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Article

The influence of macrocultural change on national governing bodies in British olympic sports

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1 **The Influence of Macrocultural Change on National Governing Bodies in British**

2 **Olympic Sports**

3 The study objective was to examine the temporal macrocultural changes in

4 Olympic sports in the United Kingdom and what regulates these changes. We

5 carried out this study integrating grounded theory and action research in a 16-

6 month longitudinal design. We collected data from eighteen interviews with

7 participants from governing sports organisations (n=6; GSOs) and NGBs (n=3).

8 Supplementary data came from ethnography with one national governing body;

9 ten focus-groups with athletes, coaches, parents, and NGB personnel; and eight

10 interviews with stakeholders. We found that political will had shielded Olympic

11 sports from societal changes. However, macrocultural changes to social standards

12 and the power of athletes highlighted that the organisational culture was

13 increasingly deficient and required radical changes. GSOs used their systemic

14 power to dictate appropriate avenues for change. Athletes used their reinforced

15 position by speaking out about aspects that challenged the welfare of athletes and

16 others working in Olympic sports.

19   The Influence of Macrocultural Change on National Governing Bodies in British Olympic

20   Sports

21   Researchers have requested a 'widening of the lens' beyond the athlete to unpack

22   the context that influences processes and events (Schinke and Stambulova 2017). Two

23   broad lines of research have evolved as a consequence of mounting interest: (1)

24   organisational psychology, which involves identifying and fostering successful

25   organisational cultures, and (2) cultural sport psychology, which emphasizes understanding

26   cultural identities and the meanings that people assign to sports. Both underscore the

27   importance of attending to local surroundings to reveal cultural standpoints (Ryba et al.

28   2013; Schinke and Stambulova 2017). Although discussions have taken place on these

29   aspects, it is yet to be determined how the individual and the environment merge (Schinke

30   and Stambulova 2017).

31   Thus, there is limited understanding of how environments are viewed within a

32   macrocultural context (i.e., encompassing interorganisational, local or national cultures). A

33   growing number of studies (Henriksen, Stambulova, and Roessler 2010; Storm et al. 2014;

34   Skille and Chroni 2018) and recent reviews (Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie 2018; Maitland,

35   Hills, and Rhind 2015; Blodgett et al. 2015) have attempted to consider the context.

36   Nevertheless, most of this research only briefly alludes to the idea that the environment or

37   the organisation might be embedded within a broader national culture.

38   Another significant limitation of the current research in organisational culture is that

39   most studies view it using an integration paradigm (Meyerson and Martin 1987; Schein

40   1990), according to which organisational culture is perceived as a consensus-based closed

41   system in which each organisation exists in oblivion (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015).

42   Meyerson and Martin (1987, p. 625) identified three common characteristics inherent to

43   this line of research: 'consistency across cultural manifestations, the consensus among

44   cultural members—and usually—a focus on leaders as culture creators'.

45   However, utilising a singular characteristic to describe a group tends to detract from

46   a substantial amount of profound cultural understanding (Ryba et al. 2013). Only a few

47   studies (Skille and Chroni 2018; Telseth and Halldorsson 2019) have substantially

48   considered the macrocultural context. Skille and Chroni (2018) evaluated the organisational

49   cultures of Norwegian sports federations to understand how Norway amalgamates the

50   demands of elite sports with a balance-oriented national culture. Telseth and Halldorsson

51   (2019) approach macroculture as a form of cultural production, situated in its socio-

52   cultural, organisational and historical context. As what is understood about culture depends

53   directly on the conceptualisation of culture, culture is generally understood to be a

54   relatively closed system of consistency and consensus, which does not fully elucidate how

55   culture is constituted (Meyerson and Martin 1987; Stambulova and Ryba 2013).

56   An examination of values is the usual approach in cultural studies; however, this

57   prevents insight into the complexity of how values are enacted or formed (Maitland, Hills,

58   and Rhind 2015). Therefore, it is essential to gain insight into *how* cultures are formed and

59   enacted. Doing so includes paying attention to how cultures change and fluctuate. The

60   development of a best-practice approach to cultural change in sport has been retrospectively

61   sought in grounded theories of culture change in Olympic sport (Cruickshank, Collins, and

62   Minten 2014) and professional sport (Cruickshank, Collins, and Minten 2015). However,

63   limitations to these approaches include poor recall, hindsight, and self-preservation bias. In

64   addition, both these studies were limited in that they conceptualised culture change as a

65   leader-led approach without including stakeholders from any of the identified subunits.

66   Moreover, the influence of changes at the macrocultural level, and how these changes

67   influence adaptive changes in sports organisations, such as national governing bodies

68   (NGBs), has not been evaluated in any study to date. Future research should encompass

69   emic real-time strategies, such as ethnography, to overcome these barriers and expand the

70   significance of culture (Schinke et al. 2018; Cruickshank, Collins, and Minten 2014;

71   Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015). With this in mind, the present study attempted to

72   evaluate a previously neglected area of cultural research and remove the traditional barriers

73   between researchers and participants.

