



Master's degree thesis

IDR950 Sport Management

Why do certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?

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Preface

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

- Lao Tzu

This thesis concludes my two-year long journey at the Master of Science in Sport Management programme at Molde. It has been an interesting journey, at times challenging, and definitely enlightening. Sport has always been close to my heart, and so it has been a pleasure (for the most part) to write a thesis on such an interesting topic.

The thesis set out to explore why certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes. And I suppose it offers some interesting findings. I would like to thank the participants, Arve, Kjersti, Bjørn Axel and Torbjørn, for taking their time and their invaluable contributions. I believe your sport clubs are in safe hands.

As this project has received grants from Møre and Romsdal county municipality I would like to offer gratitude for their belief in my project. I hope this thesis might offer some insight that is valuable. A special thanks also to the Møre and Romsdal regional confederation of sport for their influence on my choice of topic and their support along the way.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Kjell Marius for his help along the way, and for believing in me at a point where I did not share his optimism. Thanks also to the Sport Management staff at Molde, and especially Solveig who helped me in the early stages of the project. Finally, a very special thanks to my fellow student Vishnu K Kumar who kept me going throughout the project, you will never walk alone.

I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.

- Douglas Adams

Summary

This research set out to explore why certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes. The aim of the research was to provide knowledge on a topic that is relatively unexplored in the Norwegian sport context.

A qualitative interview approach was used to answer the research question. Based on a review of the literature related to performance in sport organizations a semi-structured interview guide was made, four respondents from three successful Norwegian sport clubs were interviewed. The interviews were analyzed through an inductive thematic analysis approach.

The findings suggest that a good club environment, characterized by a strong culture that value the joy of sport for all, is crucial for sustained success. Proactive leaders with a holistic approach to athlete development seems to be the driving forces behind such an environment. It was further suggested that sport clubs need the following key elements for sustained success to be possible: (1) engaged parents (2) quality coaches; (3) key facilities; and (4) healthy finances.

Based on the findings it is recommended that sport clubs work towards optimizing their environment by adopting a proactive and holistic approach. Further research on the role of Norwegian sport clubs in developing elite athletes is recommended.

Keywords: Norwegian sport clubs; sport management; athlete development; proactive; holistic approach

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1.0 Introduction

For the fourth year running Norway was in 2020 crowned the best sporting nation in the world, measured per capita (Fredheim, 2021). Greatest Sporting Nation uses a ranking system based on sports merit to crown the best sporting nation in the world. They use one overall ranking independent of inhabitants and one measured per capita. In fact, for 2020 Norway was second on the overall ranking as well (behind the US), and they are, as of April, at the top of the overall ranking for 2021 (Greatest Sporting Nation, 2021).

Organized child and youth sport has a strong position in Norway. In a report based on answers from 225 000 youths (aged 13-18), Bakken (2019) found that 75% of Norwegian youths either are, or have been, part of a sport club during junior high or high school. Of all the youth in the report, only seven percent has never been part of organised sport.

As such, Norway can be considered successful, both when it comes to grassroots- and elite sport. Norwegian sport clubs represent the foundation for activity in the Norwegian sporting landscape and play an important role in recruiting and developing athletes. Interestingly, there are certain Norwegian sport clubs who do particularly well in terms of regularly developing elite athletes. Why do some sport clubs perform better than others? Do they know something that the others do not? Are they doing things differently? Do the successful clubs have something in common? These are questions that the author of this thesis has been interested in for a long time. When the Møre and Romsdal regional confederation of sport (MRIK) approached the author with similar questions, during his internship there as part of the master's degree in sport Management at Molde University college, the interest was again peaked. Eventually this developed into the following research question.

1.1 Research Question

The research question for this thesis is: *why do certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?* This question will be explored via interviews with leaders from three different high performing sport clubs in Norway through an inductive thematic analysis approach.

1.2 Background

According to Skille (2008), research into grassroots level sport clubs is inadequate, and some of the studies done have limited transferability into the Scandinavian context. This chapter first outlines some additional influences and provides some relevant definitions; the following sections provides background information on the Norwegian sport context.

In addition to the personal interest of the researcher combined with a perceived gap in literature, the chosen topic is influenced by a bigger project undertaken by the Møre and Romsdal regional confederation of sport (MRIK), in which this thesis will contribute. MRIK's project investigates all factors needed to facilitate young athletes' wanting to develop into elite athletes, where sport clubs play an important role.

For the purpose of this thesis *elite athletes* are defined as athletes that are undergoing world-class training and preparations suited to their sport; for these athletes, their sport is first priority, and they regularly perform at a high international level (Olympiatoppen, 2020). Further, Olympiatoppen (2020) define *tomorrows elite athletes* as athletes that undergo comprehensive training and preparations through long term progression plans that might lead to top international results. In other words, these are the athletes striving to become future elite athletes. In the context of this thesis, *high performing sport clubs* are those clubs that currently have one or more elite athlete(s) in an individual sport, several of tomorrows elite athletes, and a sustained history of former elite athletes.

1.2.1 The Norwegian sport context

Since this thesis regards Norwegian sport-clubs it is useful to outline the relevant context. In Norway sport was first organized under a national umbrella organization in 1861 (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011). In those early days sport was solely for military purposes (Skille, 2015). The Norwegian government started subsidizing sport in 1863, and the cooperation has lasted ever since (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011). Throughout the years sport has served various societal purposes, after the dissolution with Sweden in 1905 sport became a national symbol of identity; during the inter- and post-war period sport was considered a health tool for the social democratic welfare state; and since the 1970's sport has been included as a part of culture policy (Skille, 2015).

Today, sport in Norway is organized under the national umbrella organization called the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (the Norwegian abbreviation ‘NIF’ will be used in this thesis). NIF is a result of the merger between the Workers Sport Association ‘*Arbeidernes Idrettsforbund*’ and the National Sports Federation ‘*Landsforeningen for Idræt*’ into the Norwegian Confederation of Sports in 1946, and later the inclusion of the Norwegian Olympic Committee in 1996, and the Paralympic Committee in 2008 (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011).

NIF consists of several organizations organized in two historically constituted lines (Skille, 2008), see figure 1 (note that NOC is used instead of NIF). Where one line takes care of the common sport policy at various levels and includes: 11 District Sport Associations (DSA); and 375 Local Sport Councils (LSC). The other, so-called special sport federation line includes: 55 Special Sports Federations (SSF); and several Special District Sport Associations (RSSA) (Skille, 2008; NIF, n.d.). There are about 10,100 sport clubs (SC), and 2,100,000 memberships under the NIF umbrella (NIF, n.d.).

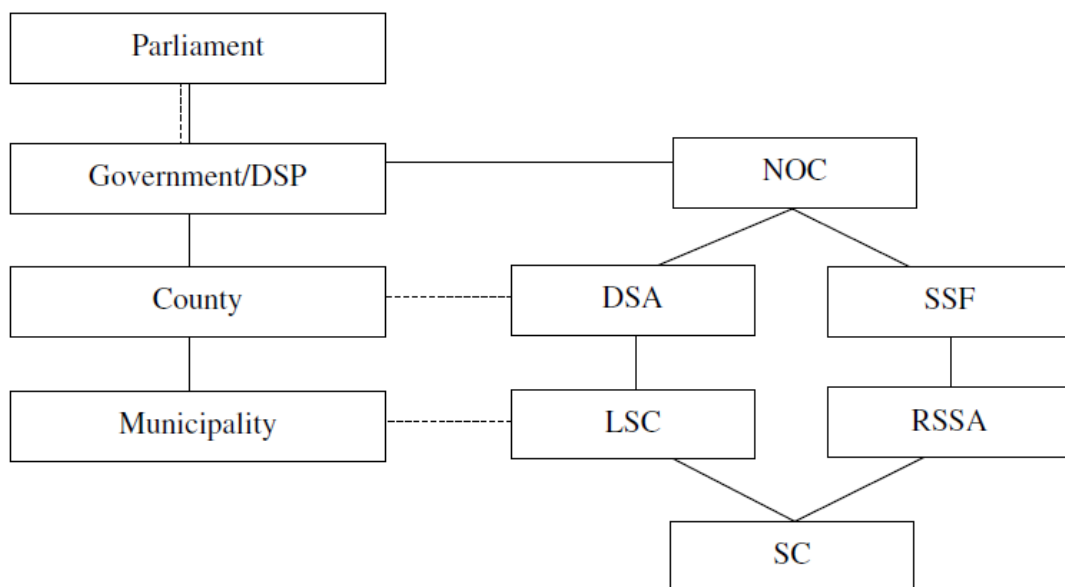


Figure 1. The Norwegian context of sport policy (Skille, 2008)

According to Skille and Säfvenbom (2011), there is a power balance between the state and NIF because of a mutual dependency. This is because NIF needs the financial support of the state, whereas the state is dependent upon the NIF umbrella organisation for the

implementation of sport (Skille and Säfvenbom (2011). The state money to sport is based on revenues from the state's gambling agency (Skille, 2008).

Sport in Norway is typically a competitive and organized activity run on a voluntary basis (Skille, 2015). Where voluntary refers to both the fact that participation is based on voluntary club membership and because the sport clubs themselves usually are run on a voluntary basis (Skille, 2015). According to Skille (2015) nine-tenths of Norwegian sport clubs are mainly run on a voluntary basis. Estimated value of voluntary work in Norwegian sport clubs are 7300 million NOK (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011). The sport clubs are characterized by a high degree of youth participants and parent/adult volunteers (Skille & Säfvenbom, 2011). Although sport in Norway have become more professionalized, an example, according to Seippel (2019), being the Quality Club Programme (QCP) introduced by the Football Association of Norway in 2014. In a study on professionals and volunteers in the Scandinavian sport context, Seippel (2010), suggested that there is actually no decline in voluntary work, but rather a stable quantity of voluntary work combined with an increased amount of professional work. *Dugnad* is a commonly used word to describe certain types of voluntary work in Norwegian sport clubs. According to Nordbø (2020) *dugnad* is voluntary, unpaid work that is done by a group of people.

A distinct feature of the Norwegian sport context is the way sport for children is regulated. According to Ellingsen and Danielsen (2017), Norway is the only country in the world where children sport is formally regulated. NIF's 'Children's Rights in Sports and Provisions on Children's Sport' (CRS), were adopted in 2007 (NIF, 2019a). The CRS is designed to ensure that children have a positive experience when participating in sporting activities (NIF, 2019a), and represent formal legislation rooted in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (Ellingsen & Danielsen, 2017). Children's sport is defined as sporting activities for children below the age of 13 (NIF 2019a). The CRS regulations are legally binding for all coaches working with children (Ellingsen & Danielsen, 2017). Accordingly, the regulations have implications for talent development (Ellingsen & Danielsen, 2017), as they discourage early specialisation for instance.

The next section further elaborates on the context of Norwegian sport by looking into the long-term plans and strategies of NIF.

1.2.2 NIF – long-term plan and strategies.

According to NIF (2019c), the purpose of the organization is to work towards giving everyone the opportunity to participate in sport according to their own wishes and needs, without any form of discrimination. NIF's vision is 'sporting joy for all', and NIF (2019c) further highlights that everyone shall experience sport, mastery, and development within a safe and good sporting community. In NIF's (2019c) long term plans, it is emphasized that the values of playfulness, ambitious, honourable, and inclusive are to be prioritized in the forthcoming years. The overarching goal for the period 2019-2023 is more participants – longer, and more new medals (NIF, 2019c). To reach the forementioned goal, NIF (2019c) states that lifelong sport, improved sport clubs, more – and better facilities, and improved elite-sport are strategically important priorities. Since this thesis regards sport clubs and elite sport, there follows a closer look at NIF's view on the topic.

Improved sport clubs

The sport club is at the core of organized sport, good sport clubs are necessary to succeed in getting more members, and to create environments that fits different ambitions – such that those who want to become elite-athletes can succeed (NIF, 2019c). Improved sport clubs are all about creating a well-functioning organization, in which the sport clubs and its groups cooperate to give a coordinated and varied offer in their local community. The most important framework-conditions for sporting participation are voluntarism, economic factors, facilities, and competence (NIF, 2019c). The goals are: (1) to work for good governance characterised by democracy, openness, and honesty; (2) to make sure that being a volunteer is experienced as being part of a meaningful community that are good for both the individual, the sport club's members, and the local community; and (3) to ensure that the sport clubs have economic resources and enough volunteers to offer great sport activities for the members and the local community. To reach the different goals, NIF have created concrete strategies for each of the above-mentioned goals, see NIF (2019b) if interested.

