Current Concepts of the Quality in Sport and their Utilization in the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

In the paper, the author analyzes the current concepts of quality in sport and examines their utilization in the sports environment in the Czech Republic. The limited perception of the different concepts of the quality in sport prevents the sport organizations to introduce the appropriate quality concepts. Therefore the author suggests a conceptual framework which in tune with the type of sports organization, its focus and also the position in the national sports hierarchy, defines the criteria for the selection of the quality concept which is the most appropriate. Finally, the author proposes the measures so to create the conditions for the motivation of the sports organizations to adopt the quality management systems.

Key words: Management; Product Quality; Sport Management.

JEL classification: M00, M10, M11

Introduction

The sports organizations are nowadays more than ever confronted with the requirements to deliver the outcomes of the best value for the price or be able to confirm the best possible spending of the public and sponsorship funds. The variety of the consumers and customers in sport seek the satisfactions of their legitimate needs and expectations. This means that they expect to be provided or to be a part of the sports products and services that offer the excitement, fun a worthy and pleasurable experience. The customer in sport are not only the participants in sport or the spectators of sport but also members, employees, and volunteers who work in sport governing organizations, in special interests clubs, in commercial sport clubs, in professional sport franchises, and in political sport organizations [10]. Managing such a variety of different customers and demands requires the complex approach toward the quality concept. Not only the sports organizations should focus on the customers’ requirements, but they should also be able to assure the organization’s requirements regarding the efficiency and effectiveness. To develop the both, the quality management system must be implemented. This enables a sport organisation to achieve the goals and objectives in compliance with the external and internal expectations stemming from complex sport environment. But the approaches to the quality management in sport should be clearly understood and properly distinguished when the sports organization is to be introduced the quality management system. Therefore the ultimate aim of our paper is to design the framework which could help the sport managers at the different hierarchical levels to identify and select the proper quality concepts in order to capture their specific features in terms of the focus, core processes and key quality items.

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Research goals and method

The aims of this paper could be presented as follows:

- The review of the relevant literature aimed at the reconstruction of the distinction between the generic approaches to the quality in sport;
- The examination of the extent to which the relevant governing bodies especially the sport associations in Czech Republic have introduced the quality management systems;
- To design the conceptual framework for the sport managers at the different hierarchical levels for the identification and selection of the appropriate quality concept;

To accomplish the aims of the paper the desk research and formal and thematic content analysis have been used as a research methods. For the identification of the different approaches to the quality in sport, the literature review from the international and domestic sources has been conducted. The formal content analysis of systematic sample of texts related to the quality in sport was used in order to identify the approaches to the topic. For the examination of the extent to which the sport governing bodies, especially the sport associations in Czech Republic have introduced the quality management systems, the web search has been conducted. The thematic content analysis of the websites of all relevant governing bodies and sport associations has been carried out. The themes under investigations were strategy, quality and improvement. The desk research was then followed by a construction of a conceptual framework that can be used by sport managers in managing the quality in their areas of responsibility.

The current concepts of quality in sport

The current concepts of quality in sport are based on the business concepts of the quality which range from the quality control and quality assurance to total quality management. Whereas the quality control is focused on the product/service which is controlled against the written specification and standards the quality assurance is focusing on the core processes so to guarantee the quality of a product or service. Total quality management (TQM) seeks the improvement of the core and support processes in the organization and at the same time is aiming to ensure the quality of its products or services. The organizations which are implementing the TQM have to introduce the Quality management system (QMS) as a set of co-ordinated activities to direct and control an organization in order to continually improve the effectiveness and efficiency of its performance [15].

Based on our analysis of the literature related to the quality in sport we believe that it is possible to distinguish based on the authors' approach the two generic approaches when defining the quality in sport: organizational perspective of quality in sport and quality of services in sport.

Organizational perspective of quality in sport

The organizational perspective of quality in sport is based on the concepts which are rooted in the management philosophy that addresses the improvement of the whole organization to satisfy the customer needs or requirements.

For managing quality standards in sports organizations Mawson suggested the implementation of the Total Quality Management (TQM) [10]. The TQM concept in sport stresses the consumer – focused management system which stems from full involvement of the entire organizational workforce in improving quality. Via implementing 14 principles into the working environment of the organization the TQM underlines the need to capture all parts of
institution and its processes within the quality assurance framework and therefore the quality of the service is not isolated from the long – term improvement of all the processes in an organization.