74   *Organisational culture framework*

75   The present study forms part of a more extensive longitudinal study on culture

76   change in Olympic sports in the United Kingdom (see Feddersen et al. 2019). Following

77   Mannion and Davies (2016), we treat culture as "a root metaphor, simply something that an

78   organization is" (p. 98). This view allows us to focus on cultural dynamics and changes

79   over time. Meyerson and Martin (1987) presents three perspectives on culture: integration,

80   differentiation, and fragmentation. Our position in the present study is within the

81   differentiation perspective (Meyerson and Martin 1987). Yet, it is not within the scope of

82   this article to discuss the three. Instead, we sign-post to Meyerson and Martin (1987) and

83   Martin (2002) for a thorough overview.

84   In the differentiation perspective, a culture is a boundary around a set of

85   subcultures. Subcultures are distinctly different and can exist in peaceful co-existence (i.e.,

86   orthogonal subcultures) counter to (i.e., counter subcultures) or supportive of (i.e.,

87   enhancing subcultures) other subcultures (Mannion and Davies 2016). Meyerson and

88   Martin (1987) explain that the differentiation paradigm allows a researcher to approach a

89   culture with the understanding that culture saturates everything and organisations are

90   embedded in an open system. This recognition increases the saliency of diffuse and

91   unintentional sources of change, which raises the prospect that culture moves with events,

92   emphasising fluctuations in content and connections between subcultures (Meyerson and

93   Martin 1987).

94   In an open system, unanticipated changes outside an NGB can have widespread

95   consequences for the composition of subcultures if these changes mandate adaptation

96   (Meyerson and Martin 1987). Macroculture might, therefore, be the changes that occur

97   outside an NGB, which might reflect broader societal cultures that contain occupational,

98   hierarchical, class, racial, ethnic and gender-based identification (Meyerson and Martin

99   1987). For the present study, we draw on Meyerson and Martin (1987) and Rosa and Tudge

100   (2013). Accordingly, we treat macrocultural change as changing patterns of beliefs,

101   resources, and hazards, as well as changing expectations and events in society, both within

102   and across generations, within a larger context.

103   The current study gave consideration to the fact that only a few large, complex

104   organisations are characterised by an unambiguous culture (Mannion and Davies 2016). For

105   the sake of clarity, sports organisations were viewed as co-existing subcultures that are

106   loosely coupled with one another (Meyerson and Martin 1987). This coupling can buffer

107   responses to change wherein inconsistencies arise in the way in which governing sports

108   organisations and NGBs experiment and respond (Meyerson and Martin 1987). Thus, the

109   study objective was to examine the temporal macrocultural changes in Olympic sports in

110   the United Kingdom and what regulates these changes.

111   **Methodology**

112   In adopting an open-system perspective on culture, an attempt was made to look outwards

113   to notable changes that occurred outside NGBs in Olympic sports in the United Kingdom.

114   The combined use of action research and grounded theory were applied to the participatory

115   inquiry paradigm to consider both change and the process behind it (Dick 2007; Redman-

116   MacLaren and Mills 2015; Heron and Reason 2006). In adopting a participative axiology,

117   efforts were focused on bringing together areas that were most meaningful to the

118   participants.

119   ***The context of Olympic sports organisations in the United Kingdom***

120   2004 marked the beginning of the 'No Compromise' framework in Olympic sports in the

121   United Kingdom (UK Sport 2004). UK Sports stated that the new approach would:

122   'strengthen the best, support the developing and provoke change in the underperforming'

123   (UK Sport 2004). Yet, multiple investigations (cf. King 2012; Phelps et al. 2017; Grey-

124   Thompson 2017) into the elite sports practices shed light on the possible adverse effects of

125   this 'No Compromise' approach. Phelps, Kelly, Lancaster, Mehrzad, and Panter (2017)

126   suggested in their report on the World Class Programme (WCP) in British Cycling that:

127   "No Compromise" has, within the WCP, also come to reflect the single-minded pursuit of

128   medal-targets in order to retain funding rather than promptly addressing behavioural issues

129   within the WCP (p. 52). The adverse examples were argued to put the sport sector 'under

130   more scrutiny than ever before' (Grey-Thompson 2017, 4).

131   ***Procedure***

132   A longitudinal study design was selected, and the study commenced in July 2017 after

133   ethical clearance was obtained from the Liverpool John Moores University's ethics board.

