

Artículo de investigación

Title: Management culture in sports organizations in Ecuador: A look at the key actors.

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to analyze the managerial culture of sport in Ecuador, emphasizing high performance and neighborhood leagues. The research involved conducting in-depth interviews with key people who hold management positions in these sports segments, which is why the methodology was based on a qualitative, descriptive and field approach, materialized in the method of grounded theory. The results revealed that there is a managerial task that to a large extent is exercised without the necessary professional, technical and human skills, with weaknesses in academic training and with little training in the managerial area. It is concluded that these factors, properly aligned with effective actions and under a shared destiny, would guarantee a successful performance, in order to direct the Ecuadorian sport to better results at the local, regional and international level.

Keywords: Managerial culture; sports organizations; High intensity sport; neighborhood leagues, grounded theory.

Resumen: Este artículo tiene por objeto analizar la cultura gerencial del deporte en Ecuador, haciendo énfasis en el alto

rendimiento y en las ligas barriales. La investigación implicó la realización de entrevistas en profundidad a personas clave que ejercen cargos gerenciales en estos segmentos deportivos, razón por la cual la metodología se apoyó en un enfoque cualitativo, descriptivo y de campo, materializado en el método de la teoría fundamentada. Los resultados revelaron que existe un quehacer gerencial que en gran medida se ejerce sin las necesarias competencias profesionales, técnicas y humanas, con debilidades en la formación académica y con escasa capacitación en el área gerencial. Se concluye que estos factores adecuadamente alineados con acciones efectivas y bajo un destino compartido garantizarían un desempeño exitoso, a los fines de encaminar al deporte ecuatoriano a mejores resultados en el ámbito local, regional e internacional.

Palabras Clave: Cultura gerencial; organizaciones del deporte; deporte de alto rendimiento; ligas barriales; teoría fundamentada.

Introduction

Sports are a universally recognized activity and are highly organized in all countries, practiced by a large percentage of humanity and conceived as art, science, entertainment, and health. In Ecuador, sports are deeply rooted in society and, in recent years, have achieved significant positioning. In everyday life and through social media, information related to this activity appears recurrently, becoming a key axis that encompasses socioeconomic, political, and axiological dimensions, generating evident interest in sectors where it previously lacked importance.

Today, the Ecuadorian State—as well as provincial governments, municipalities, and public and private institutions—relies on sports and their athletes as referential icons of success to highlight their management results. These aspects undoubtedly grant relevance to sports, especially high-performance sports and community-level sports, two sporting contexts focused on managerial culture as a phenomenon of interest in this research.

Based on the previous considerations, it is pertinent to develop a conceptual approach to both sporting segments. In this regard, community-level sports—also known as sport for all, popular sport, or mass sport—refer to physical activities carried out freely and spontaneously with purely recreational purposes, whose practice benefits large populations and is supported by a cultural tradition (Arias, 2017). This definition of community-level sport is complemented by the following:

... is oriented toward benefiting large sectors of society, with the purpose of enhancing social well-being and quality of life through physical and sports activities. It addresses aspects related to improving

physical health, emotional calm, personal satisfaction, and, consequently, preventing sedentary lifestyles, fostering positive attitudes in individuals (Aguilar, 2014, p. 54).

It is therefore evident that community-level sport is aimed at offering significant benefits to broad sectors of society, primarily by improving quality of life, promoting the constructive use of free time, fostering social inclusion, and enhancing mental, physical, and emotional well-being. In essence, community or mass sport is located at the base of the sports pyramid, while high-performance sport occupies its highest level (Cazorla, 1979). High-performance sport, for its part, is understood as an activity carried out recurrently, consistently, and systematically, with high levels of demand and focused on highly competitive international settings (Arias, 2017). Viewed in this way, it is a subcategory of physical activity—highly specialized and competitive—performed individually or collectively, subordinated to compliance with institutionalized rules and norms “...that requires physical training and is generally performed at high intensities. Thus, its main objective is competition, which always produces a measurable outcome” (Villegas, 2012, p. 12).

Although high-performance sport and community-level sport operate under different perspectives according to their purpose, both coincide in being organizational structures through which the work of groups of people is ordered and coordinated. Individuals within these structures assume functions, responsibilities, and tasks according to their position and hierarchy in order to achieve planned objectives and goals.

In this regard, a sports organization—

whether oriented toward large-scale competitive entertainment or toward sport for all, regardless of sex, age, ethnicity, or physical or mental condition—cannot achieve its proposed quantitative and qualitative goals if individuals perform their duties in isolation. Rather, they must function under a system of relationships aligned with clear objectives, shared purposes, and common benefits. Under this system, a sports organization relies on the coordinated alignment of actions among individuals, considering their responsibilities across different hierarchical levels, in order to achieve established objectives (Aguilar, 2014).

Accordingly, sports organizations require managerial practices capable of materializing coordinated collective actions among the individuals within the unit they lead to meet established goals and objectives. Indeed, Calabuig, Gómez, and Liceras (2010) argue that the sports manager represents one of the main driving forces within an organization, and that their functions include planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. This aligns with the perspective of Peiró, Ramos, and Martínez-Tur (1995), who specify that sports management encompasses a set of responsibilities and tasks involving the administrative functions of planning, organizing, evaluating, and controlling activities.

