Marketing, organization and planning,

and evaluation. Pereira et al. (2022) obtained similar results, verifying that the most emphasized competencies by their respondents are related to communication, planning, marketing, and organization. On the other hand, the least rated ones refer to interpersonal skills, integrity, and leadership. Batista et al. (2016) also point out a valued dimension by sports managers, which did not have relevance in our study and relates to the competence of teaching (lecturing), so we believe this is due to our group of participants being limited to Football Academies. The study by Retar et al. (2013) found that sports managers with more field experience and even longer tenure in the position, perceive financial resources and the associated knowledge in this domain as fundamental skills for solving specific problems in sports organizations.

Related to working hours' (duration), Augusto (2015) refers to the duration of the sports manager's working hours in that, although 55.6% of respondents work more than 20 hours per week in the organization, they consider it a flexible regime that tends to the need to combine with other functions, whether or not within the same organization. Consequently, the time spent is not considered sufficient for the manager to strongly assess the organization's dimensions. Finally, In the field of equipment management, the hiring of sports equipment supply, and merchandising (81.8%), was also highlighted as a highly relevant activity by Marques (2015).

Conclusions

The constant world's evolution, sometimes precipitated by less favorable events such as those we currently witness, forces organizations to persistently adapt, and in sports, there is no exception. In a volatile environment, the need for training sports agents in improving their skills and seeking sporting success reaches its peak. Acquired empirical knowledge shows that developing a positive work environment, acting professionally, and leading with appropriate moral authority, as well as properly delegating tasks aimed at improving the organization, are crucial elements for sports managers' development. This development occurs not as isolated members but in cooperation with others, in knowledge exchange and sharing that allows the formation of synergies, thus contributing to sports' progress.

Despite the general traits previously mentioned, it is undeniable that sports manager's context and sector of action are of extreme importance in identifying their essential competencies. There is no manager single profile; rather, there is one that is more flexible and suitable according to the needs of their own intervention. In fact, although the participants in this study percept and attribute levels of well-defined essential competency dimensions, these values are influenced by the combination of the aforementioned factors. Therefore, the vision and adaptability of sports manager are considered crucial in the current paradigm.

Sports managers play a crucial role in the functioning and success of modern sports organizations because their importance goes beyond administration of sports activities. They encompass a range of responsibilities that are fundamental to the development and growth of these organizations, also having a significant impact on the development of athletes and sports professionals. They create conducive environments for personal and professional growth, offering training, education, and skill development opportunities that are essential for success in the sports world in all its dimensions.

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