Improved elite-sport

According to NIF (2019c), Norway should be a leading elite-sport nation with a performance-culture delivering proud sporting experiences to the Norwegian people. To reach this ambition the best must become better, and the young – ambitious - and motivated must be given the opportunity to succeed. NIF's task is to facilitate for this through the

Special Sports Federations, Olympiatoppen, and other partners (NIF, 2019c). Improved elite-sport is about ambitions at the highest level, development of performance cultures, and to have world-leading competence (NIF, 2019c). NIF's (2019c) goals are: (1) to have athletes at the absolute world class level – the best shall be better; (2) more athletes and teams at a world leading level – the best shall be more numerous; and (3) to help young athletes in the transition to elite sport at a senior level. For those interested look at NIF (2019b) to see NIF's strategies for these goals.

1.3 Thesis structure

The following chapter will look into the literature for important theoretical background relevant to the research questions, it works as both the rationale behind the interview guide and is relevant for the discussion chapter. After the literature review, the methodology chapter provides a comprehensive look into the method used for answering the research question. Following that, the findings are presented and subsequently discussed in light of the relevant literature. The thesis ends with a concluding chapter that provides practical implications and recommendations for future research.

2.0 Literature review

In this chapter a review of relevant literature will be presented. It is divided into five main areas: (1) culture; (2) talent and development of athletes; (3) high performance environments; (4) organizational capacity; and (5) management and leadership. All of which are considered relevant for understanding the role of sport clubs in developing elite athletes.

2.1 Culture

In the following sub-chapters, the concept of culture and its relation to research and practice in sport is explored. It is divided into two related sections that look at the concept of culture from a broad organizational perspective towards a sport specific perspective.

2.1.1 Organizational culture

According to Clegg et al. (2019) “culture represents the totality of everyday knowledge that people use habitually to make sense of the world around them through patterns of shared meanings and understandings passed down through language, symbols and artefacts” (p. 189). Based on the work of Schein (1997) they define organizational culture as “the deep basic assumptions, beliefs and shared values that define organizational membership” (Clegg et al., 2019, p. 190). They further elaborate that culture is not only visible on a surface level, but for the most part unconscious and hidden beneath the surface. Clegg et al. (2019) use the image of an iceberg to explain Schein’s three different levels of culture in organizations. They explain that level one (above the surface) consists of *artefacts* and include visible organizational features, and that this level is easily observable but does not reveal everything about an organizations culture. Level two (on and just below surface level) contains *espoused values*, they explain that values represent a non-visible facet of culture that includes the norms and beliefs that members express. The third and deepest level, Clegg et al. (2019) explain, contain *basic assumptions* that are hidden beneath the surface. They elaborate that basic assumptions subconsciously shape values and artefacts and is hard to observe and change.

Schein (2004), suggest that the concept of culture explains some of the seemingly incomprehensible and irrational aspects of what happens in groups and organizations. A

group/organization with a stable membership and shared learning experiences will have developed some level of culture, but a group that has had either considerable turnover of members/leaders or a history lacking any kind of challenging events might lack shared assumptions (Schein, 2004). Schein (2004), define the culture of a group as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 17).

According to Schein (2004) a key aspect of culture is the idea that certain things in groups are shared or held in common. He further elaborates that the word culture consists of several critical elements to the concept of sharing, that is: *structural stability; depth; breadth; and patterning or integration*. According to Schein (2004), culture implies some level of structural stability in a group: “When we say that something is ‘cultural’, we imply that it is not only shared, but also stable, because it defines the group. Once we achieve a sense of group identity, it is our major stabilizing force and will not be given up easily” (p. 14). Schein (2004) explain that culture is the deepest, often unconscious part of a group (less tangible and visible); and that when something is more deeply embedded it also gains stability. According to Schein (2004), breadth covers all of a group’s functioning: “Culture is pervasive; it influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary task, its various environments, and its internal operations” (p. 14). Though not all groups have cultures in this sense, the concept implies that when one refers to the culture of a group one is referring to all of its operations (Schein, 2004). The fourth characteristic implied by the concept of culture is patterning or integration of the elements into a larger paradigm, according to Schein (2004) this is derived from the human need to make our environment as sensible and orderly as possible.

Schein (2004) argues that it is important to note that culture is a “multidimensional, multifaceted phenomenon, not easily reduced to a few major dimensions. Culture ultimately reflects the group’s effort to cope and learn; it is the residue of that learning process” (p. 109). Consequently, culture not only fulfils the function of providing stability, meaning, and predictability in the present, but is the result of functionally effective decisions in the group’s history (Schein, 2004).

Schein (2004) puts forward a great notion about the future, in that predictions have one theme in common; we really do not know what the ‘world of tomorrow’ will be like, except that it will be different. This means that organizations and their leaders need to become perpetual learners (Schein, 2004). He argues that putting the issue of perpetual learning in the context of cultural analysis makes for a paradox: “Culture is a stabilizer, a conservative force, a way of making things meaningful and predictable” (Schein, 2004, p. 393). It has been suggested that ‘strong cultures’ are desirable for effective and lasting performance, but strong cultures are by definition hard to change (Schein, 2004). “Does this not mean, then, that the process of culture creation itself is potentially dysfunctional because it stabilizes things, whereas flexibility might be more appropriate?” (Schein, 2004). As suggested by Schein (2004) though, it could be possible (and beneficial) to imagine a culture that is learning oriented, adaptive, and flexible. He concludes that the concept of a *learning culture* is important, organizations need to be able to adapt to changing environmental conditions. For Schein (2004), it seems obvious that the leader of the future must be a perpetual learner, according to him this requires: (1) new levels of perception and insight; (2) extraordinary levels of motivation; (3) emotional strength; (4) new skills in analysing and changing cultural assumptions; and (5) willingness and ability to involve others. Learning and change cannot be forced on people, their involvement is needed in identifying what is going on, sorting out what to do, and in actually facilitating learning and change (Schein, 2004).

2.1.2 Organizational culture in sport

Gammelsæter (2019) define organizational culture as culture within the frames of a formal organization. Hence, to understand organizational culture one must understand both the organization and what exactly culture is. As Gammelsæter (2019) suggests, neither is straight forward. The sport clubs explored in this thesis is varied in terms of structure, one of the clubs offer a variety of sports whereas the two others are devoted to a single sport. In a multiple-sport club (with different organizations/groups within the club), one might question whether there exists an overarching culture for the whole club (Gammelsæter, 2019). Therefore, it must be mentioned that the participant club Byåsen-langrenn is in fact an independent group (offering only cross-country skiing) within the multisport club Byåsen IL, however this thesis only looks at the aforementioned cross-country group.

According to Gammelsæter (2019) there are two distinct features of sport (especially in the Nordic countries) that are important in order to understand the culture and subcultures of sport organizations: (1) sport should promote success and continuously improved performance, and preferably bring medals to the individual athlete or team; and (2) sport should create positive consequences for the community. The first feature is all about competitive sport and great sport performances, whilst the second regards the ‘other’ positive effects sport is believed to contribute to the individual and the community (Gammelsæter, 2019). NIF (2019c) recognize that both these features are important, and it is their goal to both promote sporting success and to make society better by improving the everyday life of people through increased physical activity.

According to Girginov (2010) sport managers share common problems, but it is recognized that a single best way of managing does not exist. Further, the applicability of management theories may stop at national boundaries; and fundamental cultural values act as a strong determinant to managerial ideology and practice (Girginov, 2010). According to Girginov (2010) culture and sport management share a fundamental function in that both try to create order and avoid uncertainty. However, according to Girginov (2010), they operate at two different but interconnected levels: culture is abstract and subtle whereas management is distinctive and operational. “Sport management, therefore, is always plural, as it represents a bounded world of beliefs and practices. Sport managers’ beliefs, values and assumptions broadly constitute their ‘ethos’, which is often interpreted as national culture or ‘collective programming of the mind’” (Girginov, 2010, p. 411). Sport management, according to Girginov (2010), can be regarded as both a representation of the symbolic cultural system in which it operates and as a means of actively shaping this system. “Sport managers thus become meditators of meaning, while sport organizations become institutions for socialization, acculturation and control” (Girginov, 2010, p. 413).

In a review covering organizational culture in sport, Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018), conclude that the primary distinction within the literature has been between those that see culture as something organizations have or something organizations are. They explain that researcher adopting the former treats organizational culture as a variable that can be utilized for competitive advantage in sport, whereas researchers adopting the latter captures holistic individual experiences, meanings, and symbols. Consequently, they suggest that a key question for practitioners and researchers interested in organizational culture is whether it

can be managed. Their review shows an inconclusive answer to this question. According to Wagstaff and Burton-Wylie (2018) most research on organizational culture in sport is focused on using the knowledge for competitive advantage reasons. However, they suggest that researchers and scholars should encourage a balance between performance and well-being in attempts to study or influence organizational culture.

Cruickshank and Collins (2012) consider culture as a dynamic process characterized by the shared values, beliefs, expectations, and practices among members of a defined group. *High performing cultures*, according to Cruickshank and Collins (2012), “prevail when the shared perception and action of elite team environment members (a) supports sustained optimal performance; (b) persists across time in the face of variable results (i.e., wins, losses, ties); and, most importantly; (c) leads to consistent high performance” (p. 340). Note that according to Cruickshank and Collins (2012), there is a subtle but important difference in the terms high performing and high performance. They elaborate that while by definition elite teams operate in high-performance sport, this does not necessarily make them high performing; an example would be teams that constantly underperform relative to their resources.

According to Henriksen (2015) organizational culture have been identified as having a significant impact on the performance of athletes. Even though high-performance cultures have been identified as important, limited research attention has been paid to factors contributing to optimal organizational functioning or excellence in sport (Henriksen, 2015). Jones et al. (2009), underlines that the majority of intervention and research in performance psychology mainly has been focused on the individual and team, consequently overlooking the performance environments as a factor for success. Business organizations, according to Jones et al. (2009), often attribute success with having great people, rather than the environment these people perform in: “However, people do not perform in vacuum, and our contention is that the performance environment the organization creates is just as important as the people performing in it” (p. 140).

With this in mind, the following chapter contains talent development literature with a mostly individual focus before chapter 2.3 gradually covers literature that considers more environmental factors as well.

2.2 Talent and development of athletes

According to Kristiansen and Houlihan (2017), there has been a growing academic interest, and public investments in the identification, and development of young sporting talent. In a social perspective, according to Henriksen (2010), a *talent* refers to a young athlete who performs better in sport than those he is compared with.

According to Kristiansen and Houlihan (2017) the age of peak performance has remained relatively stable, but the age at which coaches try to identify talent has gotten younger. They explain that this is a consequence of both the competition for market share of young talents among sports, and the dominance of theories and models stressing the long-term nature of turning giftedness into talent. The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model is, according to them, dominant in many countries, shaping both public and national federation policy. The LTAD model is supported by the theory that the acquisition of any skill is related to the accumulation of practice and that a minimum of 10,000 hours (ten years) is required to achieve excellent levels of skill (Kristiansen & Houlihan, 2017). However, this claim is disputed, Söderström et al. (2018) notes that several studies have shown that expertise can be achieved within a much shorter timeframe than 10 years or less than 10,000 hours of practise.

The path from young up-and-coming athlete to elite sport performance requires an extensive learning process that involves step by step development with goal-oriented and deliberate training (Söderström et al., 2018; Ericsson, 2006). These researchers show that there are many factors contributing to the development of athlete performance. According to Ericsson (2006), extensive experience of activities in a domain is necessary to reach extremely high levels of performance. At the same time however, extensive experience in a certain sport does not always lead to expert achievement (Söderström et al., 2018). Looking at the detailed understanding of how experience shapes expert performance, two strands of research dominate; early specialisation vs sampling of different sports and specializing in one sport at an older age (Söderström et al., 2018). A traditional understanding on the development of expertise focuses on specialisation – concentrating on one single sport from an early age (Söderström et al., 2018; Ericsson, 2006). According to Söderström et al., (2018) however, recent research understands that the development of expertise is contingent on sampling,

i.e., trying many different sports at a young age, and concentrating (specialising) in a certain sport at an older age.