Based on these authors' viewpoints, the sports manager emerges as the key actor in a sports organization who must ensure excellent results through well-structured processes of planning, organization, direction, and control. A broader conception that highlights the importance of sports management is as follows:

“The success of operations depends on

the knowledge that managers have regarding internal factors, such as work levels, employee skills and capacities, functions, and motivation toward organizational goals, etc. Equally important is managers' understanding of external factors such as the global and local economy, technology, politics, market competition, youth needs and trends, and the social and cultural context of young people” (Acosta, 2005, p. 252).

This clearly reflects the value placed on a sports manager who possesses the knowledge and essential capabilities to appropriately handle internal and external factors that affect sports organizations. In this sense, the internal factors involve organizational and managerial aspects, many of which are subjective in nature and relate to both intrapersonal and interpersonal capacities. Regarding external factors, on one hand, the macro environment is evident, pertaining to national and international political, economic, social, and demographic settings, while on the other hand, the microenvironment corresponds to the specific needs demanded by those directly involved in sports and by other stakeholder groups.

This scenario clearly requires sports managers to be trained, with the ultimate goal of operating effectively and under parameters of excellence. In this regard, Vargas (2011) considers that a sports manager must possess preparation, education, and training in management competencies in order to interact successfully within the sports system. In turn, Campos (2007) argues that sport requires managers who are academically trained and qualified in physical activity and sports, and that among them, the most competent should be selected.

From this perspective, it is widely agreed that a sports manager must be characterized by the acquisition and development of knowledge and desirable competencies for the exercise of their role, which are inevitably achieved through academic training and ongoing professional development. Additionally, Aguilar and Guerra (2015) indicate that, beyond the knowledge and competencies of the sports manager, practical experience in sports environments must also be added, as this contributes to anticipating the circumstances surrounding the sector. Thus, knowledge, skills, and experience constitute three factors that become critical to managerial success, given that the effectiveness of a sports organization largely depends on this actor.

From this standpoint, the sports manager plays an essential role within the sports system, whether from the perspective of high-performance sports or community-level sports. Such managerial performance, given the characteristics described, must be sustained over time through the establishment of a solid culture built upon subjective human aspects that encompass axiological, attitudinal, and emotional components, which connect through a system of cultural symbols reflected in the behavior and relationships among individuals within sports organizations. These symbolic systems of culture are complemented as follows:

The symbolic systems of culture (...) manifest through codes—aligned with a characteristic language and social behavior among peers, collaborators, and related actors—such as perceptions, emotions, attitudes, habits, beliefs, values, traditions, routines, and other forms of interaction within and among the groups that exist in these organizations. These symbolic systems are established through a set of rules and norms

that must be observed (Gómez, 2017, p. 122).

As observed, the behavior of social actors and language function as codes that are interrelated and, in essence, correspond to a system of cultural symbols (Geertz, 1987; Schneider, 1980). From this perspective, culture is the way in which a group of people organizes its experiences around a concrete reality through shared perceptions, understanding, and interpretation of everyday interactions that guide the behavior of its members (Levy-Strauss, 1985; Goodenough, 1981). Based on these considerations, there is no doubt that the common denominator in any culture is the use of a system of symbols, a specific language, and a set of rules that regulate relationships.

It thus becomes evident that culture represents a shared frame of reference accepted by the members of an organization, guiding how they think and act in the face of different circumstances. This includes intangible aspects—attitudes, values, emotions—as well as tangible elements related to everyday operations. In essence, organizational culture is configured as a system through which individuals interact, meaning “...a way of life, a system of beliefs and values, an accepted form of interaction and typical relationships, and the norms shared by the members of a given organization” (Gómez, 2017, p. 180). In short, organizational culture encompasses and influences everything that occurs within an institution.

Furthermore, it is an organizational culture that must be attended to and shaped through managerial practice—one that, beyond planning, structuring, and systematizing the complexities inherent in organizational dynamics, possesses the capacity to inspire others (Kotter, 2007). All of this contributes to ensuring coherence between planned strategies and actual results. In other words, a managerial culture capable of exerting influence to mobilize individuals—and subsequently sports organizations—toward a shared vision.

In this context, Gómez (2017) reveals that sports organizations with a strong managerial culture are able to integrate aspects such as habits, routines, and learned behavioral patterns within organizational life; appreciation for work; alignment of roles that ensure group cohesion; the creation of precise communication processes—whether for technical, affective, or emotional reasons; and the establishment of a system of shared values and beliefs, among other elements.

It is also important to note the contributions of Ettinger and Schvarstein (1992), who emphasize that managerial culture conditions the ways of thinking, growing, acting, and fulfilling managerial functions and tasks within an organization. These processes involve forms of social interaction that are communicated, disseminated, maintained, and shared by groups through a system that operates with a common language understood by all social actors.

Correspondingly, Granell (1997) warns that managerial culture is oriented toward incubating changes and transformations that are beneficial and relevant for organizational success, without losing sight of the transformations occurring within the global environment. Ultimately, managerial culture can be understood as a frame of reference accepted by the social actors involved in sports, reflecting a way of thinking and acting adopted by the manager in the face of concrete situations, providing direction and coherence to actions.

