

Leaders of the Level Playing Field

Testing the applicability of a theoretical framework from sports management theory in an eSports context

Abstract

ESports, or the competitive play of video games, is a growing global phenomenon that has captured the interest of many scholars of different academic fields. Previous research suggests that there is a link between leadership in sport and eSport organizations. This thesis aims to study this link by using the *Multilevel conceptual model of leadership in sport management* by Peachy et al. The model outlines differentiating factors that have a unique influence on the leadership processes in sport organizations. Through a qualitative multi-case study, we seek empirical validation for the applicability of the model. A total of six people from four different eSport organizations took part in in-depth interviews. From the results we have analyzed the extent to which these factors and conditions are also present in the context of eSports. Largely we found that they are present and that the model is a good fit for studying leadership in eSport organizations. However, some revisions would have to be made. The most significant being the separate study of the developers that provide the game in which eSport is practiced. Ultimately this thesis recommends future research to further establish the link between eSport and sport.

Keywords: eSport leadership, sport leadership, leadership process, multilevel outcomes

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 ESports

In August 2015, five young men made history on the stage of Key Arena, Seattle, U.S.A. After two weeks of competition Peter Dager, the captain of Team Evil Geniuses lifted the revered trophy in front of 4.6 million viewers from all over the world. As the winners of one of the world's biggest tournaments of its kind, they claimed over \$6.6 million from a prize pool which exceeded \$18 million. The athletes, or players, were physically present in the arena but the struggle between the teams took place on a digital battleground, in the computer game Dota 2.¹

This digital form of competition is known as eSports, and the phenomenon has experienced substantial evolution over the last decade. Video games are to most only known as a pastime. However, many games offer their players the opportunity to compete against each other within the game. ESports is the organized, competitive play of games and it is practiced in many different dimensions, be it from the bedroom computer or on the stage of a multi-million dollar tournament. Since its original roots in LAN settings - participation, viewership and commercial attractiveness has increased remarkably. In 2015 the world championship finals of League of Legends – the biggest eSport in the world – had 36 million unique viewers, with 14 million concurrent viewers watching the final match.²

Today the eSports audience consists of 226 million people. In 2015 eSport industry revenue grew by 67.4% to \$325 million³ and expected revenue for 2016 is \$463 million. As eSports develops as a professional type of sport and entertainment form, its relevance as a subject of study becomes evident.

1.2 Purpose and relevance

What does the growth of eSports as a form of entertainment and professional sport imply for management scholars? There has been a call from scholars to approach eSports as a separate field of study. Michael G. Wagner argues that "it [the approach] looks at eSports as a field of study which in return allows us to derive

¹ A game for the PC. Two teams of five players fight each other and computer-controlled characters with the aim to destroy the opponent's base. Each player takes control of a "hero" character with a number of abilities and characteristics. Developed and published by Valve Inc.

² <http://www.forbes.com/sites/insertcoin/2015/12/11/monstrous-viewership-numbers-show-league-of-legends-is-still-eSports-king/#3705148c4021>

³ Excluding betting revenue

novel approaches and methodologies to actively advance other areas of interest that are not directly related to computer gaming." (Wagner 2006)

Given that eSports is of interest as a field of study, what tools are available for scholars when conducting their research? Wagner suggests that "there is a quite natural connection between traditional sports and eSports [...]" and that "It furthermore allows us to borrow academic approaches from traditional sport and training science and to apply them to what might be called eSports science". (Wagner 2006) If such a connection exists, legitimate methods for research on leadership in eSports are already available. Therefore, the applicability of traditional sport management theory on eSports could be of relevance to scholars.

1.3 Research question

Based on the background and purpose described above, the research question for this thesis is as follows:

How can leadership in eSports organizations be studied with the use of
theoretical frameworks from sports management theory?

1.4 Previous research

1.4.1 Leadership in eSports organizations

Research on leadership and management in eSports settings has been limited. There has been a considerable amount of research done on video games,⁴ but it is seldom related to their competitive aspect. Examples of recent studies observe eSports as a social phenomenon (Seo, Jung 2014) or analyze the outcomes of certain patterns in gameplay. (Schubert, Drachen & Mahlmann 2016) Some leaders may be able to improve team performance through insights gained from studies such as these, they do not specifically study leadership.