134   The starting point of the study was an NGB (hereinafter referred to as 'NGB-1') based on

135   post-2016 Olympic Games funding changes. NGB-1 is anonymised due to findings

136   concerning adverse behaviours (Feddersen et al. 2019). It is a long-standing part of the

137   Olympic Summer Games with approximately 15000 members who carry out the sport in

138   clubs and with personal coaches. Specifically, the perspective of a research group labelled

139   the 'talent team' (comprising the talent manager; head of coach development; talent

140   administrator, assistant talent manager, Great Britain head talent coach and the first author)

141   was evaluated. Although the NBG-1 members in the research group were primarily were

142   responsible for the talent pathway, they also oversaw the senior elite programme, as well as

143   coach, leader, and referee development. Consequently, they were responsible for the entire

144   performance pathway.

145   An attempt was made to understand the prevailing NGB-1 context during the

146   reconnaissance phase (July to November 2017) and to also served to identify anomalies

147   through theoretical sampling (Weed 2017). It became evident that NGB-1 did not exist in

148   oblivion but changed as distal levels influenced the inside conditions for culture change.

149   Findings from the reconnaissance phase led to the purpose and the focus of this article to

150   examine the macrocultural changes that were perceived to occur outside NGB-1.

151   Consequently, information on the prevailing context was juxtaposed with data on

152   macrocultural conditions using four double cycles (Gilbourne and Richardson 2005) of

153   implementation and monitoring, and reflection and review.

154   The data collection phase was concluded when consensus that theoretical saturation

155   had occurred was reached. As a part of this process, the first author carried out two focus

156   group discussions with the parents of the athletes, one focus group discussion with the

157   talent team and three individual interviews with the talent manager, coach development

158   manager and the NGB-1 CEO. This process was terminated with a meeting in November

159   2018 with two NGB participants and one participant from a Governing Sports Organisation

160   (GSO) to assess the theoretical fit (Weed 2017; Heron and Reason 2006). The significance

161   of this meeting was that a broader range of participants could be included in the process of

162   terminating the research by assessing its fit, work, relevance and modifiability (cf. Weed,

163   2017) in other contexts. In the light of the 2017 government-funded report on the duty of

164   care in Olympic sports (*viz.,* Grey-Thompson, 2017) and the current focus of these three

165   organisations, the consensus was that the findings reflected the real-world concerns of

166   athletes working in sport and those employed in present-day sports institutions. The first

167   author terminated his direct engagement with the NGB-1 in November 2018 after

168   consensus was reached that theoretical saturation had occurred.

169   ***Participants***

170   To understand the prevailing context in relation to the NGB-1, an initial sample of NGB-1

171   personnel was recruited ($n = 4$; one of whom was a woman). This group identified three other

172   important stakeholder groups; athletes aged 18–23 years ($n = 15$; eight of whom were

173   women), coaches ($n = 10$; one of whom was a woman) and parents ($n = 10$; six of whom

174   were women). The findings from these four groups led to the recruitment of a subsequent

175   sample within the focal sport using theoretical sampling (Weed, 2017). This sample consisted

176   of parents of athletes in underserved areas ($n = 2$) and members of counter subcultures ($n =$

177   1).

178   The key focus of the present research was on the nine individuals identified via

179   subsequent theoretical sampling from other NGBs and GSOs (Table 1).

180   [*Please place Table 1 near here*]

181   The intention was to identify individuals who represented either British or home-

182   country governing bodies, NGBs in charge of both the talent pathway and participation,

183   NGBs who were solely responsible for a performance pathway, as well as personnel

184   representing GSOs and other relevant sports organisations.

185   The identified talent leads represented three different NGBs: NGB-A was a single-

186   event sport organised by a governing body which was exclusively in charge of talent

187   development and senior elite athletes. NGB-B was a multi-event home-country governing

188   body in charge of grassroots sport and competitions, and that collaborated with the Great

189   Britain governing body on coach development, talent development and senior elite

190   performance. Lastly, NGB-C was a multi-event Great Britain governing body in charge of

191   membership, grassroots sports, coach development, talent development and senior elite

192   performance. The experience of the talent leads in their current position ranged from less

193   than one year to six years. The collaborative approach also helped to identify six GSOs (i.e.,

194   UK Sport, Sport England, the English Institute of Sport, UK Coaching, the Talented Athlete

195   Scholarship Scheme and a university sports programme) of interest. All of the participants

196   were anonymous.

197   *Data Collection Strategies*

198   Having considered the recommendations made by Maitland et al. (2015), a decision was

199   made to adopt emic data collection strategies to examine the ebb and flow of the culture

200   change process. It was necessary to bring collaboration and democratic dialogue to the

201   forefront of the study as a consequence of the use of participative epistemology (Heron and

202   Reason 2006). Ethnographic observations were used as the primary method of assessing

203   interrelationships within the change process to obtain a meaningful description of events as

204   they unfolded (Krane and Baird 2005).