Considering these elements, this research focused on analyzing managerial culture in Ecuadorian sports, taking into account two major segments: high-performance sports and community-level leagues. Accordingly, the study examined key actors with managerial responsibilities in Ecuadorian sports who are linked to these segments, with the purpose of allowing them to reflect on the empirical reality. Ultimately, the objective was to determine their perspectives regarding the phenomenon under study and to identify

behavioral patterns based on three previously selected categories: (a) Managerial Profile; (b) Characteristics of Organizational Culture; and (c) Conception of Managerial Culture.

This study is justified by the limited number of investigations in the Ecuadorian sports sector, particularly in the field of management. Its results are expected to serve as a platform for continuing similar research initiatives and to contribute to the production and expansion of knowledge by providing important theoretical and practical insights of utilitarian value to the social context, allowing replication in other organizations that promote sports.

Methodology

Given that reality is a system in constant interaction and change, this study adopted a qualitative approach, which in turn determined the type of research in terms of level and design. The qualitative approach sought to analyze and interpret reality from the perspective of social actors in order to understand what occurs within the phenomenon under study. In this context, attempting to characterize the qualitative approach required systematization, whose central aim was to interpret the meaning that individuals attribute to their own social life. Accordingly, the main aspects that delimit this research modality are: (a) the social world, the subject, subjectivity, and culture; (b) the activity performed by the actor; (c) the processes in which actors interact; (d) the meanings of action; (e) the subjective definitions of action; and (f) language and communication (Rusque, 2007).

Indeed, this approach allowed the construction of knowledge through interpretations arising from the subjective consciousness of social actors. Based on

this premise, it was necessary to immerse oneself in the environment where the participants interact, with the objective of gathering data from their expectations, experiences, and lived situations that shape their behaviors. These data were recorded and used as the basis for interpreting their conception of the phenomenon under investigation.

At the same time, the study was situated within descriptive research, through which those aspects related to managerial practices that shape the prevailing culture in the selected Ecuadorian sports organizations were identified and analyzed. This type of research made it possible to collect data of interest to be conceptualized, categorized, and interpreted from a qualitative perspective, based on the meanings attributed by individuals (Cerda, 1991).

Likewise, the design was framed as field research in order to maintain direct contact with social actors in their natural environment (Arias, 2016), with the purpose of achieving an accurate interpretation of what they experience, feel, and perceive—that is, their way of seeing and understanding their reality. The qualitative interpretation of these data was triangulated with a quantitative analysis to strengthen the study (Martínez, 2009).

To meet these objectives, the research was grounded in grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 2002), which made it possible to systematize the data gathered from reality. This method was supported by five key components: (1) Theoretical sampling; (2) The constant comparative method; (3) Open coding; (4) Axial coding; and (5) Selective coding.

In this regard, the research began with theoretical sampling, which consisted of

intentionally selecting an expert for an in-depth interview, based on the criterion that the individual possess extensive knowledge and experience in sports management, as well as experience as an athlete and/or coach in competitive settings, and hold a university-level degree.

Once the interview was conducted and transcribed, it was configured as a hermeneutic unit to be analyzed first through open coding, with the purpose of breaking down the data, identifying concepts, labeling them, and classifying them into categories, and subsequently through axial coding to relate the emerging concepts with their corresponding categories and determine the type of relationship. Upon completing the analysis of the interview, theoretical sampling was again carried out with another interviewee under the same selection criteria and coding procedures. Theoretical sampling continued iteratively with additional interviewees until theoretical saturation was reached—that is, when no new data emerged for analysis.

It is important to note that throughout the entire coding process, the constant comparative method was implemented within each interview and across interviews, in order to refine the data and ensure accurate conceptual organization in terms of conceptualization, categorization, and relationships among them.

Finally, the data that emerged during both coding stages were integrated and refined through selective coding to develop interpretations of the findings within the empirical reality. These findings were then contrasted with the state of the art to identify existing gaps. In total, the research involved four interview participants with

the necessary potential and relevance, as shown in.

Table 1.

Interviewed Experts Based on Their Knowledge, Experience, and Involvement in Sports.

INTERVIEWEE	POSITION	SUMMARY OF EXPERIENCE
Jorge Granja Cobos	Vice President of the Ecuadorian Volleyball Federation	Former national team athlete and coach. Bachelor's degree in Physical Culture from the Lenin Institute in Moscow. Professor at the University of San Francisco de Quito. Connected to the sports field for 40 years.
José Antonio Guevara	Vice President of the Pichincha Sports Federation	Vice President of the National Sports Federation of Ecuador. Former athlete. Bachelor's degree in Public Administration. Lecturer at the Central University of Ecuador. Has served as a member of various sports organizations, including Vice President of the Ecuadorian Olympic Committee. More than 50 years involved in sports.
Hugo León	President of the Neighborhood League of Quito	Más de 60 años en el deporte. Ex atleta de alto rendimiento y Profesor Normalista. Dirigente en distintas organizaciones del deporte.
Pedro Fernández	President of the Quito Community Sports League, District Metropolitano de Quito	Lawyer with a master's degree in Football Business and Administration from the Juan Capistrano Institute. Experience in sports marketing as a result of fragmenting the data. These labels were classified into three previously selected categories based on their properties or attributes, as follows:

Results and Discussion

Analysis Through Open Coding and Axial Coding

The analysis process using open coding required a rigorous and detailed examination and interpretation of the data. From the outset of the textual analysis of the primary documents—converted into

- **Managerial Profile:** Traits associated with managerial practice that ensure desirable behaviors for successful performance.
- **Characteristics of Organizational Culture:** Attributes of a system determined by the set of interpersonal relationships within the organization in connection with the organizational philosophy.
- **Conception of Managerial Culture:** The stance regarding how managerial practice is viewed and understood from the perspective of a culture oriented toward generating personal, group, and organizational changes.

This data fragmentation facilitated the conceptual organization in open coding, and upon consolidation, a total of 147

conceptual labels were generated and grouped into the aforementioned three categories (Table 2).

Table 2.

Conceptual Organization in Open Coding.

CATEGORIES			
ANALYSIS UNITS	Management Profile	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	Conception of Management Culture
Interviewee 1	13	17	16
Interviewee 2	6	9	9
Interviewee 3	7	12	14
Interviewee 4	5	22	17
TOTAL	31	60	56
%	21,09%	40,81%	38,10%
147 CONCEPTUAL LABELS			

Source: Authors' own elaboration .

In this regard, the figures indicate that 40.81% of the conceptual labels were classified in the category “Characteristics of organizational culture,” very close to the category “Conception of managerial culture” with 38.10%, data that was reflected similarly in each of the units of analysis.

In this regard, the figures indicate that 40.81% of the conceptual labels were classified under the category “Characteristics of Organizational Culture,” very close to the category “Conception of Managerial Culture,” which accounted for 38.10%. These data were similarly reflected across each of the units of analysis.

These results highlight the interest in emphasizing aspects related to organizational philosophy—that is, the reason for being of organizations, how they project themselves toward the future, and how the behavior of individuals is guided. This includes attention to mission, vision, organizational values, as well as beliefs,

and habits, among others. Such organizational philosophy also requires, as a condition for its fulfillment, managerial practice that combines the authority and formal power granted to plan, structure, and systematize the complexities inherent in an organization’s dynamics with the capacity to influence, persuade, and inspire others. In this sense, an organizational and managerial culture should contribute to reorienting behaviors conducive to achieving strategic objectives and goals in Ecuadorian sports organizations.

Furthermore, the 147 conceptual labels that emerged during open coding were analyzed through axial coding to relate them to their respective categories and determine the type of relationship based on the following criteria:

Property: Traits that identify and differentiate a concept, characterizing its essence within a category.

Consequence: A concept that arises as a result of an action or fact derived from a category.

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Part: Although not a distinguishing trait, it constitutes a component or segment of a concept in relation to the category.

Contradictory: Concepts that conflict with or differ from the category.

By linking these types of relationships between the conceptual labels and the

categories “Managerial Profile,” “Characteristics of Organizational Culture,” and “Conception of Managerial Culture,” Table 3 presents figures that show the tendencies both in the total population of interviewees and individually, as distinct units of analysis.

Table 3.

Relationship between conceptual labels and categories in axial coding.

TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN CONCEPTUAL LABELS

CATEGORIES		It is a Property	It is Part	It is Contradictory	It is a Consequence	TOTAL
Interviewee 1	Managerial Profile	4	1	5	3	13
	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	4	1	3	9	17
	Conception of Organizational Culture	6	2	4	4	16
	TOTAL	14	4	12	16	46
	%	30,43%	8,70%	26,09%	34,78%	100%
Interviewee 2	Managerial Profile	1	0	1	4	6
	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	2	0	2	5	9
	Conception of Organizational Culture	4	0	0	5	9
	TOTAL	7	0	3	14	24
	%	29,17%	0,00%	12,50%	58,33%	100%
Interviewee 3	Managerial Profile	3	1	1	2	7
	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	3	1	0	8	12
	Conception of Organizational Culture	9	1	1	3	14
	TOTAL	15	3	2	13	33
	%	45,46%	9,09%	6,06%	39,39%	100%
Interviewee 4	Managerial Profile	3	1	1	0	5
	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	3	6	1	12	22
	Conception of Organizational Culture	4	2	2	9	17
	TOTAL	10	9	4	21	44
	%	22,72%	20,46%	9,10%	47,72%	100%
Total Interviewee	Managerial Profile	11	3	8	9	31
	Characteristics of Organizational Culture	12	8	6	34	60

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Conception of Organizational Culture	23	5	7	21	56
TOTAL	46	16	21	64	147
%	31,29%	10,89%	14,29%	43,53%	100%

Source: Authors' own elaboration .

In this regard, the results obtained from the consolidated data of each expert interview and from the overall consolidated data show a noticeable inclination toward the relationship type “Contradictory,” reaching a peak of 58.33% in Interviewee 2. Similarly, Interviewee 1, Interviewee 4, and the total group of interviewees registered 34.78%, 47.72%, and 43.53%, respectively, in this category. Only Interviewee 3 showed a predominance of another relationship type—“Property”—with 45.46%, although it was still closely followed by “Contradictory,” with 39.39%.