The organizational approach for quality improvement in sports has been used in the Flemish policy aimed on the introduction of TQM via IKSport computer information system so to establish a quality (evaluation) system in sports clubs [5]. The evaluation of the quality management is made by using the clusters of items into seven dimensions: Strategic planning and marketing management, internal procedures and systems, external communication and image building, organizational culture and atmosphere, management and structure, human resources management and organizational effectiveness. Moreover the drivers as club’s main orientation (achievement - oriented, participation - oriented or multipurpose); primary target group (children/youth, adults or both) type of sport (individual sport or team sport) number of members/size, are also audited.

The same philosophy is behind the UK Quality scheme for Sport and Leisure called Quest, which is deemed as a first attempt to adjust Excellence Model of the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) in sport and leisure sector [16]. The EFQM is based on the premise that sustainable and excellent results in organizational performance are achieved through the leadership driving strategy and planning, people, partnership, resources and processes. For the organization it means to integrate into its culture the fundamentals concepts such as: adding values for customers, creating a sustainable future, developing organizational capability, harnessing creativity and innovation, leading with vision, inspiration and integrity, managing with agility, succeeding through the talent of people and sustaining outstanding results. In tune with the TQM and EFQM the Quest offers the framework for continuous improvement which is based on a planned approach, staff development and ownership which are reflected in the Quality/Integrated Management system. The Quest also offers the external assessment and benchmarking of services for sport organizations.

The sport and its delivery cannot be separated from the public sector and therefore we also have to mention the holistic tool - Common Assessment Framework (CAF) which has been developed in 2000 by European Public Administration Network so to assist public administrations in their quest for continuous improvement in the all public sector organizations across Europe. The latest revision of the CAF in 2013 [3] strongly supports concepts such as users’ orientation, public performance, innovation, ethics, effective partnerships with other organization(s) and social responsibility which are the concepts’ that all sport organizations which are operating in the public and state sector pursue as well. CAF as a total quality management tool was inspired by the EFQM and therefore follows the idea of the organizational performance which is achieved through enablers (leadership, people, strategy and planning, partnership and resources, processes) and results (people results, citizens/ customer oriented results, social responsibility results and key performance results).

**Quality of the services in sport**

The majority of the literature related to the quality in sport is focusing on the service quality in sport. Scholars have advanced two perspectives of the service quality in sport, referred to as the Nordic perspective and the American perspective [1]. The basic two dimensional model consists of the technical quality which describes what has been offered to the consumer and functional quality which describes how the service has been delivered.
Since then the scholars have been trying to conceptualize the various dimensions of service quality. The most comprehensive summary of the dimensionality of service quality in sports is offered by Pérez, Minguet and Freire [14]. The most used and cited is the five-dimensional model termed SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry [13] that is working with the characteristic about how the service is delivered and the gap between a customer's expectations and real perception of service performance in the five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and tangibles. Brady and Cronin's model [1] suggests focusing on three primary dimensions (interaction, physical environment, and outcome) and three sub dimensions for each of these. Based on the SERVQUAL model the further models for assessing the quality in professional sports have been developed. McDonald, Sutton and Milne [9] developed TEAMQUAL with a 39-item scale, measuring simultaneously the performance of the ticket takers, ticket ushers, merchandisers and expectations and perceptions of the professional basketball fans. Theodorakis, Kambitsis, Laios and Koustelious [12] used for measuring the quality in professional sports the SPORTSERV model which consists of the access, reliability, responsiveness, tangibles and security dimensions.

The most recent contributions to the service quality constructs in sport are related to the service quality at sporting event. Yoshida and James [20] attempted to develop measures for capturing three dimensions and sub-dimensions of service quality: aesthetic (ancillary products, aesthetic environment), technical (team characteristics, player performance) and functional (frontline employees, facility functions).

Clemens, Brush and Collins [4] suggested the hierarchical approach in analysing the professional sport experience and designed the conceptual model consisting of primary dimensions and sub-dimensions: Interaction quality (security employee performance, food and beverage service, player interaction with spectators); physical environment quality (social environment, visuals and sound, stadium access, seating, stadium cleanliness and design); outcome quality (atmosphere, game quality and match day entertainment).