1.4.2 Leadership in traditional sports management

In contrast, there is extensive research done on leadership in the traditional sports industry. Early sport leadership studies emerged as early as the 1970s (Brassie 1989). Since then scholars have investigated different leadership styles and behaviours, outcomes on different levels in both on-the-field and off-field contexts (individual, dyadic, group and organizational). A review written in 2014 by Jon W. Peachy et al. summarizes

⁴ The *Game Studies* journal has a plethora of articles on video games to choose from, <http://gamestudies.org/1402>

existing literature on the subject and articulates a model that describes leadership in sports management. (Peachey et al. 2015)

Academics who have conducted research on leadership in sports contexts have generally followed prevailing trends within leadership research. In 1973, Sage was the first scholar to draw concepts from McGregor's Theory X & Y and apply them in a sport context, resulting in his work on the role of the coach as a leader and how to attain player self-fulfillment. (Sage 1973) In the early 90s Chelladurai conducted the first review of sport leadership literature in the on-the-field context. It pointed out that sports leadership research needed to move beyond and explore other fields than on-the-field coaching behaviors. At the time of Chelladurai's review, major findings included the confirmation of perceptual biases when determining leader legitimacy and the introduction of a Leadership Scale of Sports (LSS). (Peachey et al. 2015)

Burns's introduction of the transactional/transformational leadership theory has made a lasting mark on sport leadership theory. Research based on transactional/transformational theory has primarily been conducted using the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) developed by Bass. Results from studies on transactional/transformational leadership in sports, regardless of using the MLQ or not, have proven to be inconclusive. (Peachey et al. 2015)

Gender and ethnic issues have been a subject of study among sport leadership scholars. A multitude of studies show that women and minorities are underrepresented in sport leadership positions and are marginalized as certain preferred leader traits are considered male or belonging to the "majority". (Peachey et al. 2015)

Another relevant subject to sports leadership is the implications of sport governance. The original governance model based on voluntary board membership has to a larger degree been replaced by more formal and sophisticated structures similar to those of commercial corporations. Internationalization and increasing revenues influence governance structures and, along with ethical issues, pose challenges to leaders. (Peachey et al. 2015)

An attempt to collect and summarize research relevant to sports management has been made by Peachey et al. in their article Forty Years of Leadership research in Sport Management: A Review, Synthesis and Conceptual Framework. At the end of the review, a conceptual framework is presented that aims to study how leadership processes may operate differently in a sport context. As it is a synthesis of previous sport leadership research it examines leadership from a broad perspective. In our view that would make the model interesting for application on an eSport organization. Peachey's review and model will be discussed in further detail in the

method section, as applying and testing it is part of our method. The model will from hereon be referred to as the Multilevel Model.

1.5 Scope and delimitations

This thesis is limited to the study of leadership processes that take place in organizations which field one or more eSport teams and where competing in eSports is the main purpose of the organization. We motivate this choice because this reflects the sport organization the Multilevel Model is designed for. Therefore, we will not look into the inner workings of competition organizers, game developers or other organizations operating in the eSports industry. We will touch upon these as factors influencing the leadership process, but only from the perspective of leaders and followers in the team organization.

Another limitation of our study is that we are examining leadership as exclusively a leader-follower interaction. Our study hence make assumptions regarding who is and who is not a leader based on formal positions and informal perceptions.

1.6 List of definitions

eSports - The term for formalized practice of playing video games competitively. Players play against each other online or on a LAN. The nature of the competition varies with the choice of game being played.

eSports athlete / player - An individual who competes in eSports

League of Legends (LoL) – A game for PC and Mac. First launched in 2009, it is inspired by and very similar to Dota. Has several different game modes and maps. Currently the most played game in Europe and North America. Developed and published by Riot Games.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research method

2.1.1 Choice of research method

For the purpose of studying leadership processes in a current phenomenon such as eSports, we have chosen a case study approach. This choice is based on Yin's recommendation on choice of study method. (Yin, 2014) As we aim to investigate the possible application of a general model for leadership processes, the best approach is to study several cases rather than one. This ensures that results from different cases can be compared in order

to find industry trends. Furthermore our choice is motivated by Yin's suggestion that a case study is suitable for studies where the research question includes how or why.

As explained in the "previous research" section, eSports has only received a limited amount of attention from scholars. For less well researched areas, a qualitative approach is preferred (Bryman and Bell, 2013). The qualitative multiple-case study is carried out by conducting in-depth interviews with individuals of different backgrounds in eSport team organizations.

The results collected from said interviews are analyzed and theoretical conclusions are drawn from the data. This is an inductive approach (Bryman and Bell, 2013) and is what we have chosen for this thesis. We allowed the Multilevel Model to influence us when collecting data. Bryman and Bell refer to this part-inductive, part-deductive approach as iterative (Bryman and Bell, 2013). The Multilevel Model will be used together with other theory to compare conclusions with the model and suggest improvements or areas for further research, if applicable.

