

Professionalism in Management and Performance in Sports Organizations

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The aim of this article is to present and analyse the importance of professional management in sports organizations in the context of the results achieved by these organizations. The research presented in this article was based on Fribourg Management Model for Non-Profit Organizations. The research was conducted among a randomly selected, representative sample of Polish sports organizations, from October to December 2015. A total of 381 organizations were surveyed. The results show that the key role in the results achieved by sports organizations in Poland is played primarily by the resources acquired, especially by the involved board members, the sponsors and the ability to raise financial resources. Professionalization of management is also important for the results achieved by the organization, both in general terms and when looking closer at its individual aspects.

Keywords: professionalism, management, professional management, sports organizations, sports clubs

Introduction

Professionalization of activities and management practices in NGOs is considered to be an important direction of non-governmental sector development, which is supposed to facilitate both the development and effective and efficient activities of the organizations. It is also emphasized that professionalization as well as rationalization may not be a proper solution to all the organizations – notably the small, local and amateur ones that focus on social and community objectives and do not usually aim at development and accomplishment of targets of economic nature.

Given that the majority of Polish sports clubs are small-sized entities, operating locally and in an amateur way, the conducted research attempted at investigating whether professionalization of management practices benefits them as well.

The objective of the article is to present and analyze the significance of professional management in sports organizations in the context of their performance.

Importance of professionalization in NGOs

The hitherto researches conducted among the NGOs concerning the significance of variety of management practices for their efficiency and performance prove several important variables, distinguishing the successfully managed organizations. The researches of Smith and Shen (1996) prove, for instance, that formal structure of an organization, percentage of its active members, network of contact of management board members and a number and variety of representatives in organs of the organization significantly contributes to the organization's reputation. On the other hand, efficiency mostly relies on (Herman et al; 1997) activities connected with effectiveness of the work of the Board, including clear delegation of tasks and responsibilities to individual Board members as well as appraisal of their current performance.

Yet, Norwegian researches (Wollebaek, 2009) aimed at addressing the difference between local NGOs that still exist (since 1980) and those that have already ceased to exist indicate that to successfully perform their activities such organizations need to have formal structure and must have centralized decision making process. Moreover, Board members should be of varied age and professions and should be long experienced in working in high ranking posts.

According to Hager and Brudney (2011) management of volunteers within an organization is of utmost importance. The ability of systematic management of such a group of organization's members and a skill of attracting them to the organization are a key factor determining professionalism and efficiency of social organizations.

So far Polish researches into management of NGOs managerial practices contributing to a success or efficiency of an organization. They have mostly concentrated on defining what the success really is and how it could be measured (Krzelowiska, 2008), or how to investigate professionalism within NGOs (Bogacz-Wojtanowska, 2006; Kafel, Ziębicki, 2009, Kafel 2014). NGOs sector in Poland is still young, therefore the researches into it concentrate on other kind of issues. They focus on creating classification and typology of the

entities; they rather categorize knowledge about such organizations than indicate and provide solutions and recommendations how to manage them. Among the findings of the Polish researches it is possible to distinguish ten types of activities of NGOs examined by P. Gliński (2006), four segments of non-governmental sector (spontaneous people, entrepreneurs of NGOs, hierarchical activists and democratic, task-oriented people) pointed out in the research of J. Przewłocka and P. Adamiak (2012). It is also possible to find out the types of development of the organization (expansive, permanent, amateur) indicated in the researches performed by J. Schmidt (2012, 2014).

The researches concerning management in sports organizations have much longer tradition in Poland. However, most often all the studies are conducted either from a perspective of a specific management field, e.g. marketing (Kowalski, 2015, Tarant, 2011), finance (Pawlak, Smoleń, 2011) or strategic management (Rejniak-Romer, 2011); or from the perspective of a selected sports field, e.g. football (Pawlak, Smoleń, 2011), volleyball (Wiśniewski, 2013) or tennis (Szczypka, 2012). It is yet, apparent that there are no researches focusing on sports organizations as a specific group, easily distinguishable from other entities. Neither, there are researches that in a more complex and comprehensive way would analyze different aspects of management (and reactions between them) in sports clubs.