The usage of the existing concepts of quality in the sports environment in the Czech Republic – limits and obstacles

The intention to introduce the quality system in any organization or sector should be clearly expressed in the vision and mission of the institution and in the strategies and policies relevant to the particular sector. Therefore we have focused on the examination whether or not the national sports associations' or other governing bodies’ for sport have any mention regarding the strategic decision in the realm of the quality. As far as the internal structure of sport associations in Czech Republic is club based, the strategic directions of the national governing body – sports association is of a crucial importance.

At the ministerial level for the sport sector the strategic material has been elaborated and approved by the Czech government is the Concept of state support for sport in the Czech Republic [8] approved in the 2011 by the Czech Government. But it also does not contain the statement concerning the quality in sport.

We have conducted the thematic content analyses of the strategic materials available at the sports associations’ level and at the ministerial level in Czech Republic. Analysing the web site content of all national sports association [11] we found that only 4 out of 73 national sports associations have a clearly formulated strategy (rugby, basketball, triathlon and golf). But these strategies do not contain the clear statements regarding the quality development. In our view, the sports associations and clubs rely heavily on the internal rules, procedures and guidelines
which are setting the standards of behaviour for individuals, professional groups, teams or organizations. These internal rules often refer also to ethical standards. But these cannot replace the quality management system.

The only association which has introduced the quality concept for The Quality Management System based on the European project PATHE (Physical Activity towards a Healthier Europe) is the Czech Association Sport for All [19]. Currently 4 sports clubs have been awarded the Quality certificate and 5 more are in the processes of the auditing. The Quality Management system encompasses all organizational aspect such as strategy, structure, systems, leadership style, skills, co - workers and pursues a process approach.

As it is obvious from previous analyses the formal introduction of the quality systems in sport in Czech Republic is not supported by the nationwide bodies’ strategies and therefore there is no strategic direction set for club level in terms of the quality assurance development. The only exception is the Association Sport for All.

Considering the professional sport and the enterprises operating in sport where the quality of the product and services is linked vitally to the business success we can only assume that as far as the marketing tools are widely used in the sports clubs, the service quality is monitored and managed to some extent. What is important to underline, keeping in mind the complex approach towards the quality in sport, that these marketing tools are not incorporated in the consolidated quality management systems.

So far we have examined how the organizational perspective of quality in sport is perceived and implemented in Czech sport environment. But it could be also worthy to mention that especially within the particular sport organizations the theoretical concepts related to the quality of services in sport could play a significant role in improving their core product and services. In this regard Ruda, Augustová and Šíma [17] provides the detail analyses of the practical usage of the SERQUAL method to measure the sport services in particular fitness centre in Czech Republic.

The main obstacles that prevent the introduction of the relevant concepts of the quality in sport organizations in Czech Republic could be in our view, summarized as follows:

1. Missing awareness of the benefits of the introduction of the consistent and systematic approach towards the quality management in sport.
2. The limited availability of the specific training related to the quality in sport for different sports occupations.
3. The lack of the strategies and nationwide policies regarding the quality in sport.

As the evidence of the above mentioned conclusions can serve also the Strategy of the national quality policy in Czech Republic for the period 2011- 2015 [18] where the sport is not mentioned among the areas of focus at all.

**Conceptual framework for the sport managers in the selection of the quality management concept and system**

The limited approach to the understanding of the concepts relevant to quality in sport in Czech Republic does not generate the pressure on the implementation of the variety of the quality systems and tools in sport organizations. Therefore we suggest applying the conceptual framework for sport managers in order to easy their decision on which quality concept should be introduced in the sport organization they are responsible for.
Firstly it is important to differentiate the process approach and dimensional approach towards the implementation of the quality management in sport. The process approach means that the core processes which have the outputs of value to customers are identified and their effectiveness is measured. The dimensional approach means that the multidimensional output of the core process possesses more than one characteristics and it must be measured in a sophisticated manner. The distinction between the processes and dimensions of the outputs is related to another crucial topic which is quality standards which need to be defined for all organizations operating in sport.

