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**THE SOCIAL CONTRACT -
CONSIDERING EXPECTATIONS,
CLUB IDENTITIES AND MEMBER 'FIT'**

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THE BASICS UNDERPINNING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

- All organizations are networks of social relations built on the very basic understanding that for quite a few purposes we need help to solve tasks. This is especially salient in sport in which a teammate and/or an opponent is needed in most cases.
- All social relations are governed by expectations. Some are implicit or informal such as between a group of friends or between the kids and the parents. Others are made explicit or formal such as between an employee and an employer or between a member and a club.
- However, even though many relationships are governed by explicit expectations, as between a customer and a salesperson (an exchange of goods/services and payment), most relationships are simultaneously governed by implicit ones (e.g., "the customer is always right").



EXPECTATIONS AND EXCHANGES

- For sport specifically (as in many other third sector fields), the informality (as opposed to the formality associated with working life) embedded in the traditions of the activity (play, games, fun, recreation) often results in implicit expectations superceding explicit ones.
- For example, as in many aspects of social life, common decency dictates that I as a soccer dad take with me a few of my son's teammates in the car when driving him to an away game. That is, my (or as in this case my son's) membership in the club does not oblige me to do that, but general social expectations incline me to do so.
- In turn, this is also an example of how many relations are governed by exchanges based on certain expectations. Using Social Exchange Theory (Zafirovski, 2005), some are 'reciprocal' (as in the case above) in which actors perform beneficial acts for others without necessarily knowing whether it will be reciprocated. Others are 'negotiated' and involve explicit agreements focusing on measurable benefits ("I'll cover for you this weekend if you cover for me next weekend").



THE DOWNSIDES OF NEGOTIATED EXCHANGES

- While reciprocal exchanges have characterized sport practices much of their existence, we see that contemporary exchanges have become more negotiated (Fahlén, et al., 2015).
- Evidence of such a development is not least the professionalization of sport and the increasing regulation of relationships in sport (e.g., player contracts, codes of conducts and gender quotas). We see also how members are seeking ways to disavow themselves from communal duties.
- Even though these processes have brought with them many positive effects, such as employment security, appropriate behaviour and equality, research also tells us they reflect a broader replacement of relationships of trust by ones governed by rules (Nichols et al., 2016).
- In addition, we can see how such processes are self-perpetuating insofar as the more rules we introduce, the more people ask for more rules (Fahlén, 2017).



ESTABLISHING RECIPROCITY

- Avoiding such side effects and at the same time returning to a more traditional understanding of a club as a group of individuals joining forces to create common benefits, reciprocal exchanges are preferable to negotiated ones.
- However, reciprocity cannot be created out of a vacuum, it demands trusting relationships developed through mutually advantageous social exchange (Flynn, 2005).
- Establishing trusting relationships, in turn, most often demands some sort of social cohesion, sense of community or belonging.
- Key in creating cohesion, community and belonging in a sport setting, research tells us (Stenling & Fahlén, 2015), is to stimulate the formation of common values



ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY

- In our research, we conceptualize common values as Organizational Identity (e.g., Glynn, 2008), essentially providing answers to an organization's view of 'who we are' and 'what we do' (e.g., Wry et al., 2011) - the sport club's conception of its core purpose and practices.
- By posing these questions to a representative sample of the approx. 20 000 sport clubs registered in Sweden (affiliating almost a third of 10 million Swedes), we were able to construct 10 identity types, each one with its own core purpose, target group, core practice, identity-defining marker/s and logic of action.
- In doing so, we could simultaneously say something about what kind of explicit and/or implicit expectations each type convey to existing and prospective members, and thereby deliver some answers to questions about potential 'fit' between certain club types and certain types of members since members typically "choose activities consistent with the salient aspects of their identity and support institutions incorporating such identities" (Ashforth and Mael 1989, p. 25).

Organizational identity	Core purpose	Target group	Core practice
The Sports-Educating Club, 56%	Educate members in the sport/s provided by the club	Children and youth in general Adults with prior experience of practicing the sport	Preparation for and participation in institutionalized competitive sports systems
The Village-Preservation Club, 10%	Secure survival and prosperity of the village	All villagers	Variety of sports- and non-sports activities
The Non-competitive Sports Club, 8%	Widen range of activities within Swedish voluntary sports	Individuals not attracted to competitive sports	Sports activities without a competitive element
The Social Fostering Club, 6%	Produce democratic, socially integrated citizens	Children and youth	Adult-led, formal club activities (character of sports secondary)
The Lifetime Sports-Provider Club, 6%	Provide sports-for-all	All people all ages	Preparation for and participation in institutionalized competitive sports systems Keep-fit exercise sessions
The Group-of-Friends Club, 4%	Provide opportunity for a group of adult friends to spend time together, pursuing a shared interest	Closed – recruitment solely from the social network of the adult team-members	Participation in low levels of institutionalized competitive sports system
The Self-Realization Club, 3%	Provide avenues for self-fulfillment	Adults seeking to challenge themselves	Coach-led high intensity training sessions
The High-Performance Club, 3%	Excel on the playing field	Children and youth with ambition to be the best Adults matching required performance standards	Perfection of sports skills
The School Sports Club, 2%	Enhance image and appeal of the school	Students	Participation in school sports championships
The Disability Sports Club, 1%	Secure access to sports as a societal institution	Disabled of all ages	Various competitive as well as non-competitive sports activities



MEMBER 'FIT'

- In extension, by getting hold of club type – member 'fit', we can also say something about the promises of reciprocity. That is, about the potential to establish the reciprocal exchanges known to be conducive to social cohesion.
- Consider, for example, the difference between the implicit expectations conveyed by a club with the core purpose of "Providing opportunity for a group of adult friends to spend time together, pursuing a shared interest" and the expectations conveyed by a club with the core purpose of "Excelling on the playing field" or between "Securing survival and prosperity of the village" and "Provide avenues for self-fulfilment".
- Consider also, in a next step, the prospects of establishing social cohesion, sense of community or belonging in a group of members in which the individual rationales for becoming a member differ to the same extent.



CONSEQUENCES CLUB GOVERNANCE

- Pinpointing AND discussing core values is vital to establish social cohesion in a club (“a governance able to create shared value within the organization is an important tool to promote both commitment and engagement”, Zollo et al., 2019)
- Considering how such values are conveyed is key in supporting good fit between existing members and between existing and potential members (attraction/retention strategies)
- Good fit fosters reciprocal relationships while the opposite tends to stimulate a need for negotiated relationships (“this [reciprocal relationship] allows volunteers to perceive the required tasks not as imposed duties but as activities related to the shared value and interest of the organization”, Zollo et al., 2019)
- The more the club can stimulate reciprocity, the less time, energy and resources must be spent on constructing, implementing and enforcing rules, regulations, guidelines and manuals



CONCLUSIONS AND TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

- Focus on the 'social' rather than the 'contract'. With established reciprocity, carrots, sticks and sermons are less needed.
- While consensus is almost always to prefer, remember that member retention is associated with how the majority treats the minority. That is, even if the majority of the members engage in reciprocal exchanges, you need to find ways to get the minority on-board without compromising club values.
- Even if it is convenient to think of member-club fit as a responsibility for new members joining a club, members join clubs for a number of different reasons (not merely because of the expectations the club conveys), eventually leaving you with the members you have.
- Thus, the responsibility to stimulate cohesion, community and belonging rest with the club management.



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THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

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