Sports clubs in Poland

In comparison with other non-profit organizations sports clubs constitute a significant part of entities. Sports, tourism, relaxation and hobby are the core activities of a third of all the organizations (Adamiak, Charycka, Gumkowska, 2016, pp. 31–32).

In Poland there are approximately 8,000 sports clubs and approximately 1,100 sports schools clubs registered as well as about 260 parish clubs. The total number of various sports clubs members amounts to 550,000 (Central Statistical Office, 2015).

Sports organizations can be distinguished from other organizations based on the way they are managed. They are mostly entities heavily undercapitalized, not supported and poorly managed (Przewłocka et al., 2013, Tomik, 2006). In many instances they have not undergone any reform process following the economic transformation (Starakiewicz, Kubów, 2014). In the opinion of the above mentioned authors sports is still burdened – in cultural and organizational aspects – by the past system, and the level of managerial competences of the decision

makers is still not high enough. This results from sluggishness of changes that take place (in the area of human resources as well) and is also caused by the fact that previously totally different competences were of much significance.

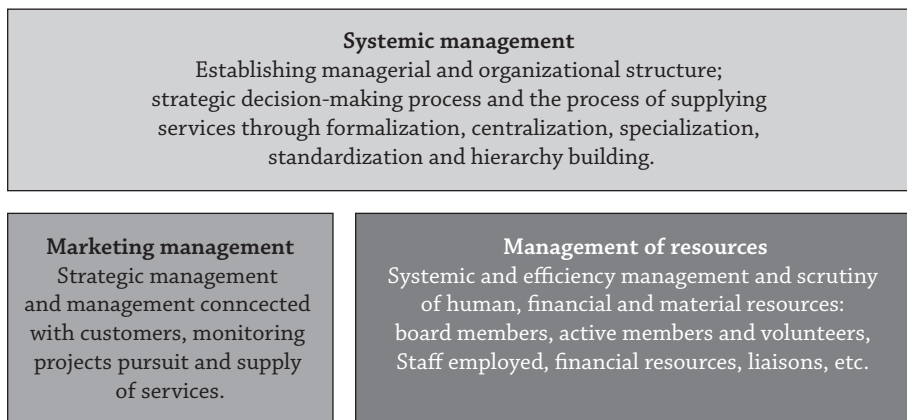
Therefore, sports clubs in Poland are facing many difficult challenges, and their existence and success will depend on quality of management.

Methodological assumptions

The objective of the research is to analyze management practices in sports organizations and to examine their significance for the aftermath of activities pursued by the organizations.

The researches presented in the article are based on Fribourg Management Model for Non-Profit Organizations (FMM) (Gmür, Wolf, Schafer, 2012). This model has been developed by the Institute of Researches on Management of Associations, Foundations and Cooperatives (VMI), University of Fribourg, Switzerland. FMM is a model tailored to non-profit entities and focuses on measuring performance of an organization considering its members' needs and the organization's overall vision (it does not consider financial indicators only). FMM and its modifications ensure both systematic and complex introduction into the area of non-profit management. The holistic approach of the model provides both the basis and framework for better understanding of NGOs management as well as potential solutions. The elements of the model are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. NGOs professionalization elements (based on FMM)