Secondly when considering the introduction of the particular quality concept we recommend applying the components of the quality evaluation as follows [3]:

- The targets of quality, which are the features of the product subjected to the quality evaluation (core service and their physical context);
- The standards of quality, which are the specific criteria applied in quality judgements (quality as value, as conformance to specifications, as meeting or exceeding customers’ expectations);
- The evaluators of quality, which are the arbiters of quality (clients, service provider, organization).

In our view, the process of the introduction of the relevant concepts of quality management in the Czech sports environment could be more efficient if the different quality concepts will be presented and further applied in tune with the sports organization focus and core processes. Using the three – category classification of the sport organization suggested by Gómez, Opazo, and Marti [7] there can be found the relationship between the type of organization and activities they promote, as follows:

- Sport governing bodies, which are focusing on development of the formal rules.
- Sport event organizations, which are focusing on the competition.
- Sport delivery entities, which are focusing on the physical activities.

In the Czech context we suggest to incorporate the existing sport organizations into the above - mentioned classification as follows:

1) Sport governing bodies are all sport associations at national and regional level, including the governing bodies working for regional or local governments.
2) Sport event organizations are professional team, leagues and competitions organized mostly by business like companies.
3) Sport delivery entities are local sports clubs and sport organizations working for local self - governing bodies.

To be more focused when thinking about the appropriate quality concept for particular sport institutions, the above-mentioned differentiation of sport organizations could be underpinned by the defining of the key items of the quality. The key items are in tune with the components of the quality evaluation defined by the Chelladurai [3]:

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Tab. 1: Key items of the quality for the framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key item of the quality</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the offer (what)</td>
<td>core product or services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the processes (how)</td>
<td>the standards of quality, which are the specific criteria applied in quality judgements of the core products or services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the environment (where)</td>
<td>physical context of the core products or services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the relationships (who)</td>
<td>evaluators of quality, which are the arbiters of quality (clients, service provider, organization)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own research

By combining the above mentioned thoughts related to the classification of the sport organizations and to the key quality items, the conceptual framework for the selection identification of the most appropriate quality concept could be developed (see Tab. 2).

Tab. 2: Conceptual framework for the sport managers in the selection of the quality concept

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of the sport organizations</th>
<th>Core process</th>
<th>Key quality items (examples only)</th>
<th>Quality concept to be applied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sport governing bodies</td>
<td>Development of the formal rules</td>
<td>What: Strategy development in the sector or sports fields How: services for the clubs Where: nationwide framework Who: clubs at lower level</td>
<td>TQM, EFQM, CAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport event organization</td>
<td>Competition</td>
<td>What: players performance</td>
<td>SERVQUAL, TEAMQUAL SPORTSERV Hierarchical approach Aesthetic concept of quality services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How: standard of the game</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Where: location of the event and physical environment Who: spectators and fans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sport delivery entities</td>
<td>Physical activity</td>
<td>What: sport activities</td>
<td>TQM, EFQM, CAF SERVQUAL,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How: standards of the services during the consumption of the sports activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Where: location and physical environment Who: participants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own research

Conclusion

In our paper we examined the concepts of quality which are currently used in sport. We have suggested to distinguish the organizational and service perspective of quality in sport. In our research we explored the extent to which the quality concepts are a part of the national sport association strategies and indirectly we have also obtained the perception about the
attention which is paid to the implementation of the general knowledge regarding the quality management in sport in Czech context. Using the classification of the sport organizations in Czech context we suggested the conceptual framework for the sport managers in the selection of the quality management concept and system which is based on the different types of the sport organizations and the key items of the quality in sport. Finally we are suggesting the measures for the motivation of the sport organizations to adopt the quality systems as an integral part of their work.

In our view, to enhance the interest of the sports organization to introduce and adopt the quality management system means that for different types the sport institutions the different motivation tools should be applied. Governing bodies can be motivated by the nationwide incentives such as special grants or the decision of the Ministry or nationwide association to establish the quality system in sport sector. For the sports event organizations the competition still remains the main motivator and for them more enlightenment, education and training is needed so to be able to implement the various quality tools for measuring and analysing the quality of the services. The sport delivery entities can be motivated by the stakeholders' opinions including the community members, local representatives and the ultimate driving force should be for them the declining membership. So there are and will be the variety of the internal and external forces which will impose the pressure on the sport organizations to become more transparent, efficient and beneficial and the quality systems can help them to achieve this.

References:


