Characteristics of Organizational Learning Culture in Serbian Elite Team Sports

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Abstract

Organizational culture represents employees' integrated values and business orientation of employees in the work environment, and conduct unwritten and written rules. This research aimed to evaluate the characteristic of organizational learning culture in Serbian team sports. The sample of respondents in this study consisted of 118 available managers of different levels in the organizational structure of sports organizations from four selected team sports (football, basketball, handball, and volleyball), which institutionally belong to the highest rank of the competition. At the individual level, the authors revealed the differences in favor of managers in volleyball clubs that come from better support, openness, and feedback from each other in the organization, all for their career development ($\chi2=12,79$, $p<0.01$). From another side, the organizational level's key differences come from the availability of information to all, better resource management, initiative recognition, openness to cooperation, and leadership ($\chi2=11,33$, $p<0.01$). Based on the obtained results, the authors discussed the theoretical and practical values of research.

Keywords: Sports Organizations, Culture, Individual, Group, Team Level

Introduction

Organizational culture is described as a feature or characteristic of an organization, or only as "the way things are organized in the organization" (Wright & Boswell, 2002), or the way decisions are made, goals are set, and employees are lead to the realization of these goals Stare (2012). Customs, habits, and beliefs are recognized as segments that affect all employees' daily functioning. Therefore, any non-fitting of an individual into the stated, appropriate patterns and standards of group behavior puts the individual in an unenviable position. This mismatch can be viewed in both directions: 1) how useful and efficient an individual feels in such an organization, and 2) how much the organization can count on a usable, motivated, and quality employee.

Examining organizational culture is a relatively young, scientific, interdisciplinary research area where psychologists, sociologists, economists, and anthropologists deal with equal interest. It is one of the most used management concepts and belongs to organizational behavior. For Britton (2002), organizational learning culture can be defined as "an organizational environment that enables, encourages, values and rewards using individual and collec-

tive learning." Similar to Britton, Pisano (1994) describes this process of acquiring knowledge and skills as a significant competitive advantage in the market. It is up to the organization's managers to "enable, support and accelerate the creation, dissemination, and use of knowledge in the organization" within the environment itself (Janićijević, 2008) and human resource management. In a way, this implies "learned patterns of behavior, opinions, feelings, and actions of a group, community or society, as well as their expressions in material objects that contribute to internal stability and the creation of characteristic features of a certain group of people" (Raduan, Naresh, Haslinda, & Goh, 2008).

Based on these mentioned facts, in the context of sports organizational culture, the effects of "motivational climate created by coach and teammates" can contribute to the satisfaction of athletes' basic psychological needs (Trbojević & Petrović, 2020), as one segment of athlete's motivation.

The importance of organizational culture has contributed to many authors dealing with this issue (Cole & Martin, 2018; Colyer, 2000; Skille & Chroni, 2018). Its development is related to individual Japanese companies' success in the 60s and 70s of the last

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century, which achieved notable business results, built on organizational culture. The consistent growth of research interest in this segment in management theory stems from numerous studies' results. Thus, some researches confirmed its positive relations for job satisfaction and work motivation (Okpara, & Wynn, 2008), employee commitment and cooperation (Singh, 2006), organizational efficiency, and improving organizational outcomes (Balthazard, Cooke & Potter 2006; Wilder, van den Berg, & Wiersma, 2012; Yang, 2003), and increasing innovation (Jaskyte, 2004). Organizational culture's determination of business success has led other organizations to deny their importance and pay more attention to these opportunities. During the acquisition of human resources or selection, organizational culture is an essential factor as an indicator of how much a particular individual will accept the challenges of the current organizational culture and achieve the organization's expected standards. Therefore, what gives it a significant role in management is its dynamism, and the possibility of transfer to individuals, groups, and teams.

Namely, Miyagawa, & Yoshida (2010) emphasize the "specific attitude" of managers and employees towards their work and the company from which their outstanding commitment stemmed. Their "specific relationship," which results in employees' better commitment, is precisely the "product" of a well-developed and nurtured organizational culture.