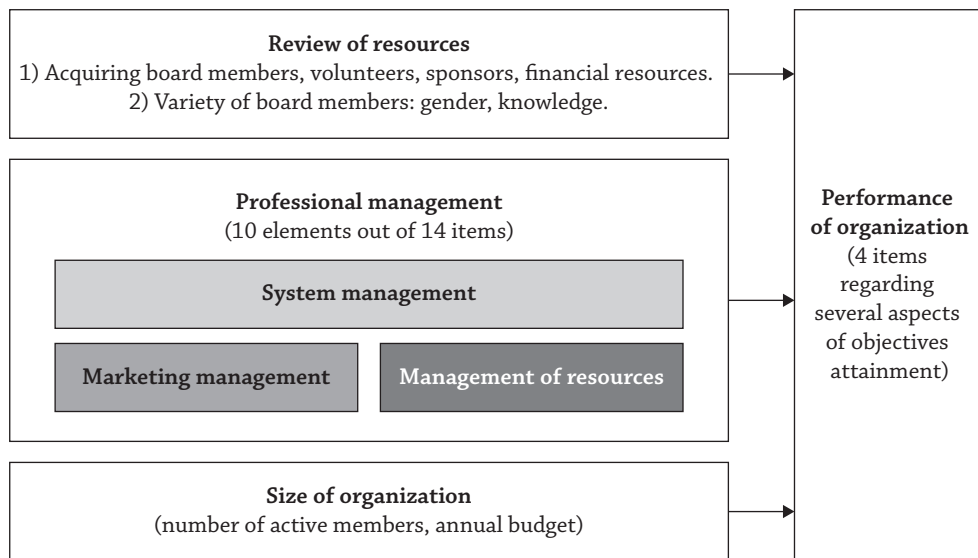
Source: Gmür, Wolf, Schafer (2012).

The presented researches are a part of a larger research projects whose objective is to compare selected aspects of management in Polish and Swiss sports organizations. Therefore, in both cases the same assumptions have been considered and they have been based on the same research model. The model (Fig. 2) assumed the analysis of selected features of sports clubs (chosen on the basis of literature studies), elements of FMM model as well as the analysis of the size of an organizations and examining their relation with performance of the organizations.

Prior to the research, three research questions were put forward:

- To what extent do sports clubs obtain their objectives (what is their performance) and what activities is the attainment of objectives connected with?
- What is the level of professionalism of management in Polish sports clubs and to what extent is it important for functioning of an organization?
- Is there any relations between management professionalism and performance of an organization?

Figure 2. Research model



Source: Gmür, Wolf, Schafer (2012).

The research method applied was a survey addressed to respondents via e-mail and traditional mail (depending on available contact addresses). The research

tool have been beforehand adapted to Polish conditions (the Swiss pattern was made use of). A pilot survey had been also conducted among 68 organizations of the Wielkopolska Province. The researches themselves were conducted among sports club within Poland within October–December 2015. The organizations were randomly chosen (direct draw, with no returns), and the obtained sample population is a representative one. The number of the organizations surveyed totals 381.

Characteristics of the surveyed organizations

In terms of active membership in the organizations, the overwhelming majority can be considered small-sized entities with the number of members up to 50 (48.6%) or up to 100 (23.4%). In terms of financial resources they also can be perceived as small entities with limited range of operations. As much as 60% of the organizations have their annual budget not exceeding PLN 75 thousand. However, over 21% of them have less than PLN 10 thousand yearly at their disposal. Such insignificant budget constrain both possibilities and resources of the organizations. Another 35% of the organizations have the annual budget amounting to PLN 75 thousand – PLN 500 thousand, and a mere 5% have the budget exceeding this amount.

In case of raising funds and acquiring resources, the ability of attracting board members, volunteers, sponsors and raising financial resources for the activity were considered in the researches. Generally, in all the areas the surveyed organizations assess their abilities as average ones (the median of responses is 1.75 for all the respondents in 0–3 scale).