These figures allow us to infer that, although there is a desire for managerial practice conditioned by a manager profile equipped with the required competencies—shaped by the knowledge and skills acquired in universities and complemented by experience and involvement in sports—the perception of these actors regarding empirical reality reflects managerial behavior that is poorly aligned with the level of knowledge and skills that managers should possess. This is largely due to the lack of university-level training necessary to guide the actions of the individuals within sports organizations in order to meet the needs of the sports sector in Ecuador. Ultimately, having field experience alone is insufficient to direct the complexities inherent in the sports sphere—a criterion that has predominated in the selection of managers.

Considerations Regarding the Results

After completing the process of open and axial coding of the expert interviews—where concepts were identified, labeled, classified into categories, and subsequently

related to one another to determine the type of relationship—selective coding was carried out. In this stage, the data were integrated within each of the categories selected for the study in order to: (A) interpret the findings obtained throughout the investigative process based on the three selected categories, under two dimensions: first, the vision held by the actors; and second, the managerial behavior that actually occurs in reality; and (B) contrast the state of the art with the findings obtained.

A) Interpretation of the Findings

Managerial Profile

Regarding the actors' vision within this category, it was found that, to perform managerial functions in sports organizations, the managerial profile should include extensive experience in the sector, as well as knowledge of the specific sport being managed, in order to have a clear perspective of its needs and anticipate the constant changes occurring at the national and international levels. Likewise, candidates are expected to possess a university degree, managerial tools to skillfully handle administrative processes, leadership skills to influence and coordinate efforts with a forward-looking perspective, and sports-related motivation to achieve high competitive standards. Additionally, a manager should have practiced a sport, maintain relationships with federations and other sports bodies, know Ecuadorian laws—especially the Sports Law—and possess some knowledge

of sports marketing.

In contrast, the managerial behavior that prevails in reality reveals discrepancies between the actors' vision and the actual exercise of managerial roles. It is argued that it is common practice to appoint managers based on their experience in sports rather than on the required training for the position. Furthermore, much of Ecuador's sports leadership does not hold a university degree, resulting in limited knowledge of managerial matters and a lack of proper training in the administrative processes required to appropriately direct the future of sports. This situation is aggravated by the presence of individuals with low cultural and educational backgrounds in these roles, leading to inadequate handling of relationships with peers and collaborators. As a consequence, there is a notable lack of sports management training schools. Ultimately, such deficiencies significantly hinder the achievement of important accomplishments and competitive results in international settings.

One interviewee's remark is particularly noteworthy: *"When there was no sports development, perhaps a sports manager without training was feasible!"* This assertion is pertinent given the advances in functionality, productivity, and organizational structures required to manage sports based on knowledge. For this reason, highly qualified sports management—focused on guaranteeing results aligned with the major challenges demanded by Ecuadorian sports—is now essential.

Characteristics of Organizational

Culture

Based on the data gathered from interviewees concerning their vision of desirable organizational culture for successful development and growth, it was found that sports organizations should involve all their members in deeply understanding the organizational philosophy—mission, vision, and values—while also contributing to the processes, tasks, and actions aligned with this philosophy. Such aspects would foster greater institutional identification, consistent with one interviewee's testimony: *"People need to wear the shirt; that is what is missing in many sports organizations."* It is therefore clear that sports organizations aspire to cultivate a culture based on integration, cohesion, sense of belonging, and ethical commitment among their members and with the organization—an organizational culture oriented toward more professional management, joint efforts, and a focus on achieving desired results.

As for the organizational behavior that currently prevails in Ecuadorian sports organizations, it is confirmed that a consolidated structure exists—from the Ecuadorian Olympic Committee downward to federations, leagues, clubs, and teams. The creation of the Ministry of Sport is valued as a significant accomplishment, given its investment in sports infrastructure and the establishment of high-performance centers. However, it is also acknowledged that the infrastructure is not at the level of other countries, and that adequate preservation and maintenance are lacking.

Additionally, the Ministry must still

strengthen critical processes, such as providing proper support to elite athletes—not only financial assistance to help cover personal needs so they can dedicate themselves to training, but also access to multidisciplinary teams specializing in sports science, along with highly trained and qualified coaches.

In this respect, it is crucial to activate systematic and ongoing training processes for personnel who hold primary and support functions related to athlete development. This training must permeate all hierarchical levels of the organizational structure and should be complemented by partnerships with institutions such as the Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial—which has expressed interest in offering undergraduate and graduate programs in Sports Administration—and the Universidad de las Américas, which offers programs in Sports Administration and Sports Marketing.

Along similar lines, a significant portion of the resources provided by the Ecuadorian State are allocated to high-performance sports—funds that should be justified with competitive international results derived from planning across multiple Olympic cycles, as practiced by world-class nations and regional countries with notable progress. However, Ecuadorian sports planning processes largely fail to adopt such long-term vision, lacking multi-cycle planning (two or three Olympic cycles) needed to determine long-term goals, along with a competitive calendar promoted by the State, urging sports management to plan for the long term in coordination with sports authorities and federations. Nevertheless, it is fair to

acknowledge that some federations are planning across two Olympic cycles and preparing for the 2024 Games.