205   The first author was stationed at NGB-1 as a part of the talent team for 16 months

206   and carried out extensive fieldwork to evaluate departmental, interdepartmental and

207   organisational meetings and events at the offices of NGB-1, national youth team camps,

208   coach development courses, competitions, public events and staff outings. The role of the

209   first author was to assume the role of a 'critical friend' (cf. Costa and Kallick 1993; Chroni

210   et al. 2019). Extensive field notes were recorded using core grounded theory elements (i.e.,

211   memorandums and diagrams), with a focus on action strategy and change process outcomes

212   (Baskerville and Pries-Heje 1999; Holt 2016).

213   The first author carried out ten focus group discussions that lasted between 40 and

214   130 minutes on average, with a view to understanding the organisational culture in a

215   broader sense. The focus group discussions served two main purposes; firstly, to provide a

216   purposeful forum through which participants could engage in democratic dialogue, and

217   secondly, to raise sensitivity to interpersonal communications and meaning-making by

218   highlighting subcultural understandings of the change process and making the group

219   interactions the explicit focus (Kitzinger 1995). The focus groups were divided into defined

220   groups (i.e., a talent team, parents of the athletes, coaches and athletes) to analyse

221   individual and collective perceptions and evaluate the intra-group subcultural processes of

222   dialogue and negotiation.

223   As mentioned previously, the area of interest in this research was the data elicited

224   through individual interviews, although these were meaningless if treated as stand-alone

225   information. Twenty-six individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, with an

226   average duration of 37–75 minutes. Eighteen of these were with the main interest group

227   (see Table 1), as described previously (Brinkmann and Kvale 2018). The individual

228   participants were interviewed twice, during spring and winter in 2018, via Skype to

229   accommodate their busy schedules and geographical constraints (Janghorban, Roudsari,

230   and Taghipour 2014). The interview guide used for the first interviews covered the

231   objective of talent development, changes to the talent pathway, societal influences on talent

232   development and linkages to other sports organisations. The interview guide for the follow-

233   up interviews aimed to provide more contextual depth and considered the iterative findings

234   of how the culture had changed, as well as the findings from the first round of interviews

235   (Culver 2012; Smith and McGannon 2018).

236   Lastly, documents and web pages were obtained to provide greater contextual depth

237   to NGB-1 and the community of the sport. These documents included training programmes,

238   official papers describing the mission, organisational structure and public communication

239   documents.

240   ***Analysis and Rigour***

241   As suggested by Holt and Tamminen (2010), open coding commenced immediately after

242   the first data collection in the reconnaissance phase, and this coding was considered to be

243   the starting point of iterative analysis. The implementation and review phase involved open

244   coding to encourage novel ideas and help prevent early foreclosure (cf. Corbin and Strauss

245   2015). The reflection and review phase entailed conceptualising the influence of

246   macroculture on the process of culture change. Memorandum writing, as well as

247   introducing the conditional/consequential matrix and paradigm from Corbin and Strauss

248   (2015), aided the transition from open coding during the implementation and review phase

249   to conceptualisation during the reflection and review phases.

250   In keeping with the participative approach, the first author presented the findings

251   regularly at talent team meetings to engage its members in iterative analysis. This enables

252   members of the team to feel part of the process and trusted to draw out what is intrinsically

253   worthwhile (Heron and Reason 1997).

254   Rigour in this study was achieved through collaborative inquiries used to enrich

255   understanding through dialogue, in conjunction with the application of all core grounded

256   theory elements (Smith and McGannon 2018). Conducting a comparison of the ways in

257   which the co-researchers understood the concepts and interpreted the data helped to ensure

258   analytical diversity. The immersion and collaboration within the Talent Team opened up

259   unique nuances and insights.

260   **Results**

261   In this section, the prevailing context (and channels through which society and GSOs might

262   influence culture change) is outlined. Secondly, consideration is given to how societal

263   changes influence the connection between NGBs and GSOs and to the perceived influence

264   of these changes on cultural change. The ways in which these findings contribute to an

265   understanding of culture change in NGB-1 are then described.

266   ***The Influence of Outside Structural Conditions on a Change of Culture***

267   We found that it was crucial to understand the ability of the macrocultural landscape to

268   influence adaptive changes within Olympic sports. The model applied consisted of four

269   embedded levels of structural conditions outside and inside NGB-1, three of which

270   comprised *Outside Structural Conditions* (Figure 1). The three levels included *the societal*

271   *level* comprised of systems of changing societal norms, values and beliefs, as well as social,

272   physical, educational and political systems. The next level, *the GSO level*, included sports

273   organisations that work within Olympic sports in the United Kingdom and influence NGBs.

274   The third level, the NGB level, was made up of NGBs in Olympic sports. The last level

275   covered *Inside Structural Conditions* and described the properties of an individual NGB

276   and subcultures within a sport.