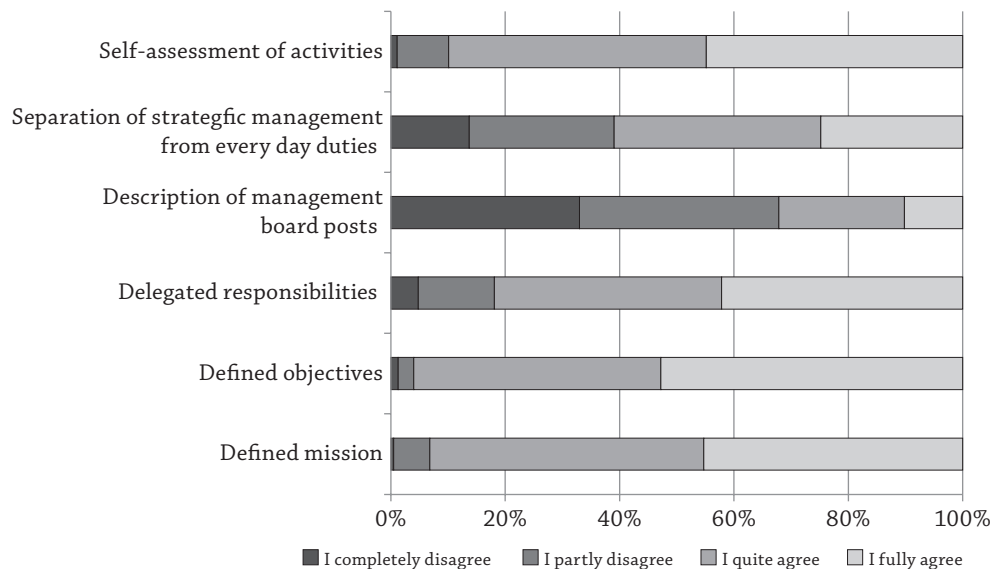
The appraisal of performance of the organizations indicate a significant percentage of attained objectives. The performance was measured with the extent of accomplishment of objectives within the past 2 years. The factors considered were general objectives, sports ones, those connected with the program offer as well as reputation/perception of a club. The obtained results prove that in terms of objectives attainment, the organizations assess themselves (in 5-point scale) as average (40.5%) and well (39%). Hardly any organization evaluated its activity very badly, and almost 10% appraised their activities both badly and very well (almost 10% in each case). Such findings may indicate that despite their miserable shape, the organizations are performing quite well (given their capacity) and are satisfied with their accomplishments.

Professionalism of management in Polish sports organizations

The analysis of professionalism in the organizations was based on 3 main elements of the FMM model. Systemic management was the first one to be analyzed. It included examining such aspects as: the extent of formality of missions, objectives, responsibilities (i.a. description of management board posts, clearly adjusted duties, determined targets, defined mission); separating strategic management from the accomplishment of daily tasks and conducting regular self-appraisal of activities of board members.

The findings presented in Chart 1 illustrate the obtained responses, and the more a respondent agreed with statements provided in the questionnaire, the larger was the extent to which the respondent accomplished the assumptions of professional systemic management (the same pattern of analysis concerns also the remaining elements of the model presented below).

Chart 1. Professionalism in management: systemic management



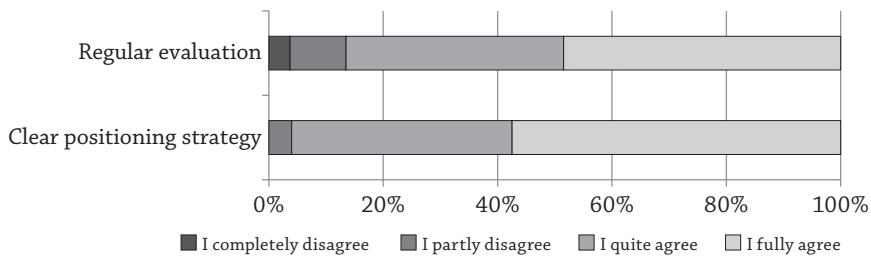
Source: Author's own.

It can be concluded from the chart that the organization are most successful at coping with the objectives defined. However, regarding the issues of more operational level that translates directly into concrete activities, i.e. description of posts, delegating responsibilities and allocating duties, the situation is

much worse. Thus, it seems that in terms of general concepts and directions of operations the organizations have clearly defined assumptions. Yet, in the field of daily solutions and activities, the level of clarity while defining their activities is considerably lower.