By reviewing the literature Söderström et al. (2018), found that the pathways to expertise, expert performance, and possible success are not linear; that success during adolescence is not always followed by long-term success in adulthood; that pathways of elite and sub-elite athletes are more similar than different; that top-level athletes started training and competing in their specific sport later than sub-elite athletes; and that early sport debut promotes rapid adolescent success whilst later sport debut increased the possibilities for long-term success in adulthood.

In a study on nine Norwegian handball players Bjørndal et al. (2018), found that there is a thin line separating those that drop-out due to a loss of motivation and meaning, and those that have a successful transition to the elite level. They conclude that no single set of factors could explain why some athletes developed into successful elite handball players whilst others did not. Bjørndal et al (2018) further suggest that the Norwegian national team activities should focus more on facilitating and sustaining long-term athlete development. They also highlight the importance of a more qualitative approach in the study of talent development and acknowledge that human development is a socially situated practice.

De Bosscher and De Rycke (2017) highlight the crucial role played by sport clubs in the early development of athletes. They argue that in the ages from six to twelve athletes are in a sensitive period in terms of developing coordinative skills, balance, posture, flexibility, speed, and perceptual and certain cognitive skills. Further they highlight that children need to combine play and practice activities during childhood in order to learn diverse skills and be motivated for continued participation in sport. They conclude that keeping talented athletes longer in the clubs can lead to increased motivation of clubs, greater expertise of coaches, and a broader talent pool and reduced dropout rates. De Bosscher and De Rycke (2017), propose that club coaches need to balance short-term performance and excessive training volume with making the sport fun and focusing on long-term development.

2.3 High performance environments

Research on talent development has often taken the individual perspective, but as noted by Henriksen et al. (2014) studies also demonstrate that elite athletic career is a highly social affair. According to Henriksen et al. (2014) researchers focusing on more than the individual itself has often focused on the athlete's microenvironment and highlighted the important role played by family and coaches.

In terms of family, Stefansen et al. (2018) found that parents see involvement in sport as natural, and a way for them to connect with their child emotionally and further the child's development. Stefansen and colleagues conclude that there has been an increase in parent involvement in sport, and that the parents see organized sport as something of importance for a proper childhood, this is also backed up by research from Strandbu et al. (2019). Birchwood et al. (2008) argued that the main reason for sport participation is generated during childhood through culture that is transmitted through families. Wheeler (2012) built upon the previous research from Birchwood et al. (2008) and found evidence that family culture is an important determinant for sport participation.

According to Strandbu et al. (2019), parents play an important role for Norwegian sport clubs as coaches and 'ground crew'. Most coaching positions in Norwegian sport clubs are voluntary based, and a high degree of the coaches are parents (Strandbu et al., 2019). Strandbu and colleagues found that most adolescents wanted their parents to be involved, but at the same time that there are ideal and an undesirable forms of parent involvement: "Parent involvement, in order to be acceptable to teenagers, must balance support and encouragement with respect to their increasing autonomy" (Strandbu et al., 2019, p. 75). Coaches and parents play an important role in determining the outcomes of participation in youth sport (Smoll et al., 2011), which should be notable for Norwegian sport clubs where the coaches are often parents as well.

In his PHD dissertation Tønnessen (2009), found that training conditions and the training environment were important for the athletes' choice of sport and the quality of the talent development process. The participants (three elite Norwegian athletes) in Tønnessen's study had throughout their career (from kids to adult) been part of a good training environment that developed them personally, socially and in terms of sporting success. Other

environmental factors Tønnessen's study highlight as important for sporting success are the role of the athletes' coaches and family. According to Tønnessen (2009), coaches play an important role in training and guiding the athletes towards a high-performance level. The coaches studied by Tønnessen had a particular important role in the athlete's development and career, they were particularly good at facilitating everything around the athletes' lives (holistic approach), as well as making the athletes believe in themselves. Tønnessen also highlighted the important role of the family, the parents played an integral role in the athlete's career. The parents made sure that the athletes had the opportunity to succeed, drove them to competitions, provided economic support, washing of clothes, and so forth (Tønnessen, 2009).

A noteworthy contribution to the study of organizational culture and the knowledge on high performance and talent development environments in sport comes from a string of work undertaken by Henriksen and colleagues (Wagstaff & Burton-Wylie, 2018). Henriksen (2010) and colleagues (Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2011) introduced a holistic ecological approach (HEA) to talent development in sport. The HEA approach, according to Henriksen (2010) emphasizes the central role of the overall environment "as it affects a prospective elite athlete and mirrors the complexity of talent development in the real world" (p. 9). Henriksen (2010) define *athletic talent development environment (ATDE)* as:

a dynamic system comprising a) an athlete's immediate surroundings at the micro-level where athletic and personal development take place, b) the interrelations between these surroundings, c) at the macro-level, the larger context in which these surroundings are embedded, and d) the organizational culture of the sports club or team, which is an integrative factor of the ADTE's effectiveness in helping young talented athletes to develop into senior elite athletes (p 160).

Henriksen and colleagues have found that successful ATDEs are unique, but also similar in many ways including: (1) training groups with supportive relationships; (2) role models; (3) training that allows for diversification; (4) focus on long-term development; (5) integration of factors outside of sport; and (6) a strong and coherent organizational culture (Henriksen et al., 2014). See table 1 for a full list of features for successful ATDE's, from Henriksen (2010), showing his description for each feature and examples of the opposite.

Table 1. Features of successful ATDEs (Henriksen, 2010).

Features of successful ATDEs	Descriptors	Opposite Poles
Training groups with supportive relationships	Opportunities for inclusion in a training community; supportive relationships and friendships within the group, despite performance level; good communication.	Individualised training programmes at an early stage; training alone; low cohesion in the group; inter-group rivalry; performance as a criterion for inclusion.
Proximal role models	Community of practice includes prospective and current elite athletes; opportunities to train with the elite athletes; elite athletes who are willing to pass on their knowledge.	Airtight boundaries between athletes at different levels. Elite level athletes keep their secrets and regard prospects as future rivals.
Support of sporting goals by the wider environment	Opportunities to focus on the sport; school, family, friends and others acknowledge and accept the athletes' dedication to sport.	Non-sport environment shows lack of understanding of elite sport and the demands involved.
Support for the development of psychosocial skills	Opportunities to develop skills and competences that are of benefit outside the sporting domain (such as autonomy, responsibility and commitment); considering athletes as 'whole human beings'.	Focus solely on sport and winning at any cost; excessive control from coaches; focus not on personal improvement but on relative performance level, which devalues learning and development.
Training that allows for diversification	Opportunities to sample different sports during early phases; integration of different sports in the daily routines; appreciation of versatile sport profiles and basic sport skills.	Promoting early specialization; focus solely on developing sport specific skills; considering athletes' interest in trying different sports to be rivalry and a potential threat.
Focus on long-term development	Focus on long-term development of the athletes rather than early success; age-appropriate amount and content of training.	Focus on short-term success; kids are seen as miniature elite athletes; no time to heal when injured.
Strong and coherent organizational culture	Organizational culture characterized by coherence between artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions; culture provides stability to the group and supports a learning environment.	Fragmented culture in which espoused values do not correspond to actions; uncertainty and confusion among coaches, athletes and others; lack of common vision.
Integration of efforts	Coordination and communication between sport, school, family and other components; athletes experience concordance and synergy in daily life.	Lack of communication; conflicting interests; athletes experience many and contradicting pulls in daily life.

As noted by Henriksen (2010) the features of a successful ATDE are context dependent, “successful environments are embedded in a larger cultural context and cannot be understood without reference to this culture” (p. 171.). The importance of considering the environment in terms of athlete development in sport is nicely depicted in this extract from Henriksen (2010):

“You’ll never walk alone”. These words feature on the Shankly Gate entrance to the stadium of Liverpool Football Club and in its anthem invariably sung by its supporters moments before the start of each home game. Most likely the words are meant to support the players, letting them know that, whether they win or lose, the fans are behind them. You are part of the family now. I suggest here a more profound meaning. You never walk alone. Nothing you accomplish is accomplished alone. Like it or not, you are situated in an environment (p..11)

2.4 Organizational capacity

Another aspect affecting a sport clubs’ success is organizational capacity. Millar and Doherty (2016) suggest that capacity is an important theoretical framework that provides the basis for a holistic analysis of organizational effectiveness. According to Doherty et al (2014), capacity can be understood as the ability of an organization to draw on various assets and resources to achieve its mandate and objectives. It is important to understand the nature of those resources for capacity to be accurately assessed, such that capacity building efforts may be effectively focused (Doherty et al., 2014). According to Wicker and Breuer (2011), “organisational capacity is a multidimensional concept and refers to an organisation’s potential that can be used to achieve organisational goals” (p. 190). Relying on various conceptual models of capacity to guide the development of interventions and measurement of effect, capacity building has been of high interest in the nonprofit and voluntary sector (Doherty et al., 2014).

According to Millar & Doherty (2016) financial aspects are one dimensions of organizational capacity, in addition there are human resources; infrastructure and process; planning and development; and networks and relationships. Misener and Doherty (2009) give the following explanation on the different dimensions of organizational capacity:

financial capacity refers to the ability of an organization to develop and deploy financial capital (for instance revenues, expenses, assets, and liabilities); *human resources* are the ability to deploy human capital (paid staff, volunteers, etc.) within the organization, and include the knowledge, competencies, motivation, attitudes, and behaviours of individuals in the organization; *infrastructure and process capacity* is the ability of an organization to deploy or rely on organizational elements related to day-to-day operations like policies, procedures, manuals, culture etc.; *planning and development capacity* represents the ability to develop and draw on organizational strategic plans, program plans, proposals, and policies; *network and relationship capacity* is the ability of the organization to draw on relationships with members, clients, funding agencies, government, partners, media, corporations, and public.

According to Doherty et al. (2014) it is important to understand the structures and processes that enable community sport clubs to meet their member-focused mandates. Their research identified key strengths and challenges impacting the ability of sport organizations to achieve their sport deliver goal; and contribute by providing a rich understanding of the range of resources a community sport club draw on to achieve their goals (Doherty et al., 2014).

2.5 Management and leadership

In relation to this thesis management and leadership are considered two sides of the same coin, discussions about differences in the terms are not considered. According to Mintzberg (1973) a manager is the person in charge of a formal organization or one of its subunits. The managers two basic purposes are first, to ensure that his organization produces its specific goods or services efficiently, and second to ensure that his organization serves the ends of those persons who control it (Mintzberg, 1973). For a manager in a community sport club the job is often to ensure that the members get activity/training that satisfies certain standards, to make sure that members stay in the club as long as possible, and to recruit more members. In the context of this thesis, the manager's job is also to facilitate the possibilities for young athletes to develop into elite-athletes. Mintzberg (1973) also highlights two other basic purposes of the manager, he must act as the key communication link between his organization and its environment (this is vital for sport clubs wanting to recruit more members etc.), and he must assume responsibility for the operation of his organization's

status system. The manager, according to Mintzberg (1973), “must design the work of his organization, monitor its internal and external environment, initiate change when desirable, and renew stability when faced with a disturbance” (p. 170).

According to Mintzberg (1973) managing is an art, not a science. He suggests that managing first and foremost require a set of innate skills. Perhaps most importantly, according to Mintzberg, the way in which managers work and the specific things he chooses to do have a profound impact on his organization. The work of Mintzberg suggest that a manager must be able to think ahead (have a far-sighted perspective), to avoid getting stuck in a loop of negativity and problems. And the more a manager understands about his job, the more sensitive he will be to the needs of his organization, and consequently the better he will perform (Mintzberg, 1973).

2.5.1 Managing sport organizations

According to Taylor et al. (2015), sport has the ability to generate irrational passions and emotional attachments, despite the variable product quality. This passion for sport might be reflected in the people who chose to work in the sport industry, where the salaries and earning potentials tend to be below what similarly qualified individuals could earn in non-sport related jobs (Taylor et al., 2015). It is also reflected in the vast number of volunteers who represent the majority of coaches, managers and administrators working for community sport clubs and associations (Taylor et al., 2015; Cuskelly et al., 2006). The distinct features of sport create a unique management environment for sport organizations, and the effective management of people who are working and volunteering for the organization is the most critical (Taylor et al., 2015).