It encompasses everything that determines human behavior in the workplace when employees are not supervised (Lorch & Tierney, 2002). The authors emphasize here the deep, ingrained methods, procedures, and decisions used by employees daily, which are so stable and accepted that they would be applied without supervision and control. Denison (1996) considers in a similar way, which also emphasizes "the deep structure of the organization, which is rooted in the values, beliefs, and assumptions maintained by organizational members." From the definition itself, it can be seen that each individual must know how the organization "breathes" in the business system, to limit as much as possible the possibilities for ambiguous interpretation and different views on specific business tasks and disorganization. In his holistic approach, Hofstede (2005) calls organizational culture "collective mental software."

This paper aimed to determine the individual, group, and team level of organizational learning culture in Serbia's elite team sports.

Methods

The sample of respondents in this study consisted of 118 available managers of different levels in sports organizations' organizational structure from four selected collective sports (football, basketball, handball, and volleyball), which institutionally belong to the highest rank of competition. In this paper, the evaluation of

organizational learning culture prepared using the recommendations of Watkins & Marsick (1993, 1996). These authors divided the organizational learning culture into three levels: individual, team or group, and organizational.

The individual-level refers to how the organization creates continuous learning (e.g., Continuous Training Center, online learning) for each employee individually. The organization creates a climate of support for a developmental approach to learning by promoting employees' information and dialogue. Team or group level refers to how the organization encourages team learning and cooperation within the organization. Team learning is enhanced when teams master the skills of staffing, testing, experimenting, and creating a shared perspective. The organizational level means the organization's ability to "preserve" what has been learned and create an organization that understands to support appropriate leadership in the organization.

The questionnaire from this research was applied by Xie (2005) in researching the organizational culture of learning in sports organizations. Thus, the questionnaire included six items for evaluating the individual, four items for group, and twelve items for respondents' organizational learning culture.

Indicators of the organizational culture of learning at the individual, group, and team level were formed by positive answers for each level of the organizational culture of learning coded with 1, and negative with 0. Therefore, the maximum value of organizational culture at an individual was 6, at group level - 4 and organizational level - 12.

Kruskal Wallis and Man Whitney tests, in SPSS, version 24.0, were used to analyzing the differences.

Results

An overview of descriptive statistics of organizational learning culture is given according to aggregate indicators separately at all examined levels: individual, (Table 1) group, or team (Table 2) and organizational (Table 3).

None of the sports calculated that the sum of all answers was 0; that is, a deficient organizational culture level was not determined for an individual level.

According to the respondents, the level of organizational culture at the individual level (Table 1) shows that: 1) in over ½ sports organizations (50.9%), there are high conditions for this type of organizational culture, 2) 15.5% have above average with specific shortcomings, 3) 18, 2% average, and 4) 15.5% below average conditions.

Regarding the indicators of group level of organizational culture, the sum of all variables categorized the respondents into four categories: 1) the sum of all results 0 or all negative answers, 2) one positive and two negative answers, 3) two positive and one negative answer, 4) all positive responses.

Table 1. Individual-level - respondents from all sports

Level	Recoded Category	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Low	1	2	1,8	1,8
	2	15	13,6	15,5
Medium	3	20	18,2	33,6
	4	10	9,1	42,7
High	5	7	6,4	49,1
	6	56	50,9	100
Total		110	100,0	

$\chi^2=12,79**$

The obtained results in Table 2 show that about 70% of the respondents consider the sports organization's environment favorable for realizing the group or teams' goals. The chi-square analysis ($\chi2 = 4.83$) did not show differences in sports at group level.

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Table 2. Group level - respondents in all sports

Level	Category	N	%	Cumulative %
Low	1	6	5,7	5,7
Low	2	13	12,3	17,9
Medium	3	13	12,3	30,2
High	4	74	69,8	100,0
Total		106	100,0	

$\chi^2 = 4,83$

The cumulative percentage of an organizational learning culture (Table 3) indicates a high level of this type of culture in sports organizations (over 60% has a high level), with the difference between sports being determined.