Within the area of marketing management the researches focused most on finding out whether in an organization there is a transparent strategy of defining the organization's position within the surrounding environment, and whether the organization pursues regular evaluation of its activities in this respect.

Chart 2. Professionalism in management: marketing management

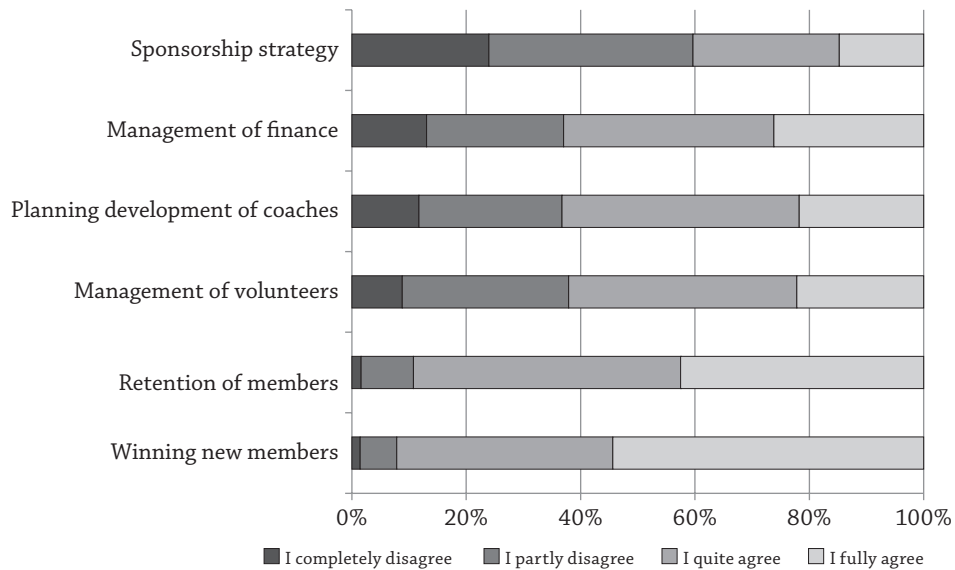


Source: Author's own.

In both presented fields the organizations evaluate themselves well and majority of them declare professional marketing management, yet, it is slightly better in case of positioning themselves in the surrounding environment.

The third area of the model is linked to management of resources. This element included: management of club members (including attracting new members and retaining the current ones), management of volunteers, planning the development of coaches, management of finance and sponsorship strategy.

The obtained responses suggest that management of resources is difficult for sports organizations. Relatively, they most successfully cope with management of members, which seems natural in case of NGOs. Yet, the situation is much worse in the event of management of volunteers. Attracting and encouraging volunteers to active involvement is not the strength of sports clubs; it is quite likely that they rely more on the involvement of their members, which is not paid for. However, sponsorship strategy is the largest weakness of sports clubs. In this field they rather act on intuition, they have no defined strategy or are unable to encourage sponsors to their active involvement. Organizations in this respect act rather intuitively, occasionally and in short term. They have no well thought strategy, neither can they encourage sponsors to their financial engagement.

Chart 3. Professionalism of management: management of resources

Professionalization of management and performance of organizations

A significant element of the research was to determine the relationship between the above discussed elements of professional management of an organization and its performance. The correlation analyses allowed to establish such relationships, although majority of them are weak (detailed findings are presented in Table 1). Most of all there is a statistically important correlation between overall level of professional management and the performance of a professionally managed entity.

In the field of systemic management there is a correlation between formality of missions, objectives, responsibilities and self-evaluation of activities. In case of resources management the effects on managing members and volunteers correlate with planning the development of coaches.

In this context it is worth noting that of primary importance are those elements of management system that the organizations are the most efficient at coping with. In case of the fields that the organizations found difficult to deal with (e.g. separating strategic management for day-to-day one, finance, sponsorships) there is no such a correlation. From the perspective of the organizations, such a situation seems to be a positive prognosis, since their activities and attempts

translate into accomplishment of objectives and achieved results. However, in the fields in which the organizations make mistakes or fail to cope with problems – there is no reverse correlation (indicating that their activities could restrict the chance of obtaining objectives). Therefore, it is quite likely that the improvement of quality of management in the fields that are burdensome for the organizations – either through education, creating suitable procedures or e.g. benchmarking – could bring about better effects and performance.