2.1.2 Choice of case subjects

The choice of case subjects are eSports organizations, more specifically those which own and run teams which actively compete in leagues and tournaments.

There is a plethora of organizations that match our chosen criteria. They operate in very different circumstances. Some teams participate in amateur competitions on weekends and evenings and their player base consists of hobby gamers. Other teams are professional and compete in high-profile competitions with large prize pools. ESports is divided between a number of games, and most teams have chosen to limit themselves to only one or a few eSports. Some teams have chosen to compete in a large number of eSports, depending on their ambitions and available resources.

Under these contexts teams have chosen to structure themselves in different ways. According to our scope, the choice of organizations is biased towards professional organizations, where players and employees earn their living primarily from eSports. All organizations are also located in Western Europe which is the result of the extent that organizations were willing to participate in this study. The four organizations used for the purpose of this study have several features in common, but there are also significant differences between them.

ORG1 is a Swedish organization which fields active teams in a number of eSports. It is registered as a joint-stock company.

ORG2 is an international organization which fields active teams in a number of eSports. It is registered as a joint-stock company.

ORG3 is a team of five European players which competes in Dota 2. It is not tied to a larger organization. It is not registered as any entity.

ORG4 is a Swedish organization which fields active teams in a number of eSports. It is registered as an association.

2.2 Data collection

Primary data was collected through interviews with people who hold or have held leader position in abovementioned organizations, as well as players and coaches.

Secondary data was collected from online sources, in order to compliment the primary data

2.2.1 Choice of interview subjects

The leadership process involves leaders and followers. To get a balanced view we reached out to a varied selection of interviewees. These are presented in the table below. All interview were carried out in the months March-April 2016.

Title	Organization	Respondent ID
General Manager	ORG 1	GM 1
Player	ORG 1	PLAYER
Chief Gaming Officer	ORG 2	CGO
Ex-Coach & Team Manager	ORG 2	COACH
Player / Team Captain	ORG 3	TEAM CAP
General Manager	ORG 4	GM 2

Figure 1 – Interview subjects and organizations have been replaced with abbreviations, for the discretion of our interview subjects as well as the quality of data.

We interviewed three members of upper management of their respective organizations, two active players and one former manager and coach. This selection of interviewees represents the essential parts of an eSport organization, as described by the Multilevel Model. Due to TEAM CAP's long background in many roles within the eSports industry, TEAM CAP also served as an expert opinion from outside the team organizations. Despite our attempts to find female interviewees, all interviewees in this study are male.

To get a hold of members of e-sport organizations, we screened our contact network and sent messages to team representatives based on the contact information they publically provided. The latter approach ranged

from emails to messaging streamers on Twitch.tv.⁵ Some interviewees were attained through the assistance of other interviewees.

2.2.2 Interview design

The interviews were all conducted with a semi-structured technique. Before the sessions we prepared an informal grouping of topics and questions that we wished to explore. Each topic had a series of sub-questions and prompts that were applied as seen fit during the interview but we also asked spontaneous questions in order to adapt to new information. We moved back and forward between topics based on how the conversation progressed.

The groupings of questions were tailored for each interview based on whom we would be speaking to. However, those who fit in the same profile were generally asked similar questions. As most interviews were scheduled to last an hour we decided upon a number of topics, as to provide a good balance between going in depth and covering a topic completely.

As to improve our response rate every participant was offered the possibility of anonymity as recommended by Rowley (Rowley, 2012). By our choice we also decided to inform the interview subjects of the purpose of our thesis. This has potential drawbacks in that the answers could have been affected by the expectations placed on the interview subjects, but we felt that this drawback was unavoidable as to improve our response rate.

Each interview was recorded, as also recommended by Rowley (Rowley 2012), and then transcribed to limit our bias as observers. Hence, each interviewee was asked for permission before the interview was started.

2.3 Bias and mitigating efforts

We recognize that we as researchers may be affected by our existing interest for the subject at hand and thus put bias into our research (Voss et al. 2002). Both authors have an interest for eSports and are emotionally invested in certain teams and players. As such we may become advocates and not observers. In order to mitigate the risk of bias we let third parties take part in our recordings and give us feedback. This served two purposes: it made us more self-aware when we conducted the interviews and designed the questions and it allowed us to more critically evaluate our performance.

⁵Twitch is the world's leading social video platform for gamers, visited by over a 100 million viewers every month, and used as a streaming platform for almost 1.7 million broadcasters

3.0 Theoretical framework

This section includes an overview of research and theories on leadership in sports management. By comparing the components and predictions of these theories with real world outcomes we aim to create an understanding for how applicable they are on eSports organizations.