Table 3. Organizational level - respondents in all sports

Level	Category	N	%	Cumulative %
Low	2	2	1,9	1,9
	5	2	1,9	3,8
	6	6	5,7	9,4
	7	8	7,5	17,0
Medium	8	7	6,6	23,6
	9	15	14,2	37,7
	10	7	6,6	44,3
High	11	7	6,6	50,9
	12	52	49,1	100,0
Total		106	100,0	

$\chi^2 = 11,33**$

Considering that sports represent the determined differences in the organizational learning culture at the individual and organizational level ($\chi 2 < 0.01$), their comparison was further approached (Tables 4 and 5).

Table 4. Analysis of differences in different levels of an organizational learning culture by team sports

Level of the organizational learning culture	Mean Rank			
	football	basketball	volleyball	handball
Individual	52,51	41,63	70,50[1a2a]	62,542[a]
Group (team)	84,87	45,10	57,00	58,46
Organizational	48,61	42,96	69,17[1a2a]	57,81

* 0.05, ** <0,01 - Kruskal Wallis test; 1, 2, 3, 4 – 1 - football, 2 - basketball, 3 - volleyball, 4 – handball; a < 0.01, b < 0.05 - Man Whitney test

At both levels, it was obtained that the respondents - managers in volleyball clubs, both at the individual and organizational level, have higher levels of organizational learning culture concerning football and basketball clubs. No statistically significant differences were obtained at the team or group level. The individual and organizational level of a learning culture, the respondents from the examined sports, differ, showing the Man Whitney test (Table 5).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of organizational culture (%)

Items	Football		Basketball		Volleyball		Handball		χ^2	p
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
Individual-level - In my organization ...										
... people teach each other.	91,7	8,3	75,9	24,1	100	0	86,0	14	8,12	0,04
... people have been supported to improve their knowledge.	75,0	25,0	58,6	41,4	100	0	82,1	17,9	11.62	0,00
... people are rewarded for working on their training.	52,8	47,2	41,4	58,6	85,7	14,3	71,4	28,6	12,32	0,00

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Items	Football		Basketball		Volleyball		Handball		χ^2	p
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
... people give open and honest feedback to each other.	50,0	50,0	60,7	39,3	81,0	19,0	85,7	14,3	11,53	0,00
... when people have their point of view, they also ask what others think.	88,9	11,1	71,4	28,6	81,0	19,0	89,3	10,7	4,42	0,21
... people spend time building trust with each other.	86,1	13,9	66,7	33,3	85,7	14,3	85,7	14,3	4,96	0,17
Organizational level - My organization ...										
... assesses actual and expected performance.	91,2	8,8	89,7	10,3	100	0	92,6	7,4	2,19	0,53
... makes the lessons learned available to all.	77,9	22,1	48,3	51,7	100	0	85,2	14,8	20,06	0,00
... measures the results, time, and resources spent on training.	94,3	5,7	71,4	28,6	100	0	81,5	18,5	11,11	0,01
... "recognizes" the people who take the initiative.	61,1	38,9	62,1	37,9	90,5	9,5	88,9	11,1	11,15	0,01
... gives people control over the resources they need to work.	75,0	25,0	77,8	22,2	95,2	4,8	80,8	19,2	3,77	0,28
... supports employees who take the assessed risk.	72,2	27,8	71,4	28,6	81,0	19,0	74,1	25,9	0,68	0,87
... encouraging people to think globally.	88,2	11,8	69,0	31,0	95,2	4,8	85,2	14,8	7,25	0,06
... cooperates with other communities for the common interest.	100	0	82,8	17,2	90,5	9,5	100	0	10,65	0,01
... encourages people to find a solution through their organization.	93,9	6,1	79,3	20,7	100	0	92,6	7,4	7,28	0,06
In my organization, leaders and coaches are the ones who lead the organization.	91,4	8,6	93,1	6,9	100	0	66,7	33,3	15,04	0,00
In my organization, leaders are continually looking for opportunities to learn.	65,7	34,3	79,3	20,7	85,7	14,3	74,1	25,9	3,19	0,36
In my organization, leaders make sure that their values conduct organizational activities.	79,4	20,6	89,7	10,3	100	0	92,6	7,4	6,24	0,10