Non-profit and voluntary organizations inevitably have to cope with volunteer management challenges (Taylor et al., 2015). According to Taylor et al. (2015), organizations working with both paid employees and volunteers require an approach to managing people that recognize the different perspectives, motivations, and capacity that each group bring to the organization. The challenge is to make sure that there are enough volunteers, to make sure they maintain the motivation, and to retain their services (Taylor et al., 2015). According to Taylor et al. (2015) retention of volunteers is often related to matters of motivation, satisfaction, positive morale and suitable rewards and recognition.

According to Østerlund (2013), most sport voluntary sport organisations find it difficult to recruit volunteers. At the same time voluntary work is the most vital resource for voluntary sport organizations in the Nordic Countries (Østerlund, 2013). He suggests that to enable volunteer recruitment, sport organizations should (1) involve members in key decisions; (2) delegate decision-making; (3) give volunteers perks and material incentives for working; (4) have a specific strategy for recruiting volunteers; and (5) have good communication. The suggestions from Østerlund, especially regarding involving members and delegation of decision making, can be linked to self-determination theory (STD). According to Deci and Ryan (2012) STD propose that the fundamental psychological needs for *competence*, *relatedness* and *autonomy* provide the basis for categorizing an environment as supportive to vital human functioning. Social environments that allow for the satisfaction of the three basic needs are predicted to support personality development and the quality of behaviour and experience within a particular situation (Deci and Ryan, 2012). Deci and Ryan explain that competence refers to a felt sense of confidence and effective interaction with one's environment. Whereas relatedness, they explain, refer to a sense of belonging both with other people and with one's community. Autonomy refers people feeling in control of their own behaviour, and concerns acting from interest and integrated values (Deci and Ryan, 2012).

According to Fahlén and Sjöblom (2012) sport clubs face many challenges both in terms of societally related dilemmas and sport specific problems. In their study on two successful Swedish sport clubs, they found that a key to overcoming many of the problems experienced by clubs is through expansion. They found that continuous expansion is both a goal and a means: a goal in terms of assuring long term survival of the club; and a means because of the expectation that a big club can better meet the needs conveyed by the members (Fahlén & Sjöblom, 2012). They suggest that a big club can gather more resources which can be used for marketing purposes, like engaging the club in non-sporting- and recruitment activities. Decentralisation is another key to problem solving, according to Fahlén and Sjöblom. This they also describe as both goals and means, as goals in the sense that decentralisation of authority leads to more solidarity and commitment amongst members, as means in terms of decentralised responsibility.

3.0 Methodology

“Research involves systematic exploration, guided by well-constructed questions, producing new information or reassessing old information” (Edwards & Skinner, 2009, p. 48). This chapter provides a description and explanation of the chosen methodological framework.

3.1 Research design and approach

Since there is little research about what makes certain Norwegian community sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes (Skille, 2008), an exploratory research approach seemed suited. According to Gratton and Jones (2010) exploratory research looks for clues about a phenomenon and attempts to gain some familiarity with suitable concepts. The researcher looks for patterns or ideas emerging from the data without any preconceived ideas or explanation (Gratton & Jones, 2010). As such this thesis is qualitative in approach. The analysis follows an inductive approach, but the interview guide was deductively developed based on previous literature relating to the research question. According to Gratton and Jones (2010), an inductive approach is well suited when trying to explain why something is happening in an area that is relatively under-researched.

Qualitative research utilizes the natural setting as a source of data, and the researcher tries to observe, describe, and interpret settings as they are (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). The researcher functions as the ‘human instrument’ of data collection (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). According to Edwards and Skinner (2009) qualitative researchers mostly use inductive data analysis, have an interpretive character, seeks the uniqueness of each case, and have an emergent design (as opposed to predetermined).

Considering time and resources available, semi-structured interviews was chosen as a suitable method for collecting data. Semi-structured interviews are useful when seeking information about a topic that the respondents have particular experience with (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Because of the explorative nature of the thesis an inductive thematic analysis approach seemed suited for analysing the data, this choice was also backed up by the fact that the researcher had prior experience with thematic analysis. In the following chapters the research process is described in detail.

3.2 Participants

A total of four participants from three different Norwegian sport clubs were interviewed: Kjersti (board leader) and Arve (head coach) from Dimna IL, Bjørn Axel (board leader) from Halden SK, and Torbjørn (board leader) from Byåsen-langrenn. The rationale behind the selection of interviewees was based on a strategic choice of candidates. This can be described as *purposive sampling* (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). Different sport clubs were chosen as potential participants based on their level of performance in relation to the previous definition of sustained high performing clubs. The identification of potential participants was based on the researcher's prior knowledge and discussions with supervisor and contacts from MRIK. Once the high performing clubs were identified, the final choice of participants were again influenced by discussions with the supervisor and contacts from MRIK. There was also an intention to choose participants clubs that were quite different to each other in terms of sport, and in terms of location (urban/rural). It must be mentioned that this study received grants from the Møre and Romsdal county municipality, due to the ambition to obtain knowledge that might be useful for the cultural life in Møre and Romsdal. Having said that, only one of the participant clubs had to be located in Møre and Romsdal. Given that this club is considered as one of the locomotives in a Norwegian sport context and has fostered champions at national and international levels, the premise set by Møre and Romsdal county municipality cannot be considered as a matter of inconvenience.

Such purposive sampling (researcher selects participants subjectively) is often referred to as *judgement samples* (Edwards & Skinner, 2009). According to Edwards and Skinner (2009), purposive sampling is used when unique cases are required to provide especially informative data, and when aiming to identify particular cases for further in-depth investigation. A selection of specific clubs based on performance criteria makes purposive sampling the natural fit for this thesis. In terms of choosing whom to interview from each club, the main criteria were that he/she could be considered especially important for the club's history and development, and that the person has a current leading role in the club. An overview of the participants is presented at the start of chapter four.

3.3 Semi structured interviews and interview guide

“If you want to know how people understand their world and their lives, why not talk with them? (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. xvii). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) the qualitative research interview has the purpose of understanding the world from the subject’s point of view and to unfold the meaning of their experiences.

Semi structured interviews, as chosen for this thesis, are the most common form of interviewing in qualitative research and is characterised by a somewhat structured approach (Thagaard, 2013). In preparation for the interview, an interview guide was made (see appendix). The interview guide consists of an outline of topics to be covered with suggested questions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

The interview guide was made in accordance with recommendations from the literature (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Thagaard, 2013), and with suggestions from my supervisor. As Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggests, the first few minutes in an interview are decisive. The interview consisted of six parts: (1) general information; (2) background information; (3) club-culture; (4) performance culture and talent development; (5) organizational capacity; and (6) the future. The first part sets the stage for the interview and include brief information about the project, the use of sound recording, and asks if the subject has any questions before starting the interview. Then, part two consist of questions seeking background information about the participant. These questions are important since they both functions as icebreakers and are important in the context of the research question. Knowing the sport-club leader’s background is essential in order to develop an understanding for how and why they do things in a certain way, related to the sport-club’s history and development over time. The remaining set of questions consisted of topics considered to be relevant based on the literature review. In part three the focus is on organizational culture, based on (Schein, 2004; Clegg et al., 2019), these are questions designed to gather broad insight about the culture of the sport club. Part four consists of questions related to performance-culture and talent-development, based on (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Henriksen, 2010; 2015; Söderström et al., 2018). These topics where combined as they are in many ways related to each other. Organizational culture, performance-culture and talent development were identified as particularly interesting topics in relation to the research question. Part five relates to organizational capacity, based on (Doherty et al., 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009),

again this was considered truly relevant to the research question. Part six focus on the future of the organization, based on (Mintzberg, 1973; Schein, 2004), with the purpose of identifying future challenges/opportunities and how they could be met. The interview guide ends by asking if the respondent has anything to add and informing him about the opportunity to be sent the results.

3.4 Interview process

Making sure that the themes we want to get information about are explored is an important part of qualitative interviews (Thagaard, 2013). To do this it is important to ask the questions in a way that invites the respondent to really reflect about the themes in question, and to encourage them to give comprehensive answers (Thagaard, 2013).

After getting approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), (see appendix), the candidate participants were contacted through email. Once confirmation of interest and an appropriate date had been agreed upon, the participants were sent a letter of information and agreement (see appendix) which they signed before the interviews. It was agreed that the participants name and club could be used in the thesis. The rationale behind was that they represent a relatively small community and would have been difficult to anonymize, in addition the names of the club and participants adds weight to the relevance of the thesis. As previously noted, an overview of the participants is presented in chapter four.

The interviews were conducted using the digital platform Microsoft Teams, this was chosen because of the relative uncertainty regarding Covid-19. It was decided to use a digital sound recorder, and to take notes during the interviews. The drawback of doing it digital might be that the setting is less natural, and ‘getting to know’ the respondent is more difficult, body language is more difficult to observe and so forth. However, these constraints are less important when considering the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and it was considered unnecessary to travel around to do the interviews in person.

There was an intention to interview three different clubs, and two people from each club. However, certain issues led to four interviews in total, two interviews from one of the clubs, and one for the two others. The interviews lasted between 50 and 70 minutes, and the participants were asked similar questions based on the Interview guide.

3.5 Analysis

Thematic analysis (TA) was chosen as the method for analysing the interviews. According to Terry et al. (2017), the flexibility and accessibility of TA makes it particularly suitable for those new to qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe TA as “a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic” (p. 79). Braun and Clarke’s (2006; 2013) step-by-step guide for doing TA was followed to ensure good quality in the analysis. Accordingly, the process of analysing the data involved six phases. It must be noted that the process was recursive (Braun and Clarke, 2006), meaning that there was some back and forth between the phases. The first phase in Braun and Clarke’s guide is to familiarize oneself with the data, this includes the transcription process which will be described next.

3.5.1 Transcribing

After interviews were conducted, they were subsequently transcribed within two days. This approach led to a constant evaluation of the questions asked, it became apparent that the interview guide questions worked well, which improved the confidence of the researcher. Transcription was done according to a style called orthographic or verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2013), which means writing down the spoken words (and other sounds). A transcription notation system was made to ensure a thorough and meticulous approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013), this included for instance: (P) indicating a pause; (LP) for longer pause; (HAHA) meaning laughter; and an underlining of words that were clearly emphasised. The transcribed interviews amounted to about 28.000 words of written text in total. After finishing the initial transcription, the interviews were listened to a couple of more times to make sure no mistakes had been made. After ensuring proper quality in the written transcripts the sound recordings were deleted as per the agreement with NSD.

3.5.2 Generating codes

Once the transcription process was done, the next step was to begin generating codes from the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) codes identify a feature of the data that is considered interesting to the researcher and is a way of organizing the data into meaningful groups. As noted by Terry et al. (2017), codes can vary between semantic (descriptive) and latent (interpretive), semantic codes capture explicit meaning; latent codes capture implicit

meaning. For the purpose of this thesis the codes were primarily semantic. The initial coding process involved identifying and labelling all features of the data that were considered potentially relevant for the research question, a process called complete coding (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Once the four interviews were coded, the next step was to go through all of the data several times over. This was necessary in order to make sure that the codes made sense both in terms of the extracts they ‘represented’ and to ensure that similar extracts were coded the same way across all four transcripts. It also involved cutting down on the number of codes by changing similarly worded codes into the exact same code name and removing codes that were considered irrelevant to the research question.

3.5.3 Generating initial themes

The next phase in the analysis was to begin sorting the different codes into potential themes. Note that the original wording in Braun and Clarke (2006) was *searching for themes*, however this was later changed (Clarke, 2018). The codes were sorted using Microsoft excel, as this made handling the relatively large number of codes (about 150) possible. Following the suggestions of Braun and Clarke (2006) this phase also involved collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the potential themes. After having spent an unexpected amount of time on this, eventually a collection of candidate themes and subthemes were collected. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), at this point a general sense of the significance of each theme was developed. However, by creating a thematic map (Terry et al., 2017) some problems were found in terms of relating the candidate themes to each other, further analysis was needed.