These demands are met with several difficulties, particularly because sports authorities often require results without first undergoing proper evaluation. There is no strategic planning to guide the objectives and goals that should be established, and furthermore, officials lack advisors with sufficient knowledge and experience in sports. Added to this is the presence of political power dynamics at various levels, significantly influencing decision-making—circumstances that hinder the necessary support required to redirect actions that would enhance international sports positioning.

In the same vein, it is noted that elite athletes are not valued as they should be. After years of preparation and successful participation in international competitions, when the time comes for retirement, they do not receive the support required; and in the best cases, they receive precarious assistance that does not contribute to attaining a better quality of life.

On the other hand, from the perspective of the interviewed experts, it is confirmed that community sports leagues serve 40% of Ecuadorian athletes. Their main focus is on reducing sedentary lifestyles by promoting healthy habits through sports and recreation. Government entities have made commendable efforts in creating sports centers to support this segment, based on a management model that ensures the preservation of synthetic fields through mechanisms that regulate their use—for example, implementing user fees to support maintenance, while exempting vulnerable groups such as people with

disabilities, children, and women. These measures undoubtedly help raise awareness among the public and support a sense of ownership over these spaces.

However, it is evident that some leagues are well equipped while others are not, due to unclear sports policies for this sector, limited staffing, and scarce economic resources (sometimes for long periods). As a result, many have resorted to organizing self-funded activities to pay off necessary debts.

Similarly, it is revealed that community-level sports are not a priority for the Ministry of Sport, which focuses almost exclusively on high-performance sports (a view contradicted by other actors who believe that the emphasis is on “good living,” to the detriment of elite performance). Support is often provided only during political campaigns, recognizing that this segment can generate significant votes for mayoral elections. It is also emphasized that many athletes who eventually reach high performance come from community leagues, often training with limited resources and with unmet needs.

One interviewee commented:

“They don’t understand that the athlete comes from here—from the dirt fields! Morejón came from our dirt tracks, without shoes, and they expect her to become a world champion first just to recognize her.”

Conception of Managerial Culture

Based on the interpretation of data from expert interviewees regarding their perception of managerial culture, it is inferred that a manager has the obligation

to train continuously in order to perform efficiently and effectively. Indeed, to carry out managerial actions, it is imperative that a manager continually evaluates the basic administrative processes—planning, organizing, directing, and controlling sports management. This requires being able to operate within an organizational structure that ensures stability, supported by leadership capable of influencing, persuading, and motivating people through effective communication processes that foster commitment to actions and lead to outcomes aligned with ongoing plans and projects.

Likewise, a manager must perform duties both in the office and in the field, maintaining close awareness of real-world conditions to understand what is happening and be prepared to address emerging challenges. This involves understanding the concerns and needs of athletes, coaches, administrators, fans, and other stakeholders. This does not imply an absence of delegation; rather, delegation should be used to contrast opinions and consider alternatives that support more informed decision-making.

Regarding the prevailing conception of managerial culture in Ecuador, based on the actual behaviors observed in these institutions, the findings reaffirm that academically trained managers are more likely to guarantee competitive results. Although it is acknowledged that some managers do have such training, including graduate-level education, there is still insufficient staffing with university-level education and managerial training.

As a result, the prevailing managerial practice shows a lack of strategic thinking for planning and guiding future actions.

Managerial behavior is often reduced to fulfilling an Annual Operational Plan dictated by the budgetary demands of the Ministry of Sport—an administrative entity lacking strategic planning—and, according to the interviewees, led by officials who are not the most qualified and demonstrate limited knowledge of sports. Thus, high-level leadership lacks a clear sports vision: if there is no directionality to manage a Ministry, even less can be expected in the rest of the sports structure.

Despite all this, it is recognized that some sports federations understand the importance of securing sponsorships for their events. They have taken initiatives to establish agreements with companies to strengthen event organization. However, overall, there is a shortage of managers with the necessary tools to build relationships that secure sponsorship, and there is no significant initiative to develop sports marketing.

Many of these managerial tools are linked to soft skills such as perseverance to reach objectives, persistence to overcome obstacles, responsibility for personal performance, willingness to build relationships, detect opportunities, negotiate, and resolve disagreements. At the same time, it is understood that companies often hesitate to invest in sports because they perceive it as unprofitable—hence the challenge for managers to construct alliances or cooperation agreements with the private sector.

It is also emphasized that Ecuador should look to the best managerial practices of world-class sports teams and those of neighboring countries such as Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia, which surpass Ecuador in sports management.

These countries employ highly trained professionals with solid academic backgrounds (undergraduate and graduate) and proven experience, achieving significant international results.

Regarding community sports leagues, it is stated that they are managed by personnel with academic backgrounds—doctors, lawyers, administrators, physicians, and even former assembly members. It is also acknowledged that some individuals lack formal education yet have demonstrated exemplary leadership within the league. One interviewee illustrated this by saying:

“José Francisco Cevallos does not have a university degree, and he was one of the best ministers, and now he is governor. You have to have something inside to lead a team like Barcelona to where it is.”

These leagues have expanded across provinces through effort and self-management, and despite budget cuts, they continue to work with dedication. Their organizational model understands that managing sports is a challenging and demanding task that necessarily requires self-management processes to operate and serve the vast population of athletes engaged in community sports. Such self-management has enabled them to acquire resources that benefit the entire community.

B) Contrast Between the State of the Art and the Findings

To determine the gap between the state of the art and the findings of the research, the latter focused on the elements that operate in empirical reality—that is, the behavioral patterns derived from managerial practice in high-performance sports and community

sports leagues. For this purpose, eleven contributions from sixteen authors were considered, allowing the comparison between existing theories and how the phenomenon is conceived in reality, in terms of coincidences and contradictions within each of the categories selected for this study.

With regard to the category Managerial Profile, the comparison between the theoretical contributions and the empirical evidence that emerged in the study (Table 4) revealed managerial behavior that contradicts

the contributions related to “Administrative Processes,” “Interpersonal Skills,” and “Training and Education.” These inconsistencies in role performance stem from deficiencies in academic training and the absence of systematic managerial training processes necessary for developing knowledge, acquiring interpersonal skills, and generating practical value for both high-performance and community-level sports. Such deficiencies ultimately hinder the improvement of professional performance.

Table 4.
Coincidences and Contradictions in the Managerial Profile.

<i>AUTHORS</i>	<i>CONTRIBUTIONS</i>	<i>STATE OF ARTS</i>	<i>EMPIRICAL REALITY</i>	
			<i>COINCIDENCES</i>	<i>CONTRADICTIONS</i>
Calabuig, Gómez & Licerias (2010); Peiró, Ramos & Martínez-Tur (1995)	ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES	The sports manager guides organizational management based on the processes of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling.		There is no evidence of proper training in administrative processes that would guide the effective management of sports development.
<i>Acosta (2005)</i>	INTERPERSONAL CAPACITIES	One must have knowledge of work levels, employees’ skills and capacities, their functions, and their motivation in relation to the organization’s objectives.		There are individuals in these positions with a low cultural and educational level, which results in inadequate management of relationships among peers and collaborators.
Vargas (2011) & Campos (2007)	TRAINING AND EDUCATION	A sports manager must have academic training and preparation in leadership competencies, and the most qualified individuals should be selected to successfully lead the sports system.		The required training for the position is lacking, and furthermore, a large portion of Ecuadorian sports leadership does not hold a university degree, resulting in limited knowledge in managerial matters.

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Aguilar y Guerra (2014)	SPORT EXPERIENCE	Experience gained through practice in sports environments is necessary, as it helps develop prior knowledge of the circumstances surrounding this sector.	It is common practice to exercise management based solely on one's experience in sports.
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Source : Own elaboration based on theoretical contributions and the research findings.

Despite this, it was found that a significant proportion of managers in these segments come directly from the sports field, aligning with the theoretical contribution “Experience in Sports.”

Such experience helps them understand the meaning of perseverance, discipline, dedication, and the sacrifice that an athlete devotes to their sporting career—factors that could facilitate decision-making and problem-solving in sports management at both the high-performance level and within

community sports leagues.

Regarding the category Characteristics of Organizational Culture (Table 5), it was detected that reality appears inconsistent when contrasted with the contributions “Alignment of Actions” and “Managerial Imperatives.” This results from an organizational culture characterized by discretionary handling of decisions made at the upper levels of sports political power, which negatively affects the coordination of efforts downstream in relation to the common interests of high-performance sports and community sports leagues.

Table 5.

Coincidencias y contradicciones en perfil gerencial.

AUTHORS	CONTRIBUTIONS	STATE OF ARTS	EMPRICAL REALITY	
			COINCIDENCIAS	CONTRADICCIONES
Gómez (2017); Geertz (1987) y Schneider (1980)	SYMBOLIC SYSTEMS	Social behavior and the language used among peers, collaborators, and related actors are codes that interrelate and, in essence, correspond to a system of cultural symbols based on norms and rules that must be followed..	Sports organizations operate with their own well-defined codes that distinguish them from other types of organizations. It is a common language understood by all, and there is also a Sports Law that regulates responsibilities, functions, and tasks..	

Levy-Strauss (1985) Goodenough (1981)	<i>ALIGNMENT OF y ACTIONS</i>	<i>A group of individuals organizes their experiences around a concrete reality through their perceptions, understanding and interpreting everyday interactions that guide the behavior of its members.</i>	<i>Sports authorities demand results without first undergoing proper evaluation, and they do not carry out joint analyses with sports organizations to align expectations and the actions that are intended to be achieved.</i>
Kotter (2007)	MANAGERIAL IMPERATIVES	An organizational culture must be led by a manager who, in addition to planning, structuring, and systematizing organizational complexities, has the ability to inspire others.	The presence of political power spaces at various levels significantly influences the decisions that are made; these circumstances undermine the necessary support to redirect actions that would enable the international positioning of high-performance sports and ensure equitable attention to all community sports leagues.

Source: Own elaboration based on theoretical contributions and the research findings.