The Man Whitney test showed that statistically significant differences at the individual level, which are recognized in favor of volleyball clubs, come from better support, openness, and feedback they receive from each other in the organization, all for their career development. Otherwise, the organizational level's key differences stem from information availability, better resource management, initiative recognition, openness to cooperation, and leadership.

Discussion

Aware of the possibility that the combined knowledge of individuals, groups, and the entire organization, with clearly set norms of behavior of all its members, can improve organizational goals, researchers and managers in sports organizations pay more attention to creating such a business environment. This research examined the organizational learning culture at the individual, group, and team levels in Serbia's elite sports clubs.

The indicators of an organizational culture of learning show that the highest level of the organizational culture of learning (individual and organizational level) was determined in volleyball clubs. The obtained results indicate that employees in volleyball clubs, about other team sports, have the most outstanding ability to "preserve" what they have learned and promoted dialogue and exchange opinions among employees.

Likewise, such results can be explained through causal factors of how organizational culture affects end outcomes and organizational effectiveness. Managers in volleyball sports clubs adhere to the established direction that contains structures, systems, technology, skills/qualities that initiate the operational culture. Other shows that volleyball clubs have a good structure in which organized groups of people function, with clear roles and activities. Such results from a group of people who work together with trust and complementarity and who have common goals greater than individual goals can be considered as expected (Senge et al., 1999). On the other hand, a group of people's skills and qualities are mainly related to leadership, i.e., its components such as communication, leadership, i.e., the function of organizing - the distribution of power.

In a broader context, given the interaction between leadership and organizational culture shown in many studies (Bas & Avolio, 1993), it should be borne in mind that the leader is the one who changes organizational culture, but that organizational culture can also determine development leadership. That is why successful leaders, with a good understanding of organizational culture, adjust the speed of changes they want to achieve. The time determinants necessary for implementing the desired changes, with the leader's patience, become an essential factor in the practical realization of leadership goals. Suppose we consider some studies that showed the highest scores in leadership characteristics in volleyball managers (Matić, 2016). In that case, work in volleyball clubs is primarily based on employees' enthusiasm and motivation, which proved to be leading in the evaluation of leadership in domestic team sports. The concept of leadership in these circumstances with modest financial resources, with a smaller number of employees, where everyone is gathered around a common goal, is easier to implement than other team sports with many employees.

The volleyball sports clubs function on specific leadership, which is considered a cascading effect. This effect by Bass (1985) emphasizes the transformational influence that leaders, mentors, and coaches have on followers gradually transferred to lower organizational levels and manifested in their other spheres of social action. It is evident that in volleyball, there is a good education of managers by the National Volleyball Federation of Serbia, as a leading body at the national level, which can lead to Lee (2019) "to initiate development-oriented reform of the winning-at-all-costs culture in sports." The success in sports results of Serbian volleyball confirms excellent organizational culture and leadership in this sport. In 2019, Serbia's senior volleyball national teams repeated the success from 2011 and won gold medals at the European Championships. Both seniors won the third European champion titles. In addition to senior gold medals, pioneers and juniors won silver medals at the Balkan Championships.

In today's business environment, organizational culture is taken seriously, and it can be stated that its importance is directly proportional to the organization's size and business success. This research showed a high level of organizational culture in volleyball clubs. Such an organizational culture level is a good prerequisite for realizing business ventures and accepting the desired innovations.

In a way, well-known, successful volleyball and other sports organizations are expected to "lead" in their organizational culture, and set new standards and trends. Creating such favorable conditions in volleyball clubs means removing obstacles to learning and encouraging and rewarding the organization's positive work characteristics (taking risks, finding a different solution to the problem, new initiatives of employees).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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