277   [*Please place Figure 1 near here*]

278   Coupling of organisations and layers was demonstrated to be an evolving system of

279   dependency that included horizontal dependency (i.e., the degree to which same-level

280   organisations were dependent on one another) and vertical dependency (e.g., the degree of

281   dependence between organisations situated in the GSO and NGB layers). Generally,

282   coupling denotes the extent to which individual organisations are dependent on other

283   organisations to function and influence adaptive changes. At the outset of the current study,

284   the analysis indicated that GSOs and NGBs in Olympic sports were primarily protected

285   from societal level influences (denoted by the solid ring in Figure 1). This protection

286   buffered the need for responsive changes. GSO personnel and pathway managers agreed

287   that societal changes had little adverse influence on cultural change within Olympic sports

288   (Figure 1). Instead, most Olympic sports enjoyed sizeable public support and political,

289   which meant that they were able to capitalise on the traditions and working practices

290   needed to ensure cultural continuity.

291   Within this interorganisational structure, participants suggested that personnel

292   engaged with personnel at other NGBs or GSOs at continued professional development

293   opportunities and through other forums. However, participants also reported that these

294   interactions had little influence on changes within their own organisation. In particular,

295   NGBs had little horizontal interdependence, and the pathway managers reported a sense of

296   loose coupling (Figure 1). When asked about an NGBs collaboration with other NGBs a

297   pathway manager of an England NGB mentioned: '[Us] not so much. I mean [GB

298   organisation of NGB-C] obviously .. and EIS' (NGB-C). Structural conditions that

299   influenced loose coupling included demanding day-to-day operations, and perceptions of

300   interorganisational incompatibility (i.e., working practices, approaches to coaching and

301   sport-related differences). This perceived incompatibility amounted to NGBs not perceiving

302   other NGBs to have the legitimate power to influence changes.

303   The vertical structure placed NGBs as a conduit between a GSO and their respective

304   communities within their sport. The vertical dependency was generally structured as a

305   relationship between GSOs and NGBs, and the NGB and its sports community. The link

306   between the Outside and Inside Structural Conditions is represented by two channels

307   (Figure 1). These represent direct dependency between NGB-1 and GSO levels, thereby

308   facilitating the indirect transfer of knowledge; first from other NGBs to the GSO level, and

309   secondly from the GSO level to NGB-1. Limited horizontal and vertical coupling led to

310   localised changes and inertia with respect to making adaptive changes.

311   Importantly, varying perceptions of the systemic power of a GSO influenced its link

312   to an NGB. The pathway managers agreed that their relationship with Sport England and UK

313   Sport mainly revolved around funding: 'To be honest, yes. I think they would like to see it

314   not be that and so would we in some ways. But it tends to just default back to that [funding]

315   position. (NGB-B). Pathway managers mentioned that Sport England and UK Sport had a

316   large degree of systemic power that they utilised to prescribe changes and drive the focus of

317   NGBs. This systemic power was seen to be partly linked to a *coercive offer,* wherein the

318   funding GSOs were able to rearrange the available options relating to the Inside Structural

319   Conditions of an NGB based on a perceived threat of a fragile and insecure funding

320   relationship: 'They are being pushed. You know, governing bodies are being pushed by UK

321   Coaching by Sport England …to make sure they have these things in place and [to look] after

322   young people down that talent pathway' (Participant from a GSO).

323   GSOs influenced the Inside Structural Conditions pertaining to an NGB by dictating

324   conditions that warranted adaptive changes. These conditions included, but were not

325   limited to, funding conditions, updating normative coaching practices, safeguarding and

326   welfare changes, and strategic supervision of how the allocated funding was spent. A

327   vertically dependent relationship was particularly important owing to the perception of

328   having to be increasingly accountable to the funding bodies.

329   *Ongoing Process of Coupling Macrocultural and Cultural Changes*

330   Consideration is now given to how changes influenced NGBs within Olympic sport. While

331   variations in localised changes are likely to exist different organisations, the pathway

332   managers and GSO personnel reported experiencing the macro changes that impacted

333   individual changes. When describing the period prior to the study (i.e., the Olympic cycles

334   leading up to London 2012 and Rio de Janeiro 2016), the stakeholders tended to refer to it

335   as a 'golden' sports period. The perception was that this period received significant support

336   and that this shielded GSOs and NGBs from the influence of societal events: 'We [Olympic

337   sports] have been through something of a golden period in every way in British sport down

338   to the lottery, but also, the political will that is behind that finance has been incredibly

339   supportive for sports' (NGB-B).

340   The positive consequence of this view was that Olympic sports enjoyed a

341   significant degree of autonomy without strategic supervision of how the funding was spent.

342   However, the consensus was that medals had to be produced continually in relation to

343   Olympic sports to maintain this level of independence. By contrast, this approach was also

344   associated with socially undesirable behaviour:

345   I think the pursuit of performance can often lead to people getting away

346   with cracking the whip. What has emerged over the past 12 to 18

347   months in various parts of British sports [is] the idea that trying to be

348   the best and win medals is often used as justification for behaviour that

349   in any other world would be seen as bullying or inappropriate.

350   (Participant from a GSO)

351   In this regard, the consensus between GSOs, NGBs, and stakeholders in sport (i.e.,

352   athletes and coaches) was formidable, highlighting that the organisational culture in sports

353   at the time was increasingly deficient and required radical changes. This consensus

354   pertained to two interconnected changes: the emergence of social media (Societal level) and

355   a process leading to the emergence of the 'athlete's voice' (within Olympic sport). This

356   process involved an increasing number of NGBs focusing on the development of increased

357   athlete ownership regarding decision-making and own development:

358   '…. "We have got this really new idea, and it is a bit wacky"… What

359   they would then say [is] "What we want to develop is athletes [having]

360   ownership over their own things and [making] decisions themselves".

361   And I would be like, "Yes, you and everyone else". (NGB-C).

362   As evidenced by this quote, most NGBs initiated the process of developing

363   enhanced athlete ownership; yet, a lack of horizontal connectivity meant that these changes

364   remained localised, exemplifying the overall inertia in making incremental changes.

365   Whereas Olympic sports had previously enjoyed considerable independence and less

366   scrutiny, the mounting 'athlete's voice" cut through and exposed catalysing events for less

367   desirable behaviours:

368   Then there [are] technological advances, probably related to social

369   media, where the athlete's voice is huge now. So, you can't ignore the

370   athlete's voice, whereas previously their forum for communicating was

371   much smaller. So, I think it has changed so much in 10 or 20 years that

372   it is completely unrecognisable. (NGB-C)

373   Technological advancement allowed athletes to reach a wider public audience.

374   Talent leads and GSO personnel interpreted this as an increase in the legitimacy of the

375   athletes' message and informational power. The saliency of this coupling was evident in the

376   interviews conducted, and observations made during the study. Participants viewed

377   technology as a diffuse source of change. Athletes used their reinforced position by

378   speaking out about aspects that challenged the welfare of athletes and others working in

379   Olympic sports.

380   These catalysing events served as unanticipated sources of change in terms of public

381   exposure, which mandated changes. The influence of this process was that the normative

382   approach was under increased scrutiny in most sports: '…A number of times I have heard

383   coaches in a couple of other sports say [that] what was acceptable only ten years ago simply

384   isn't now' (NGB-C). This statement reveals that the exposure of incidents in sports led to

385   radical changes regarding the perceived legitimacy of certain behaviours.

386   *The perceived economic fallout of exposure.*

387   Participants thought that the changes to oversight in elite sports might be owing to

388   the advancement of new norms and standards regarding what was acceptable. The

389   participants mentioned that general legislation and regulation in sport was perceived as a long

390   and evolutionary process. However, participants agreed that the consequence of poor

391   behaviour and accounts of bullying catalysed increased regulation with respect to greater

392   strategic supervision in Olympic sports:

393   So, I sat in on the funding meeting leading into the new four-year cycle

394   from 2017 to 2021. I was representing [a national NGB]. There was

395   someone representing [a GB NGB] on the talent side. And we had a

396   meeting with Sport England. It has changed since then. But essentially,

397   the Sport England talent team and UK Sport talent team. Their strong

398   view was [that] public money [should] be accountable. Therefore,

399   [investment] should be systemised, and actually, if we systemise we can

400   measure better, and we can therefore be accountable for the return on

401   investment. (NGB-B)

402   Financially, it was demonstrated that it would be in the interests of NGBs to change

403   their structure to that of a more professional organisation as this would then provide greater

404   strategic supervision of how the funding was spent. This finding was based on the

405   perception that public funding agencies, such as Sport England, are moving towards a more

406   directive funding model, where NGBs are rewarded for attentive regulation. It was apparent

407   that the NGB we evaluated in the present study made a considerable effort to satisfy the

408   interests of GSOs:

409   We didn't agree the targets until November of the first year, supporting

410   other changes and this, that and the other. We hadn't recruited a team

411   until then, end of November. You're playing catch-up whilst trying to

412   start something new (NGB-1).

413   As evidenced by the quote, NGB-1 felt that they were constantly behind, and that

414   their changes challenged the existing organisational culture within the sport. These

415   challenges were met by antagonism from subcultures, which made it extremely difficult to

416   implement changes. In two seemingly opposing ways, GSOs pushed the NGBs to make

417   adaptive changes to funding conditions while simultaneously providing a *set of armour* to

418   mobilise the appropriate power capacity for change.

419   First, exhorting NGBs to make rapid adaptive adjustments, such as moving from a

420   position of independent volunteers to one in which they are subject to strategic oversight by

421   professionals could have resulted in a litigious process since the volunteers who were left

422   behind or who had to involuntarily cede power were some of the biggest causes of conflict.

423   Secondly, the GSOs stated that any prospective funding conditions and the financial

424   backing provided by them constituted power by proxy, meaning that the NGBs could have

425   accessed the systemic power of funding bodies to drive and sustain changes within their

426   sport. However, limited efficacy associated with this support was identified since the

427   legitimacy of the GSO generally influenced the link to the NGB and, less so, a link to

428   individuals or subcultures within the sport being evaluated. Instead, the imposed changes

429   signified radical changes within the sport, leading to ambiguity and uncertainty for within-

430   sport stakeholders, and ultimately led to an uneasy symbiosis and tension between

431   divergent subcultures.

432   **Discussion**

433   This study provides empirical insight into how changes outside an organisation is perceived

434   to influence the organisational culture of sports organisations. That is, how macrocultural

435   changes are perceived by NGBs in British Olympic sport. We found that the conditions

436   outside NGBs included the Societal level, the GSO level, and the NGB level (see Figure 1).

437   The findings provided evidence of the influence of interorganisational coupling, which is

438   linked to an evolving system of horizontal (i.e. within levels) and vertical dependency (i.e.

439   across levels). The findings also have implications for research and applied practice within

440   elite sport organisations. Firstly, the results were ascertained by studying the processes

441   along the way rather than in retrospect, which suggests that the combined use of grounded

442   theory and action research methodologies was feasible. This approach provided insight into

443   how power shapes interorganisational linkages. Secondly, the study demonstrates that it is

444   important for practitioners to understand a given site, beyond its people, prior to conducting

445   an intervention. Thus, the findings call for a context-driven approach to research and

446   practice in culture change, sport psychology and talent development in sport.

447   This study constitutes a stimulating evolution of research, especially for grounded

448   theory purists. A significant criticism raised by researchers has been the deliberate selection

449   of favourable grounded theory elements in sport and exercise (Holt and Tamminen 2010;

450   Weed 2017, 2009; Holt 2016). Disapproval pertains to the use by some researchers of only

451   a couple of elements, most notably coding techniques, and the consequential erroneous

452   labelling of the studies as grounded theory (Holt 2016). Also, Weed (2017) limits grounded

453   theory to three forms of epistemology; realist positivist, realist interpretivist and

454   constructivist interpretivist. This study evolved out of dissatisfaction with the approach

455   used by researchers in disregarding participants and viewing them as passive 'vessels' who

456   are incapable of making decisions for themselves (cf. Heron and Reason 2006). It was

457   against this backdrop that an attempt was made to push academic thinking further by

458   combining the grounded theory and action research methodologies using a participative

459   epistemology (Heron and Reason 1997). It was thought that this constituted considerably

460   more than a merger of two research designs; it was a study on how epistemology

461   completely underpins the expression of all core elements of both approaches in the

462   participatory inquiry paradigm. Holt (2016) argued that grounded theory is relevant when

463   there is a need to create a new theory to explain social phenomena, and that it was

464   particularly suited to research with a focus on changes in conditions. The strength of the

465   present study was that it thoroughly shaped the methodology and data collection strategies

466   using a coherent epistemology by drawing the participants into deeper engagement by

467   considering how diffuse and unexpected macrocultural changes link to culture change in an

468   Olympic sport.

469   A second finding of this study relates to the changing expression of culture, which

470   firmly challenges the prevailing vantage point of culture change in sport research

471   (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015). This challenge rests on the research question and

472   methodology. Asking *what* culture is will generally produce an answer that involves a set

473   of values, beliefs, working practices or basic assumptions that are dependent on a

474   theoretical framework. Using etic methodologies when conducting an inquiry involves the

475   danger that critical elements will be disregarded (Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015).

476   Evidence of this with respect to culture change includes research that argues that culture

477   change is reliant on the need to uphold shared values, standards and practices through

478   interactions with different stakeholders (Cruickshank et al., 2014, Cruickshank et al., 2015).

479   This is a functional perspective and, alongside work derived from Schein (1990), presents a

480   number of levers to leaders that they can use to carry out unproblematic culture change at

481   their discretion (Martin 2002; Maitland, Hills, and Rhind 2015). Nonetheless, this implies

482   stasis; how things are establishes how they will remain.

483   This study asks *how* is culture, which is in line with the definition of organisational

484   culture as a dynamic process. This definition conceptualises change by continuity, wherein

485   a culture adapts to changing conditions through an evolutionary process (Mannion and

486   Davies 2016). It also conceptualise changes as radical, wherein a culture responds to a

487   growing cultural deficiency or lag by overhauling the fundamental nature of the culture

488   (Mannion and Davies 2016). Both imply that the status quo is impossible since the process

489   of culture is fundamentally changing, either continuously or radically. Our findings support

490   the ongoing process; yet, it was also noted in the present research that some conditions and

491   interorganisational structures might be in place that serve to sustain a sense of status quo.

492   However, the findings suggest that this is a fallacy since the experienced status quo might

493   be cultural continuity.