3.5.4 Reviewing themes

Phase four in the Braun and Clarke approach involves reviewing and refining the candidate themes. Following the suggestions from Braun and Clarke (2006; 2013), this phase involved two levels of reviewing and refining the themes. The first level consisted of reading all the collated data extracts to examine whether they seemed to form a coherent pattern. Level two involved a similar process, but here the biggest consideration was whether the candidate themes reflected the meanings of the data set as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), it became evident in this phase that some of the themes were in fact not themes at all. For instance, some of the candidate themes lacked support from the data extracts, others were not covering all of the participants to a satisfying degree. It became apparent in this phase, that the themes should focus mostly on what the

participants had in common as this would answer the research question in the best way. Each theme was given a definition and description which made it possible to check if the themes worked in relation to the data extracts. The initial thematic map was very useful here in order to visualize the relation between the candidate themes. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006), I had a fairly good idea about what the different themes were and how they fit together at this point.

3.5.5 Finalizing and writing

The final two phases began once I had a satisfactory thematic map (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and consisted of refining and finalising the themes and subthemes, and eventually writing the analysis and discussion chapters of the thesis. Since the interviews were done in Norwegian, this phase also included translating the extracts selected for each theme into English – which were an unexpected struggle as some phrases were difficult to translate. However, this also made refining and finalizing the themes ‘easier’ as a deeper understanding of the data was developed. In chapter four the result of the analysis is presented and subsequently discussed.

3.6 Trustworthiness

According to Edwards and Skinner (2009) qualitative research is evaluated using specific criteria for trustworthiness. Nowell et al. (2017) argues that it is important that qualitative research is conducted in a rigorous and methodical manner. They elaborate that qualitative researchers must show the reader that the data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner by documenting, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough detail. According to Yin (2011) qualitative researchers can build trustworthiness and credibility by focusing on three objectives: transparency; methodicalness; and adherence to evidence.

Consequently, to build trustworthiness and credibility, the data gathering process and analytical method has been thoroughly explained in the previous sections. Secondly the results chapter presents a thorough write up of the analysis, and the themes presented are backed up by sufficient evidence from the data (Braun & Clarke 2013).

Generalisation in research is present when findings of a study can be applied to other settings or a whole population (Sparks & Smith, 2014), the findings from this study is context dependent (and included few participants) and therefore not generalisable (Gratton & Jones, 2010). On that note it is assumed that the study offers important insight relevant to the Norwegian sport context. This thesis contributes by offering new insight on a topic that is relatively under researched. Norwegian sport clubs looking at this thesis should consider their own context and evaluate the findings based on their current situation.

3.7 Ethics

According to Skinner et al. (2015) ethics are a set of principles of right conduct and the rules and standards governing the actions of a person, which define what is or is not legitimate or morale. Ethical aspects need to be considered in every phase of a research project (Edwards & Skinner, 2009).

As previously mentioned, the project has gotten approval from NSD. It was deemed preferable to not anonymize the participants, this was discussed with the participants, and they all agreed that their name and the name of the club could be disclosed. The participants were given an information letter and voluntary consent form of which they agreed upon before the interviews were conducted.

Another relevant consideration is the fact that the present researcher received grants from the Møre and Romsdal county municipality, and the thesis topic was also inspired by a bigger project undertaken by MRIK. However, this did not affect the data analysis in any way or form.

4.0 Results

This chapter presents the findings from thematically analysing the interviews. Firstly, I will present some descriptive background information on each of the clubs (n=3) and the representatives that were interviewed (n=4). Then the thematic map is drawn, before each of the different themes generated are explained in further detail.

4.1 Background

The following sections provide background information on the participants and is based on data from the interviews. It provides contextual information relevant to the research question.

4.1.1 Dimna IL

A total of two respondents contributed from the athletics club, Dimna IL. The club is located in the western part of Norway, in a small community with relatively few inhabitants (Ulstein municipality has about 6000 inhabitants and is recognized for its maritime industry). The club has been very successful in recent years and have many emerging talents as well as established elite athletes. According to their board leader Kjersti, they have about 300 members of which 200 are under the age of 25 and considered active; “another positive thing is that we have about 50/50 girls and boys among the active, which is very good for the environment (of the group)”. The interviewee Kjersti, has been involved with the club for a long time and has had many different roles in the club. The interviewee Arve, got involved as a coach for Dimna in 1987, he is now the acting head coach. He has had many different roles in the club but is now mainly working with the coaching side of the club. Both Kjersti and Arve was part of the club as athletes in their youth.

4.1.2 Halden SK

One respondent contributed from the multisport club Halden SK, the club primarily focus on orienteering (but they also offer skiing, cycling, climbing, and outdoor-life activities). Halden SK is located in the south-easter part of Norway, close to the Swedish boarder. The club is located in an area which can be considered medium sized in terms of population in the Norwegian context. Halden municipality has about 32.000 inhabitants and Halden city

is relatively close to the more densely populated Sarpsborg and Fredrikstad area. The interviewee Bjørn-Axel is the current board leader of Halden SK, he has been involved in the club for a long time and has experience from different roles both within and outside of the club. For instance, he was previously the national coach for German orienteering (for 10 years) and has also been responsible for the elite-sport part of Halden SK for another 10 years. Halden SK is amongst the most decorated clubs in the sport of orienteering, they have for instance six individual world champions, numerous national team world champions, and many individual world championship medals (Gran, 2018). The club currently have many decorated elite athletes and a promising group of youth.

4.1.3 Byåsen IL-langrenn

One respondent contributed from Byåsen IL-langrenn, which is an independent cross-country group within the multisport-club Byåsen IL. The club is located in Trondheim, one of the bigger cities in Norway. As a club Byåsen IL celebrates their 100-year anniversary this year. Cross-country is a traditional sport in Norway often referred to as the national sport. And in terms of active memberships one of the most popular sports in Norway (NIF, 2019d). The interviewee Torbjørn, who is the board leader, share a similar background to the other participants in this study – in that he has been involved in the club for a long time. He has been the board leader for about 15 years. The cross-country group of Byåsen IL have been very successful and fostered many elite athletes, especially since the 1990's. They currently have a number of promising youth athletes as well as several established elite athletes.

4.1.4 Summary

All four participants are highly engaged in the particular sports their clubs represent. Both at various levels as athletes and through different roles within the organisation. It seems to be a high level of dedication to their contributions. Torbjørn and Kjersti also specifically mentions being involved in what their kids are doing as a motivation for their current involvement with their respective club. The participants have been involved in different key roles for their respective clubs for a number of years. They seem knowledgeable and well suited for their current (and important) roles.

4.2 Thematic framework

Below is the final thematic map drawn (figure 2), including themes and subthemes and their relation to each other as recognized by the researcher. The map evolved through processing the data and will as such define the output structure of results. As such the results is presented in the opposite manner to the actual analysing process. I urge the reader to keep this map in mind when reading the following chapters that explain each of the themes. In the extract's brackets *[like this]*, are used to indicate contextual information provided by the researcher.

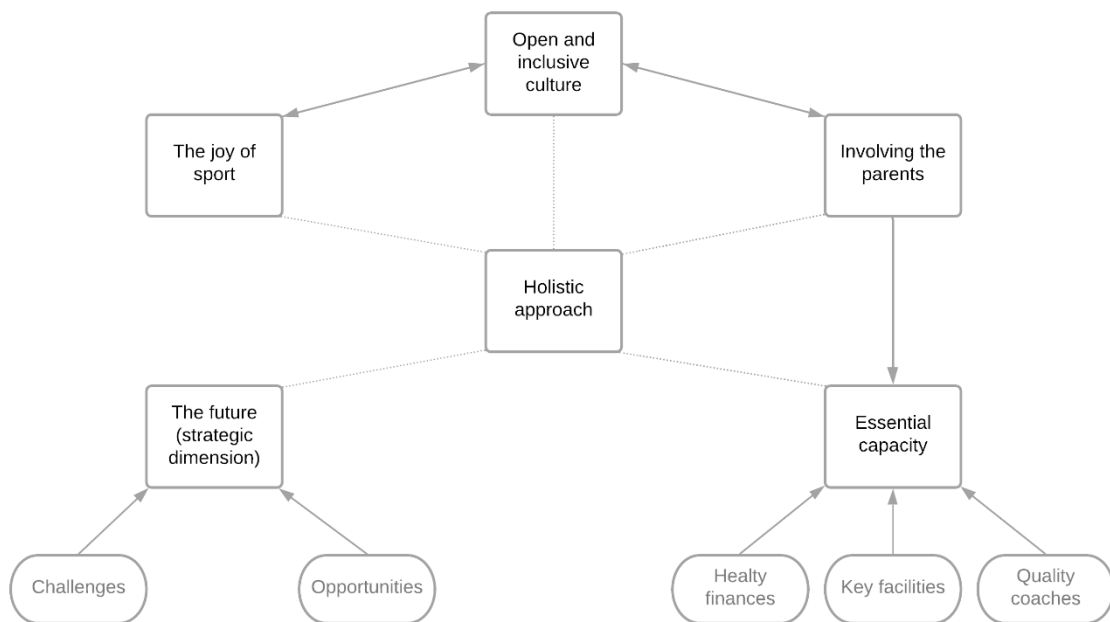


Figure 2. Thematic map displaying features of high performing Norwegian sport clubs.

4.3 Open and inclusive culture

Having an *open and inclusive culture* captures the essence of each of the club's desire and intention to be a community sports club where anyone should feel welcome. According to Kjersti, "the most important for the club is to be an amateur (mass-participation) club with a low threshold in all ways for entrance". All the participants mentioned the culture of the club as something that they have been prioritizing, i.e., they have actively decided what kind of club they want to be. "The culture of the club is something we have been working consciously with for many years" (Kjersti). The participants from Dimna and Halden mention that they aimed to be a club focusing on both amateur and elite sport, Torbjørn from

Byåsen describes the club as definitely an amateur club. According to Arve, the dual focus on both elite sport and mass-participant might sometimes be challenging:

We have defined ourselves as an amateur club with room for all, also elite sport, we facilitate for elite sport. Then there is a challenge, maybe, to include the amateur athletes and especially when they get older. Because we have many top athletes it can be difficult for some to accept that they are also welcome even though they are further down on the results. But they are in many ways our most important, also to create an environment that makes it fun for the elite athletes.

Makin the 'less talented' athletes feel welcome and appreciated thus becomes important. Bjørn Axel says that combining elite and mass sport is something that is mutually beneficial and elaborates, "again, that closeness, the fact that you have someone who are good, then someone who are the 'clown', but we are all the same club". As Bjørn Axel describe in the quote below, an open and inclusive culture creates opportunities for friendship and togetherness:

You also have, I would say a closeness between the elite-athletes and the veterans, again Høyås [the clubhouse], it has been a culture amongst the elite-athletes, they have sat down with the pensioners and had a talk, asked about how they did it back in the days. What are you guys doing now? So, it isn't that you are just a name on the list, it is faces that one knows.

The open and inclusive culture create a welcoming environment that positively affect all elements of the club: athletes (old and young); parents; other volunteers; and staff (often parents/volunteers). This positive environment is further described by Torbjørn:

Openness, that is perhaps our most important culture carrier in every way. From our best athletes and down, I mean they are very good at inviting others to training, there are no secrets, there is no hocus-pocus, it is just about hard work over a long period of time. Openness, and not least that which encompasses humour, attitude, and joy, that is it should be fun to partake in training.

There is a common perception amongst the participants that having a strong and definite culture is important, there is a certain way of doing things, and being part of the club means

that you are part of that particular culture. As Torbjørn suggest in the below quote, there should be a reaction if someone do things that does not fit with the values of the club:

You have to try and correct unwanted behaviour. When things are going in an unwanted direction or there are unwanted behavior you have to correct it in a smart way. And preferably the group-dynamic does this, so you cannot let parents do their own thing, everyone must follow what the club decides. This is important.

This theme is tightly interlinked with the themes *the joy of sport* and *involving the parents*.

4.4 The joy of sport

In terms of what the participants talked about, the importance of having fun at training emerged as the most frequently mentioned. *The joy of sport* is about facilitating an environment that values humour, playfulness, and good old-fashioned fun. According to the participants the joy of sport is very important for kids and youth “they join to have fun”, and can according to Kjersti be seen as an important contributor to success:

The most important thing is what we do for kids and youth. We strongly emphasize that they should enjoy training, that is the most important, and we think that if we can make going to training fun then the results will come eventually.

The joy of sport is also about more than just having fun in training. It is about the full experience of being part of the club, and as Arve explain in the below quote, enjoyment is essential for a good environment:

I think that throughout many years vi have had a good training-environment, it has permeated the whole system. It is something we try to have both in relation to training, traveling and competitions; to have fun, and to have a good environment, that is what has characterized us. And even before we became the dominant club in the region, it was not uncommon for many of the other clubs to wish to travel with us; they wanted, in addition to competing and such, to have fun. So, the

environment, a good environment is what lies at the core, and something we shall always have.

The joy of sport is also very much about making sure that as many as possible stay as long as possible. By working towards the goal of having as many as possible as long as possible the likelihood of fostering elite-athletes increases for the sport clubs. As Arve says, “we are so few that we can’t afford to lose anyone either if we are to continue having an environment, so then we have to facilitate for all types”. Speaking of facilitating for all types, Torbjørn offers a good analogy of the way Byåsen thinks about this:

I think that if one lives by that principle and makes sure that one has many participants because the training is fun, and that one has training methods and activities that sometimes gives the opportunity for those presumably ‘worst’ to be able to beat ‘the best’ because one adds obstacles and activities and 360’s and cookie-eating which equalizes things. I think that is the most important. To include, try to think that we shall have as many as possible for as long as possible. There will always be someone at the back, no matter if you are 50 or 20, there is always someone at the back of the line in training if it goes to fast, and if the one at the back quits then the second to last will be last.

Torbjørn suggest that by adding obstacles and playful exercises those that are often at the back of the line in competitions might actually perform best in that particular training. It is likely boring to always be last. To keep as many as possible for as long as possible clubs should strive to make training fun for everyone. Speaking of everyone, Torbjørn also mention that the elite athletes themselves enjoy being part of a bigger group:

And those that are presumably best also think it is incredibly fun that there are many in training, it is not fun to struggle alone, and that is something our best athletes have said many times; that they are so glad they were part of a big group. Then everything becomes so much more fun, I think that is the key.

According to Bjørn Axel, the elite athletes contribute to the good environment by including others, which is something that can be highly motivational for the kids and youths that look up to them:

UFO [7-16 years of age], the fact that we organize it as a distinct group is that you have many distinct priorities, a bit independent from the elite-sport, but there is a lot of joint training. [...] regularly the elite-athletes take youths with them for a run in the woods. When we have Høyås day and night cup, sitting around the campfire, then it amazing for a 16-year-old to be sitting there talking to a world champion.

All participants mention the training environment as extremely important, and the core for a good training environment in sport clubs are that the members actually enjoy being there.

4.5 Involving the parents

Involving the parents is about the importance of including and utilizing the parents for many different tasks within the club, this can be as coaches, as additional support in training and competitions, and as volunteers at events amongst others. The parents are key proponents for the overall environment of the club and offer many advantages to those clubs that are able to involve them, according to Arve:

Yes, our club has always been a dugnad-club where most things have been done on dugnad. And then we are somehow dependent on the involvement of parents, both as coaches, but not least as helpers at events and to drive and contribute when we are traveling and such. So, we have a tradition all the way from we started the club that parents are vital in the club. And this is something we have managed to maintain, now when we have had many big events in recent years the parents have been the foundation for getting it done.

The parents play an important role for kids and youths in the club, “the child and youth sport has always been driven by the parents” (Bjørn Axel). According to Torbjørn “there won’t be any activities for the kids if the parents aren’t involved, especially not in cross-country skiing”. Some sports (like cross country skiing) require a big support apparatus in training and competitions because of the nature of the sport, as expressed by Torbjørn:

We have been very conscious about the importance of involving the parents. If we have a group of 40 kids then we need almost 20 parents that

can facilitate it in the form of coaches, supervisory roles, and other supporting tasks and so forth, we are totally dependent on the parents.

In terms of how to actually get the parents involved Torbjørn had some suggestions:

My experience is that parents have to be asked. I mean if you ask an open question; is there someone who wants to do this? Then nobody will join, if you however ask concretely then they will suddenly join, and then they will become part of the group and the club. So, parents have to be asked, they have to be invited.

Recruiting enough volunteers is something that is important for Norwegian sport clubs. Having a recruitment strategy, like Torbjørn suggested above, is important in that regard. Another reason why involving the parents are seen as important is the relationship they have with their kids, and how much that relationship means for the choices their kids make. As Bjørn Axel says, “children often follow in the footsteps of their parents”. According to Torbjørn, parents play a crucial role in keeping their kids active in the club and it is important to make the parents understand how vital they are:

I mean we are completely dependent on the parents, so we have to make them understand that they also play an important role in the club and for their kids. And they have to get involved early, we see that it is the kids who have their parents with them at training, or whose parents have some kind of role in the club – those are the kids who continue [practising sport] the longest. We find the greatest dropout amongst the group where we never see the parents.

This theme was initially placed as a sub-theme under the *essential capacity* theme. However, it became apparent that it needed to be placed as a separate theme because of how important the parents seemed to the participants, and how frequently that was expressed. Another reason was that involving the parents seemed interlinked with the open and inclusive culture theme in a more direct way than the essential capacity theme.

4.6 Essential capacity

In addition to parents (they are certainly essential), the participant clubs highlight certain important resources contributing to the success of the club. These have been divided into the following sub-themes: *healthy finances*, *key facilities*, and *quality coaches*.

Healthy finances relates to a fit between the economic resources available and the needs and wants of the club. Some of the participant clubs have greater expenses in some areas than the others. Halden for instance, has more paid staff (mostly coaches). According to Bjørn Axel, “we were probably the first club to hire coaches, I guess it was early, or mid 90’s, mostly part time, and 3-4 four-year contracts”. Whereas Byåsen “have basically only voluntary coaches, but with some exceptions for the junior-group where we have some paid coaches, that is they get paid a small amount for the job they are doing” (Torbjørn). Dimna has recently hired Arve in a full-time position, “this is the first time we have a full-time coach that is paid, before it was only a symbolic sum” (Kjersti). The focal point is that all the participant clubs indicate that their finances are good, and that it fits well with what they want to achieve. “I would say we have finances that fits with our ambitions, to a very high degree, well balanced, low income and low expenditure (HAHA)” (Torbjørn). In terms of income, the participants mention events, sponsors, and dugnad as important. The benefits of organizing events and having a good relationship with sponsors is exemplified in this quote from Bjørn Axel:

In 1997 we started a cycling race, after an idea from someone in the club to go with the trend, we cooperated with some sponsors and formed an operating company. It became the second biggest mountain-bike race in Norway. It gave us large profits [...] Our sponsors did not have any ambitions to take out profit for themselves, all the profit went to the sport.

Healthy finances take time and effort to achieve, once attained it gives the clubs opportunities to invest if needed. As shown in this quote from Arve:

We are probably the club with the best finances in the county. This is something we have built throughout the years, both through good sponsors and through events that have generated income. So, this is something that keeps on rolling, we have solid finances and money available, so that vi can do major changes if the need arises.

Dugnad can be of benefit in many ways, be it for practical task like “painting the club house” (Bjørn Axel) or “shovelling snow into the tracks” (Torbjørn). And as a direct generator of income for the clubs. Torbjørn talked about a Dugnad they usually do (which got cancelled this year because of Covid-19) where club members do some vacuum-cleaning in a large hall used during a major annual fair, this generates “an incredible amount of money”. In many ways Dugnad is at the core of most sport clubs in Norway, and it is certainly true for the participant clubs.

Key facilities capture the way the clubs described their training facilities in terms of standard (quality) and how available they are. In terms of quality the participants often described their current training facilities as ‘very good’ and/or ‘the best’, and all of the participants report that the availability of the facilities are excellent:

Torbjørn: Byåsen have good prerequisites in terms of facilities, the local facilities called Nilsbyen, are incredibly good for training both summer and winter. We are lucky that we have Nilsbyen which is perfectly placed in terms of where our members live, because our members are within a radius of 1 to 2 km from Nilsbyen.

Bjørn Axel: Yes, I mean you can reach good maps with a bike. And the terrain is snow free for 11,5 months a year, at least those by the coast, so if you want to become good then it is easier to live in Halden because you can train so much more orienteering technic. And it is always 7-8, 10-12 tracks with posts out there that you can run.

Having the best facilities is not necessarily a be all end all factor for success however, “we were a relatively big club before we got the best training facilities, the new arena in many ways came about because we had become a large club that did well on a national level” (Arve). That being said, it is likely that having great facilities helps, at least in terms of recruiting young athletes, “the youth of today has become a bit more leisurely in recent years” (Arve). It is also implied that having good facilities might be even more important in the future since kids these days have some many other possibilities in terms of activities.

Quality coaches means coaches that are knowledgeable and supportive, whether they are hired professionals or purely voluntary ‘amateurs’ (often parents) isn’t necessarily the most important. What matters is the competence, the actual skill of the coach, and if that skill fits with the group of which he is responsible. As Torbjørn says “we have parents who are coaches who I easily think could have been coaches for the national team, I mean there are incredibly many competent people”. Whereas Byåsen, and Dimna (with the recent exception of hiring Arve in a full-time position) mainly have voluntary coaches, Halden have had many paid professional coaches (often foreign) working for the club. According to Bjørn Axel the process of hiring a new coach require deliberate consideration:

Every time a new coach was hired there was a very thorough internal evaluation beforehand. What do we want? What kind of criteria should we have? What type? Should it be a club-coach, an elite-coach? Should the coach be good at maps or tracks?

Whether paid or unpaid, professional, or amateur, the participants highlight the important role coaches have for the athletes. The ratio between number of athletes and number of coaches are also something they consider highly important, as Kjersti says “it is about seeing the individual and to be able to follow up each and every one”. This is further elaborated by Torbjørn, who also talks about recruiting coaches as ‘easy’:

Yes, we do have many coaches. In cross-country it is the coaches who are easiest to recruit. Because so many goes skiing with their kids, and like skiing themselves, and enjoy being active with the kids. So, they very much like to partake as coaches. I would say that per group we have about one coach for every third athlete [...] and then each group have one main coach who is responsible for the training plans and to ensure that there are enough coaches at the trainings.

Both the competence of the coaches and the number of coaches relative to athletes is important. According to Arve, “we have room for more athletes in terms of facilities and finances, but we would need more coaches”. Having many competent coaches makes it possible to follow each individual athlete closer, thus improving the quality of the trainings.

4.7 Holistic approach

This theme is about the importance of thinking about the whole picture in terms of the athlete's everyday life. In many ways this theme is interlinked with all the other themes, but it also specifically considers what the athletes are doing outside of their time spent at the club trainings. In this regard communicating with and cooperating with high schools are seen as important, according to Kjersti:

So, and many of them [the athletes] they are doing the sport programme in high school, so we have a cooperation with the Ulstein high school. To see the whole context also so that they do not get overtrained and injured and such, that is also important. So, we try to make this combination work.

As can be seen from this quote, it is important to consider the total training load that the athletes have. Without cooperation it will be difficult for both the high school and the sport club to give the athletes a well-balanced training regime. One solution is to have coaches that work both places, as seen in this quote from Arve:

Yes, we have for many years had a close cooperation with them [the high school], me as the main coach in the club have also made training plans for the school training. And the last year I have been hired at the school so that I organize the trainings [...] We have through many years had close dialogue with the sport teachers at high school to ensure that what they do at school fits with what we are planning in the evening.

Having coaches from the club involved in the high school can offer benefits both to the athletes studying there and full-time athletes (not enrolled at the school), as seen in this quote from Bjørn Axel:

There is a sport programme at the high school in Halden, and those who do elite sport as an elective have been able to do orienteering. [...] there has been instances where a coach from the club has taught orienteering at school, for instance a course in mapmaking in sprint, and then the course was held in the middle of the day so that both the students and those that are full-time athletes could join.

Even though the participants agree that having a cooperation with the high schools is beneficial, there might also be room for improvement. As Torbjørn says "it is important that

the high schools and sport clubs cooperate, and I think we gradually do that more and more, and better and better”. The participants seem to share a holistic approach in all aspects related to the club, it is about thinking about the big picture to ensure the best for the athletes and consequently the club as a whole. Cooperating with high schools are considered one of the important aspects in that regard.

4.8 The future (strategic dimension)

The participants seem aware that overcoming challenges and preparing for the future is strategically important for the continued development and success of their clubs.