Even so, an organizational culture based on a shared symbolism was recognized—evidence that aligns with the contribution “Symbolic Systems.” Thus, symbolic systems in sports are characterized by the use of specific codes for communication among peers, collaborators, and related actors, and additionally, the functions are supported by the Sports Law.

Regarding the category Conception of Managerial Culture (Table 6), the study revealed managerial behavior that clearly contradicts all the contributions selected for this segment, such as “Inspirational Motivation,” “Vectorial Effort,” “Cooperative Effort,” and “Managerial Perspective.”

Table 5.
Coincidences and Contradictions in the Managerial Profile.

AUTHORS	CONTRIBUTION	STATE OF ARTE	EMPIRICAL REALITY
		COINCIDENCES	CONTRADICTIONS
Gómez (2017)	INSPIRATIONAL MOTIVATION	The team is inspired to pursue appreciation for work, group cohesion, the creation of communication	There is a lack of sports managers who possess the necessary tools related to the soft skills required to interact with others, manage disagreements, and identify opportunities for improvement.

processes—whether for technical reasons or for affective and emotional purposes—and the establishment of a system of shared values and beliefs.

<p><i>Etking & Schvarstein (1992)</i></p>	<p>VECTORIAL EFFORT</p>	<p>Managerial culture conditions the ways of thinking, developing, acting, and fulfilling managerial functions and tasks within an organization.</p>	<p>Managerial behavior is limited to fulfilling an Annual Operational Plan due to the budgetary requirements of the Ministry of Sport—an administrative entity that does not operate with strategic planning. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that those in charge are not the most qualified, demonstrating limited knowledge.</p>
<p>Etking y Schvarstein (1992)</p>	<p>COOPERATIVE EFFORT</p>	<p>Managerial culture supports forms of social interaction that are communicated, disseminated, and shared among groups.</p>	<p>sobre el deporte. There exists a high-level leadership that, in essence, lacks a clear sports vision. In this regard, if there is no directionality to effectively oversee the management of a Ministry, much less can it be expected in the remaining spheres of the sports structure.</p>

<p>Granell (1997)</p>	<p>General Perspective</p>	<p>Managerial culture is oriented toward fostering changes and transformations that are beneficial and relevant for organizational success, without losing sight of the transformations occurring in the global community.</p>	<p>There is no strategic thinking to guide future actions. It would be advisable to examine the best managerial practices used by world-class sports teams and by countries in the region—such as Peru, Venezuela, and Colombia—that surpass Ecuador in managerial matters.</p>
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Source: Own elaboration based on theoretical contributions and the findings of the research.

In this regard, such behavior reflects a lack of managerial tools to skillfully lead people energizing them, generating commitment, and persuading individuals to achieve the established objectives and goals. In sum, these weaknesses prevent a sports manager from observing and adopting best managerial practices from other countries that have achieved significant positioning in the international sports arena. These aspects undoubtedly do not contribute to the development of a managerial culture capable of achieving the changes and transformations demanded in Ecuadorian high-performance and community-level sports.

In light of these comparisons, it becomes evident that there are more contradictions than coincidences between what theory proposes and what occurs in reality. This gap significantly affects the expected outcomes, not only for those directly involved in the sports sector but also for Ecuadorian society at large, which demands effectiveness in sports management. The focus lies particularly on community sports leagues, which benefit large sectors of society and serve as the birthplace of future athletes, and on high-performance sports, where the highest standards of quality and competitive excellence are achieved.

Conclusions

The research conducted was supported by a methodological approach aligned with the guidelines

provided by Strauss and Corbin (2002), whose relevance was confirmed by the validity and reliability of the results generated through a process that applied the constant comparative method. This method enabled the identification of patterns, regularities, inconsistencies, incoherencies, and discontinuities in the data obtained from the reality studied through four interviewees with managerial responsibilities, all of whom were opinion leaders with the authority and experience necessary to provide relevant and pertinent information through in-depth interviews regarding managerial culture in Ecuadorian sports.

Accordingly, the findings that emerged from this study confirm that both high-performance sports organizations and community-level sports organizations require a strong managerial culture to guide their behavior. Such a managerial culture must be grounded, on the one hand, in the knowledge acquired through university education and managerial training processes, articulated with the experience accumulated over years within the sports field; and on the other hand, in those intangible and subjective aspects that shape the human dimension. Therefore, successful performance will depend on the combination of these factors that influence managerial culture.

Thus, when these factors are

properly aligned toward a shared purpose—with administrative continuity in the upper levels of the sports system to support common projects—they would contribute to strengthening a solid sports platform that allows for the construction of foundations leading toward a coherent managerial culture. This culture would encompass a system of beliefs, attitudes, values, routines, and habits that help transform the current state of affairs in the collective interest of fundamentally improving Ecuadorian sports, guiding it toward success at the local, national, and international levels. Ultimately, the contributions derived from this study will serve as a platform for future research of similar nature across other segments of the sports sector.

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CONFLICTOS DE INTERESES

Los autores no refieren conflictos de intereses

Contribución de autores

Autor 1: conceptualización, investigación, administración del proyecto, redacción.

Autor 2: administración del proyecto, revisión, validación y edición.