494   When the question is posed of how this study connects to previous research, several

495   compelling connections were found. First, there is growing confidence in the assertion

496   made by Cruickshank, Collins and Minten (2014, 2015) that culture change is a dynamic

497   process involving ongoing power that flows to and from stakeholders. The argument is that

498   the continuous flow of social power enables or hinders the change process. Yet, neither the

499   present study nor those carried out by Cruickshank, Collins and Minten (2014, 2015)

500   delved into the properties of power.

501   Second, one of the key findings, with reference to power, pertained to the

502   interorganisational structure: the NGBs did not perceive other NGBs to have legitimate

503   power to influence change. However, Skille and Chroni (2018) found that several common

504   features existed in different federations in a Norwegian setting, and that organisational

505   closeness (i.e., being close to the competencies and expertise of other organisations)

506   characterised the success of these sports federations. When this is juxtaposed with the

507   present findings from four different NGBs, there is need for further research to consider the

508   extent to which different sports and their systems are genuinely different.

509   Third, the findings with reference to the 'athlete's voice' detail the process of

510   change as constituting a possible power asymmetry between the NGBs and athletes.

511   Mountjoy (2019) and the Ethics Centre (2018) both describe how the commodification of

512   athletes could be attributed to the development of destructive cultures. Yet, the process in

513   the UK indicated that the growing 'athlete's voice' could be a path to increased ownership

514   to cut through and expose catalysing events of less desirable behaviour. In addition,

515   growing power to athletes might also increase their capacity for action and enable radical

516   change by using their ability to unite (cf. Steen-Johnsen and Hanstad 2008).

517   Fourth, the findings on a shift from volunteerism to strategic oversight by

518   professionals represent an important consideration for sports organisations (Amis, Slack,

519   and Hinings 2004; Steen-Johnsen and Hanstad 2008; UK Sport 2019). Countries and NGBs

520   that rely on the voluntary sector for delivery (Skille and Chroni 2018; Bjørndal, Ronglan,

521   and Andersen 2017; Bostock et al. 2018) might find that blurring the lines between

522   volunteers and professional staff could influence public policy-making through

523   repositioning, which could be particularly threatening to volunteer networks (Bostock et al.

524   2018). By contrast, NGBs might face growing concerns over the use of volunteers in the

525   decision-making process (cf. Amis, Slack, and Hinings 2004) since it could make an

526   organisation unwieldy or inefficient. Yet, as we have described, volunteers in sports

527   organisations or subcultures could make it litigious for an NGB to try to enforce change if

528   they have no intention to cede power (cf. Amis et al., 2004), especially as our findings

529   illuminated a possible linkage between GSOs and an NGB.

530   Future research should consider power struggles as elite sport organisations are

531   seemingly starting to shift to using professional staff. Attention in research should be

532   brought to how changes to funding conditions influence the context for culture change and

533   add to the findings by Amis, Slack, and Hinings (2004). Accordingly, the current study

534   finding is in support of their suggestion that although it might be financially relevant to

535   change, different interests could make this extremely difficult.

536   ***Strengths and Limitations of the Present Study***

537   A limitation of the present study was the re-thinking of GT in the participative inquiry

538   paradigm. Weed (2017, 2009) asserted that researchers should adhere to established

539   paradigms. Yet, an example of how qualitative research is moving forward is consideration

540   of GT from a critical realist perspective (cf. Redman-Maclaren and Mills 2015) as this calls

541   for transformational GT. Redman-Maclaren and Mills (2015) highlighted a limitation of

542   their study, which resonates with the present study, namely that ongoing participation can

543   be challenging. They found that co-researchers were not always present for all iterations,

544   yet, those who did participate often assumed leadership. Likewise, collaboration was not

545   found to be an unproblematic process in the present study; however, the talent team often

546   led the process of identifying avenues for theoretical sampling and provided profound

547   nuances of how they interpreted the influence of the societal level and GSOs. Accordingly,

548   Blodgett, Schinke, McGannon and Fisher (2015) suggest that engaging participants in the

549   reflexive process has implications that relate to understanding power and domination. And

550   in so doing, this could be useful when working towards decentralising the academic

551   researcher and bringing profound cultural insights to the forefront (Berger, 2005; Blodgett

552   *et al.*, 2015).

553   Ultimately, based on the present study we conclude that the findings indicate that

554   organisational culture is not an attribute that can be manipulated at will. However, diffuse

555   sources of change might influence adaptive changes that sports organisations must adhere

556   to. Instead, we conclude that a change of culture process is influenced by conditions both

557   inside and outside an organisation. And not considering these structural conditions can have

558   significant influence on both GSOs and NGBs as they may experience a cultural deficiency

559   and lag possibly leading to conflict. The implications of these findings are also that sports

560   organisations should consider the vertical and horizontal coupling to other organisations or

561   subcultures, since the degree of coupling might influence the need for adaptive changes.

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