Talking of *challenges*, the participants mentioned various problems connected to the Covid-19 situation. “We need more coaches, and especially now with the Covid situation when you need smaller groups and such” (Kjersti). Torbjørn mentioned loss of income because of Dugnads not being able to run as usual, and Bjørn Axel mentioned planned social events that had to be cancelled. Other (not related to Covid) challenges where “fewer members to do Dugnads” (Bjørn Axel), this he discusses in terms of people having other priorities these days “people travel more, people go to their cabin in the mountain and the cabin by the sea”. This means that the same type of job (e.g., organising the orienteering track in the woods) has to be done with fewer people, consequently “events must be done smarter, I mean with the same quality but with fewer hands” (Bjørn Axel). In this sense this can be considered both a challenge and an opportunity.

In terms of *opportunities* the participants offer various thoughts on ways to improve. Arve talks about possibilities for including active elite athletes even more:

I think we can be better; we have always been a little careful in involving athletes that are active [...] they are involved in some trainings yes. It can be challenging to use athletes that train twice a day, so it is something we have not prioritized that much. But we do have both good current athletes and previous active athletes that often drop by and partake in some trainings. But I think it is something we could be better at. We were well underway before Covid, but then these efforts have stopped now for the last year.

It has been previously noted that hosting events offer benefits to sport clubs. Kjersti mentions opportunities for being more innovative in this regard:

Currently there is a kind of running- and exercise-wave and uphill-races and such are popular, which is something we do not have at all. So yes, this is something we could possibly go for on the event side, but something that at the moment is difficult only on a voluntary basis.

The participants talk about being proactive and always focusing on what the club might improve, this is exemplified in this quote from Bjørn Axel:

So, we have always, I think it lies in the elite-sport-culture, that we never go for the easy and safe, we have always said that (P) when we are, when we think we are at the top and start to relax (P) then I have thought that someone else are doing something smarter than us, so then we have to try and do something smart.

Bjørn Axel also talk about making sure that the club continues to have the so-called enthusiasts (ildsjeler), as they are important for the sport club:

Yes, so this is something we try to do, I mean to cultivate new enthusiasts. Let them be able do the things that they want to do, and then we hope that what they want is also what the club wants (HAHA).

Torbjørn talks about environmental issues in the context of cross-country skiing, and propose that future facilities need to be well planned to ensure good conditions:

I see that there are many ski-facilitates in the region that are wrongly placed in terms of snow-conditions, just about 100 meters to low in the terrain. Or that they lie in an area that is very exposed to weather and wind. So, I think that in a transition stage now it is very important for many ski facilities to be really wise and tactical in terms of where to place the tracks, because it can be as easy as that.

The participants are aware of many possible opportunities for improvement, and again it is about thinking about the next step – what is good enough today might become obsolete in the future. Planning ahead then is very important for future success.

5.0 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore *why certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes*. This is a big question where many factors must be considered, one of which is what the leaders of these sport clubs considers important for success. In the current chapter the findings presented in the previous chapter will be discussed in in order to provide some insight.

Open and inclusive culture

According to Henriksen and colleagues (Henriksen, 2010; 2015; Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2014) a strong and coherent organizational culture is one of the features of successful ATDEs. All of the participants explained that the culture of the club is something they have worked purposefully on, and that being part of the club means that you are part of that culture. Which indicates a strong and coherent culture that supports the findings from Henriksen and colleagues. As explained by Henriksen et al. (2014) a strong and coherent culture provides stability and supports a learning environment.

The open and inclusive culture also supports another of Henriksen's (2010) feature of successful ATDEs, that is training groups with supportive relationships. Participants talk about opportunities for inclusion in a training group that values friendship and togetherness, where everyone should feel welcome despite their level of performance. This culture supports NIF's (2019c) objective that everyone should be given the opportunity to participate, without any form of discrimination. As put forward by Henriksen (2015) organizational culture has a significant impact on the performance of athletes, which is something the participants seem to be aware of.

The open and inclusive culture described by the participants can be seen as a high performing culture (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012). Based on the current research an open and inclusive culture can be seen as part of the reason these high performing clubs regularly develop elite athletes. The present research indicate that it is possible (but sometimes challenging) to combine mass sport and elite sport within the same club, and that this might be mutually beneficial. It is suggested that having different types of people (in terms of abilities, humour and so forth) create a good environment that supports human development and growth, which also relates to the joy of sport discussed next.

The joy of sport

NIF has ‘sporting joy for all’ as their vision, the findings in this study indicate that the participant clubs definitely work towards fulfilling this vision. All of the participants strongly suggest that having a training environment that is characterised as fun to be a part of is highly important for success. Consequently, the present research supports previous findings (e.g., De Bosscher and De Rycke 2017; Bjørndal et al., 2018; Tønnesen, 2009) in suggesting that enjoyment is important for individual development and success in sport. Although the Norwegian elite athlete Jacob Ingebrigtsen somewhat disagree on this point (Post, 2021). Nevertheless, from the perspective of a sport club it makes a lot of sense to focus on the joy of sport as this makes it easier to recruit new members and makes keeping athletes longer more likely. Tønnesen (2009) found that the most important reason for the elite athletes’ choice of sport (their main sport) was that they enjoyed the sport, that they had a desire to perform, and that the training environment was good. Therefore, the present research suggest that a club environment built around NIF’s vision of sporting joy for all increases the likelihood of regularly developing elite athletes.

Another important part of the joy of sport is the role the elite athletes have. The results suggest that they contribute towards a positive environment by acting as role models and motivators for the kids and youth. This seems in line with the ‘training groups with supportive relationships’ and ‘proximal role models’ features of successful ATDE’s (Henriksen, 2010). The joy of sport support a sense of togetherness and unity that create possibilities for friendship within the club despite different performance levels.

The results indicate that creating a good environment that values the joy of sport makes sense from both an athlete development perspective, and in terms of the success of the club as a whole (membership continuity). Considering the unambiguous importance that the participants gave the joy of sport, it is suggested that enjoyment is an essential ingredient for sport clubs aiming for sustained high performance.

Involving the parents

In line with previous research (Stefansen et al., 2018; Strandbu et al., 2019; Wheeler, 2012) the findings from the current research indicate that including the parents are important for sport clubs for several reasons. The results indicate that involving the parents can be considered essential for both individual athletes and the sports club as a whole.

Firstly, parents are shown to play an important role in the kids' choice of sporting activity and as motivators for further activity (Stefansen et al., 2018; Wheeler, 2012), as mentioned by one of the participants kids often follow in their parents' footsteps. Once kids have joined a particular sport, the parents are important in order to avoid dropout "we find the greatest dropout amongst the group where we never see the parents" (Torbjørn). Consequently, the parents both directly and indirectly affect the development of individual athletes and the overall performance of sport clubs. Both in terms of membership continuity and athletic accomplishment.

Further, parents can contribute as providers of resources and transport (Tønnessen, 2009; Smoll et al., 2011), sporting activities often require some form of transport to the arena/training facility and often requires buying and maintenance of equipment. Looking at it from the perspective of the clubs, the parents can be considered essential capacity. That is, parents contribute when the club is organizing events, dugnads, and they often work as coaches and additional support in training and competitions as well as holding administrative positions within the clubs. The present research suggest that parents are invaluable to the Norwegian sport clubs and should be involved in the daily running's of the club for sustained performance to be feasible.

Essential capacity

The participants clubs all have what I have described *healthy finances*. They describe their financial situation as stable (Doherty et al., 2014), and there is a fit between the resources available and what the clubs want to achieve. According to Millar and Doherty (2016), research has found that financial capacity is often a major concern facing community sport organizations, however that seems not to be the case for the participant clubs. The participant seems to have good relationships with sponsors. This might be because their clubs have such good environments, as it can be suggested that sponsors like to be associated with positivity Misener and Doherty (2009) highlight the importance of having a strategic approach to revenue generation, for the participant clubs the main sources of income (in addition to the sponsors) is related to hosting events and dugnads/voluntary work.

As described the *key facility* theme underlines the fact that the participants have facilities that are both good in terms of quality and crucially that they are also easily accessible. This

enables them to offer the athletes good training opportunities, which is something that for instance Tønnessen (2009) highlights as important for the development of athletes. However, in accordance with Tønnessen (2009) having the best facilities is not necessarily the most decisive factor – in the end it is up to the athletes themselves to do the job. But the present research indicates that having good facilities is beneficial for recruitment purposes and the motivation of athletes – at the very least having great facilities can by definition only contribute positive.

The participants describe what I have called *quality* coaches. Coaches play an important role in the development of athletes (e.g., Tønnessen, 2009; Smoll et al., 2011). The participants have to some degree different strategies when it comes coaches, as Halden for instance has a higher degree of paid professionals. However, the most crucial factor for success seems to be that they all describe their coaches as very competent. The present research indicate that it does not matter if the coaches are hired professionals or volunteers, what seem to be most important is their level of competence.

The present research suggests that having quality coaches, a healthy financial situation, and key facilities are a major reason for the club's sustained success in developing athletes.

Holistic approach

The participants are aware that the athlete's everyday life has to be considered. Since many of the athletes are also doing sport specific study programs in high school, it is important that there is a synergy between what goes on at school and what the clubs are offering. Henriksen and colleagues (e.g., Henriksen, 2010; 2015; Henriksen et al., 2010a; 2010b; 2011; 2014), describe integration of efforts as one of the features of successful ATDEs, which is something that the participant clubs do by cooperating with the high schools. The present research suggests that a lack of cooperation between high schools and the sport clubs will increase the risk of overtraining and injuries. Although this section mostly focuses on the relationship between the club and high school, it must be mentioned that the holistic approach seems to include every aspects of the participant clubs. They are looking at the bigger picture, it is indicated that the whole human being (not just the athlete) is important. In this sense the present research suggests that a holistic approach to human development is needed for sustained success. As have been indicated in the literature review, research on talent development has traditionally taken the individual perspective (Henriksen, 2014). In

line with suggestions from e.g., Henriksen (2010), to understand (and facilitate for) athletic development the present research suggest taking a holistic approach. This has both practical and theoretical implications. The present research suggested that sport clubs who are struggling with obtaining sustained high performance should look into their approach and determine whether they are considering all aspect of the athlete's life. At some point in their life, most Norwegian kids and youths will be part of a sport club (Bakken, 2019). Therefore, it can be suggested that the clubs play an important role in the growth and development stage of kids, this is also supported by (De Bosscher & De Rycke, 2017). Consequently, the clubs should try to make the best out of their contribution. Whether this leads to the development of numerous elite athletes or not, might not be the most important. But the values, the friendships, the sense of unity and belonging, the lasting impressions a life of sport can offer should be a high priority for any sport club.

The future

The participants seem well aware of the fact that overcoming challenges is important, there is always room for improvement. The present research suggest that the participant clubs and their leaders can be described as perpetual learners (Schein, 2014); they seem to be learning oriented, adaptive, and flexible. As Schein (2014) argues organizations need to be able to adapt to changing environmental conditions. In the world of sport there is always room for improvement. According to Mintzberg (1973) the more a manager understands about his job the better he will perform. The present research indicate that the participants are well knowledgeable and competent, and it can be suggested that a big reason for the club's performance is because of this fact. The participants seem to be opportunistic and proactive in their view on the future. The present research seems to support findings from Mintzberg (1973) indicating that proactive thinking is crucial to avoid being stuck in a loop of problems and inefficiency. Challenges will always arise; it will be the job of sport club leaders to respond. The present research suggests that being proactive (always thinking of ways to improve) is a key feature for successful leaders in sport clubs; the most important step is always the next one.

Why do certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?

In order to answer this question, it became apparent that the analysis should be focused on what the clubs had in common. The thematic map presented in chapter for offer a visual representation of this. The core feature of the high performing sport clubs in the present

study seems to be a good environment. That good environment is built up by a strong culture that values sporting joy for all, first and foremost. The parents have been highlighted as a crucial part of the club, but it is suggested that the club is the boss. Meaning that the club culture sets the precedence for how things are done, there is a certain (right) way of doing things that all members must follow. In addition to the parents the high performing clubs all seem to have the essential capacity needed for sustained performance. Their healthy finances are built up by key sponsorship deals, events, dugnad, and membership continuity. And can be considered a necessary framework condition for success. It can be suggested that having a good environment is in fact a reason for support, as sponsors would prefer to be associated with a positive club environment. Having facilities of good quality that are easily available are considered positive in terms of recruiting new members, membership continuity, and for athletic development purposes. The facilities also generate income by enabling the clubs to arrange big events, and better finances enable the club to improve their facilities. Coaches play a crucial role in the development of athletes (e.g., Tønnessen, 2009). The present research suggest that sport clubs need (enough) competent coaches that share the same values and ambitions as the club. Finally, it can be suggested that a key reason certain sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes is that they have proactive leaders who adopt a holistic approach to athlete development. It is the leaders of these sport clubs, their values and their engagement that enables the club to sustain a good environment that positively affects human (athletic) performance and development.