Table 1. Correlations between researched FMM model and performance of organizations

| | Performance of organizations |
|---|------------------------------|
| Systemic management | |
| Formality of mission, objectives and responsibilities | +0.16 / p(t) = 0.002 |
| Separation of strategic management and daily tasks accomplishment | Irrelevant |
| Self-evaluation of activities | +0.17 / p(t) < .001 |
| Marketing management | |
| Clear positioning strategy | +0.15 / p(t) = .004 |
| Regular evaluation | +0.22 / p(t) < .001 |
| Management of resources | |
| Management of club's members | +0.20 / p(t) < .001 |
| Management of volunteers | +0.24 / p(t) < .001 |
| Planning of development of coaches | +0.11 / p(t) = .039 |
| Management of finance | Irrelevant |
| Sponsorship strategy | Irrelevant |
| Professionalization overall | +0.28 / p(t) < .001 |

Source: Author's own.

While analyzing the findings, linear regression models were created. They indicate the extent to which a defined predictors explain variability of results within the performance of the organizations. In Table 1 all the elements in the area of raising and acquiring resources (i.e. the first element of the research model) that appeared to be relevant were presented. These are: acquiring board member, sponsors and raising financial resources. These elements in 14.7% explain variability of the performance of the organizations. In model 2 another element of the research model was added to the results obtained in model 1, i.e. professionalization of management (according to FMM model).

The most significant aspect here was mission defining (in the field of systemic management), regular evaluation (in the field of marketing management) and management of volunteers (in the field of management of volunteers). The above elements explain further 5.8% of variability of performance, and together with elements of acquiring resources amount 20.5%. Additionally, variables defining the size of organizations in the context of their importance in the model were also investigated. It was found out that an increase in the number of members is a significant factor only. Thus, considering this predictor, all the predictors explain variability of performance in 23.5%, which seems to be a satisfactory result, i.e. if performance of organizations can be explained in almost $\frac{1}{4}$ through the analysis of aspects of professional management.

Table 2. Models of linear regression

| Predictors: | Dependent variable: results | | |
|---|-----------------------------|----------|----------|
| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 |
| • Acquiring resources | | | |
| – Boards members | +0.154** | +0.146** | +0.139** |
| – Sponsors | +0.104* | +0.127** | +0.120** |
| – Financial resources | +0.311** | +0.252** | +0.230** |
| • Professionalisation in management | | | |
| – Systemic management: defining mission | | +0.131** | +0.137** |
| – Marketing management: regular evaluation | | +0.119* | +0.094* |
| – Resources management: management of volunteers | | +0.139** | +0.131** |
| • Increase in number of members | | | +0.185** |
| • Criteria of model quality: | | | |
| – Value F | 22.273** | 16.518** | 16.924** |
| – Model explanatory power (corrected R ²) | 14.7% | 20.5% | 23.5% |
| – Increase in explanatory power with additional variable in the model | 14.7% | 5.8% | 3% |

Source: Author's own.

Conclusions

The findings of the researches discussed above indicate that in the area of performance reached by sports organizations in Poland, the key role is played by acquiring human and raising financial resources, dedication of board members and involvement of sponsors.

Professionalization of management also contributes to enhanced performance of the sports organizations, both in general terms and in individual aspects.

Astonishing is the fact that the size of organizations (number of members and annual budget) is irrelevant for the organization's results. This could be connected with homogeneity of the organizations surveyed (small-sized and local entities dominated).

The way the sports organizations are managed is characterized by specific, distinguishable practices. Knowing them better and examining their correlation with accomplishment of objectives and success of the organizations might be of much significance, both cognitive and pragmatic.

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