6.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to explore why certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes. Based on interviews with four leaders from three high performing Norwegian sport clubs, it can be concluded that a good club environment is important for sustained success. A good club environment is characterized by a strong culture that value the joy of sport for all, first and foremost. Everyone is welcome and the clubs offer opportunities for friendship and camaraderie despite different performance levels. The results indicate that proactive leaders with a holistic approach to athletic development are the driving forces behind such an environment. Further, it is suggested that sport clubs need the following four capacity elements for sustained success to be possible: (1) Engaged parents; they play an important role for their kids' development and is a key resource for voluntary work. (2) Quality coaches; they are crucial for athletic development. (3) Key facilities; good and available facilities are positive for recruitment purposes and athletic development. (4) Healthy finances; this enables activity and possible expansion.

6.1 Implications

It was neither within the scope of this research, nor the purpose to offer any final conclusive answers. However, it can be suggested that the present research contribute new and interesting information on the topic of developing athletes in sport clubs. First and foremost, the present research offers valuable insight that those affiliated with Norwegian sport clubs should find interesting. As such it is proposed that 'struggling' clubs in particular might have something to learn from the results of this thesis. On a related note, this research seems to support 'the traditional Norwegian sport model'. The joy of sport. That is what community sport clubs should focus on. And remember; the most important step is always the next one.

The participant clubs offer individual sport(s). An interesting proposal for future research therefore is to explore whether high performing Norwegian team sport clubs share similar features. In line with Henriksen (2010), more research with a holistic approach on athlete development is recommended. Finally, further research on the role of Norwegian sport clubs in developing elite athletes is recommended.

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8.0 Appendix

8.1 NSD approval



NSD's assessment

Project title

Why do certain Norwegian sport-clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?

Reference number

884616

Registered

25.02.2021 av Fenne Per Andre Munkeby - per.a.m.fenne@stud.himolde.no

Data controller (institution responsible for the project)

Høgskolen i Molde – Vitenskapelig Høgskole i Logistikk / Avdeling for økonomi og samfunnsvitenskap

Project leader (academic employee/supervisor or PhD candidate)

Kjell Marius Herskedal, kjell.m.herskedal@himolde.no, tlf: 41441398

Type of project

Student project, Master's thesis

Contact information, student

Per Andre Munkeby Fenne, perandrefenne@gmail.com, tlf: 95903874

Project period

08.03.2021 - 31.12.2021

Status

09.03.2021 - Assessed

Assessment (1)

09.03.2021 - Assessed

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet med vedlegg den 09.03.2021, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER

Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilke type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

<https://www.nsd.no/personverntjenester/fylle-ut-meldeskjema-for-personopplysninger/melde-endringer-i->

meldeskjema

Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET

Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 31.12.2021.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG

Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake.

Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER

NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke behandles til nye, uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lengre enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER

Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), og dataportabilitet (art. 20).

NSD vurderer at informasjonen om behandlingen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13.

Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER

NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1 f) og sikkerhet (art. 32).

Zoom og Teams er databehandlere i prosjektet. NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene til bruk av databehandler, jf. art 28 og 29.

For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og/eller rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET

NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet.

Lykke til med prosjektet!

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

8.2 Information and consent form

Vil du delta i forskningsprosjektet: *Why do certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?*

Dette er et spørsmål til deg om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt hvor *formålet er å undersøke hvilke faktorer som ligger til grunn for at spesifikke idrettslag jevnlig utvikler elite-utøvere*. I dette skrivet gir vi deg informasjon om målene for prosjektet og hva deltakelse vil innebære for deg.

Formål

Formålet med prosjektet er å undersøke om det finnes noen fellesnevner/likhetstrekk ved de idrettslagene som presterer på et høyt nivå med tanke på å frembringe gode utøvere over tid. Prosjektet vil ha et overordnet organisatorisk perspektiv, der ledelse, organisasjonskultur, prestasjonskultur, og kapasitet er sentrale faktorer.

Prosjektet er en masteroppgave, og problemstillingen er «*hvorfor lykkes enkelte Norske idrettslag jevnlig med å utvikle elite-utøvere?*». I den forbindelse vil det bli undersøkt om det kan begrunnes i bestemte faktorer som for eksempel, kulturen i idrettslaget.

Hvem er ansvarlig for forskningsprosjektet?

Høgskolen i Molde er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

Hvorfor får du spørsmål om å delta?

Utvalget er blitt strategisk plukket utfra gitte kriterier, der idrettslagets historikk - og status på nåværende tidspunkt, med tanke på antall aktive elite-utøvere er vektlagt. Videre er det tenkt at idrettslagene skal representere ulike idretter, dette for å kunne sammenligne idrettslag som representerer idretter av ulik størrelse i Norge. Totalt er målet å intervju 6 forskjellige ledere i 3 forskjellige idrettslag.

Hva innebærer det for deg å delta?

Hvis du velger å delta i prosjektet innebærer det at du ser deg villig til å delta på et intervju. Intervjuet har en estimert varighet på 1 time og vil foregå digitalt, (ZOOM eller Teams). Intervjuet tas opp på lydopptaker, og vil i ettertid transkriberes.

Det er frivillig å delta

Det er frivillig å delta i prosjektet. Hvis du velger å delta, kan du når som helst trekke samtykket tilbake uten å oppgi noen grunn. Alle dine personopplysninger vil da bli slettet. Det vil ikke ha noen negative konsekvenser for deg hvis du ikke vil delta eller senere velger å trekke deg.

Ditt personvern – hvordan vi oppbevarer og bruker dine opplysninger

Vi vil bare bruke opplysningene om deg til formålene vi har fortalt om i dette skrivet. Vi behandler opplysningene konfidensielt og i samsvar med personvernregelverket. Det er bare student Per Andre M Fenne og veileder Kjell Marius Herskedal som vil ha tilgang til dine opplysninger. Data og mobile enheter brukt i forskningsprosjektet er kode beskyttet.

Deltakeren vil kunne gjenkjennes i publikasjonen. Kun opplysninger som er relevante for problemstillingen vil publiseres, dette kan dreie seg om din idrettslige bakgrunn, utdanning og erfaringer som leder i idretten.

Hva skjer med opplysningene dine når vi avslutter forskningsprosjektet?

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes 21.05.2021. Innhentede opplysninger og lydopptak slettes innen utgangen av 2021, dette for å ta hensyn til eventuelle forsinkelser/utvidelser av prosjektet.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg, og å få utlevert en kopi av opplysningene,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- å få slettet personopplysninger om deg, og
- å sende klage til Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Hva gir oss rett til å behandle personopplysninger om deg?

Vi behandler opplysninger om deg basert på ditt samtykke.

På oppdrag fra Høgskolen i Molde har NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS vurdert at behandlingen av personopplysninger i dette prosjektet er i samsvar med personvernregelverket.

Hvor kan jeg finne ut mer?

Hvis du har spørsmål til studien, eller ønsker å benytte deg av dine rettigheter, ta kontakt med:

- Høgskolen i Molde ved student Per Andre M Fenne, E-mail: per.a.m.fenne@stud.himolde.no, Tlf: 95903874
- Høgskolen i Molde ved veileder Kjell Marius Herskedal, E-mail: kjell.m.herskedal@himolde.no, Tlf: 41441398
- Vårt personvernombud: Merete Ludviksen. E-mail: merete.ludviksen@himolde.no, Tlf: 71214118

Hvis du har spørsmål knyttet til NSD sin vurdering av prosjektet, kan du ta kontakt med:

- NSD – Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS på epost (personverntjenester@nsd.no) eller på telefon: 55 58 21 17.

Med vennlig hilsen

Prosjektansvarlig

Student

Kjell Marius Herskedal

Per Andre Munkeby Fenne

Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg har mottatt og forstått informasjon om prosjektet «*why do certain Norwegian sport clubs succeed in regularly developing elite athletes?*» og har fått anledning til å stille spørsmål. Jeg samtykker til:

- å delta i intervju.
- at mitt navn og idrettslag kan publiseres.

Jeg samtykker til at mine opplysninger behandles frem til prosjektet er avsluttet

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

8.3 Interview guide

Informasjon

Velkommen, og takk for at du tok deg tid til å delta i denne undersøkelsen. Jeg er takknemlig for at du velger å bruke av tiden din til å belyse temaet mitt.

Temaet for dette intervjuet er 'prestasjonskultur' i idrettslag. Hensikten er å kartlegge hvilke faktorer som fører frem gode idrettsutøvere over tid sett ut ifra klubbledelsens perspektiver. Intervjuet vil være en del av datagrunnlaget for min masteroppgave i Sport Management ved Høgskolen i Molde.

Intervjuet vill bli tatt opp elektronisk, deretter transkriberes intervjuet og lydfilen vil bli slettet. Det skriftlige dokumentet vil bli oppbevart i henhold til gjeldende regelverk og vil bli slettet etter at oppgaven er fullført.

Intervjuet forventes å ta omtrent 1 time. På grunn av personvern hensyn vil jeg informere om at du ikke kan navngi eller på annen måte identifisere andre personer i løpet av dette intervjuet. Har du noen spørsmål før vi starter?

Bakgrunnsinformasjon

1. Kan du fortelle litt om deg selv og din bakgrunn?
 - Idrettslig; utdanning; jobberfaring
2. Kan du fortelle litt om din rolle i klubben? (Når- og hvorfor startet du, arbeidsoppgaver, hvilke erfaringer har du gjort deg?).

Klubbkultur (Schein, 2004; Cruickshank & Collins, 2012)

1. Hvordan vil du beskrive kulturen i klubben/gruppen?
 - Synlige sider
 - Regler og normer
 - «Usynlige» sider (uskrevne regler)
 - Verdier (hva er viktig, samfunnsaktør? Prestasjoner?)
 - Kulturbærere/kontinuitetsbærere: Typer, egenskaper, drivkrefter?
2. Hvor viktig er (og på hvilken måte foregår) involveringen av foreldre? Trener? Utøvere?
3. Hvordan er arbeidsfordelingen mellom frivillige og ansatte i klubben?
4. Hvordan oppfattes klubben fra utsiden? (Samlingspunkt? Positivt miljø?)

Prestasjonskultur og talentutvikling (Cruickshank & Collins, 2012; Henriksen, 2010;2015; Söderström et al., 2018).

1. Hvordan vil du forklare klubbens suksess i tiden du har vært her?
2. På hvilken måte *legger dere til rette* for at satsende utøvere skal kunne utvikle seg til fremtidens elite-utøvere?
3. Hvilke *kvalifikasjoner* har vært viktig for å få dette til?
 - Interne (trenere, f.eks.)
 - Eksterne (krets, spesialister, testing etc.)
4. Fokuserer dere på etterutdanning og faglig påfyll for trenere i klubben?
 - Hvorfor?
5. Hvordan vil du si forholdet mellom bredde- og toppidrett oppfattes i klubben?

Klubbens kapasitet (Doherty et al., 2014; Misener & Doherty, 2009)

1. Hvordan oppfatter du tilgjengeligheten og kvaliteten på *anleggene* klubben bruker?
2. Kan du si litt om klubbens *økonomi*?
3. Har dere tilstrekkelig *tilgang til trenere* i forhold til antall utøvere?
4. Hvordan ser du på *tilgangen til frivillige* i forbindelse med trening og konkurranser?
 - *Strategier for hvordan rekruttere frivillige?*
5. Har dere noen form for samarbeid med videregående skoler og/eller høyskoler i nærområdet, med tanke på å legge til rette for utøverne?
 - Betydning av samarbeidet?

Fremtiden (Mintzberg, 1973, Schein, 2004)

1. Hvilke utfordringer ser du for deg at klubben må løse i fremtiden?
2. Hva er din visjon for klubbens retning fremover?
3. Har klubben klare strategier og fremtidsplaner?
4. Er klubben rustet for dette?
5. Er du rustet for dette?

Avslutning

Har du noe du vil tilføye?

Takk for intervjuet! Om du ønsker kan jeg sende deg resultatene når oppgaven er ferdig.