3.1 The Multilevel approach to leadership

In accordance with the objective of this thesis, the Multilevel Model is used both as a frame of reference and target for investigation.

The Multilevel Model addresses aspects of leadership that are unique to sport contexts. A key insight of the model is that leadership styles do not operate differently in sport contexts than it would in other business environments with regard to their influence on the possible multilevel outcomes. Thus it is more interesting to study contextual factors that may differentially affect leadership style, decision making, and process.

Leadership within the model is defined as:

"Leadership is a multilevel (person, dyad, group, collective) leader-follower interaction process that occurs in a particular situation (context) where a leader (e.g., superior, supervisor) and followers (e.g., subordinates, direct reports) share a purpose (vision, mission) and jointly accomplish things (e.g., goals, objectives, tasks) willingly (e.g., without coercion)."

The model examines this leadership process and divides it into different levels:

Individual,
Dyad,
Group/Team,
Organizational

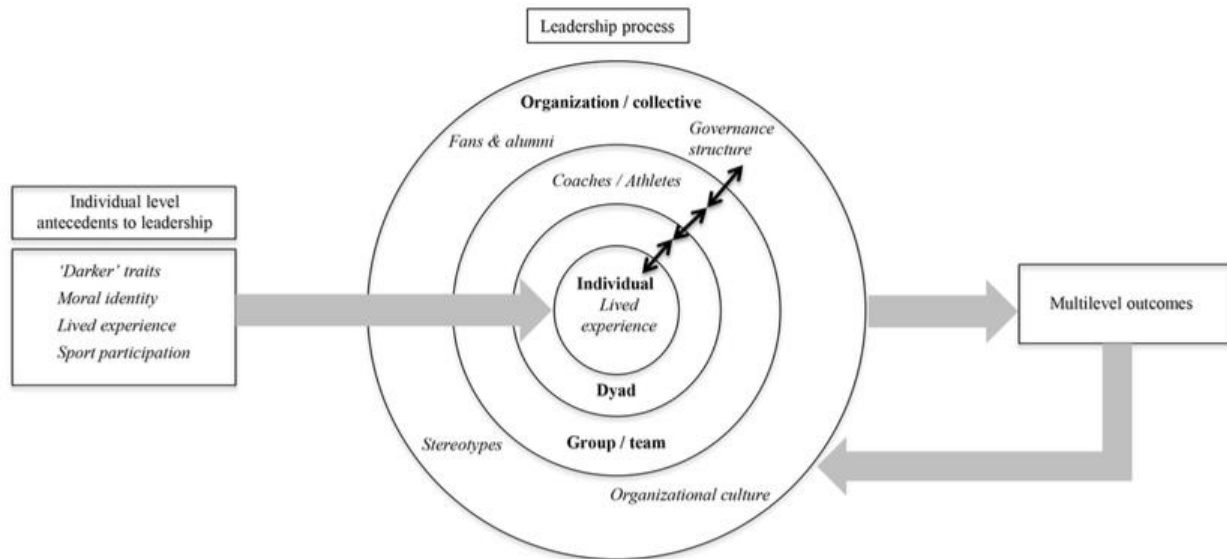


Figure 2 – The Multilevel Conceptual Model of Leadership in Sport Management

The model suggests that individual-level antecedents have a unique influence on leadership process at the individual level. These are:

- Darker traits
- Moral identity
- Lived experience
- Sport participation

The model also suggests that part of the leadership process includes the principal differentiating factors of how leadership operates in sport. These are:

- Fans and alumni
- Governance structure
- Coaches/athletes
- Lived experience

Highlighted in the figure is the term multilevel outcomes. Each outcome of interest are hence the result of influences emanating from different levels of the analysis (Peachey et al. 2015).

3.1.1 Antecedents to leadership

3.1.1.1 *Darker traits*

Literature proposes that given the pressure for success in sports certain traits will be more common among sports leaders than others. Specifically it is proposed that socially undesirable traits or darker traits are more common.

Judge & Timothy identifies four different dark traits (Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka 2009) . These are Narcissism, Hubris, social dominance and Machiavellianism. Peachey, et al. argue that these traits are more common among sports leaders than other types of leaders.

Within leadership research, traits are usually said to have evolved in one of two ways. Either they have developed through natural selection – that traits come into existence because they have been useful in solving adaptive problems. The other way in which they have evolved is through sexual selection – that processes, in organizations and collectives, determine which traits are “selected in” and which are “selected out (Judge, Piccolo & Kosalka 2009).

It is proposed that darker traits have emerged in the sport setting due to the pressures of winning in sport settings. Several studies support that the pressure of winning is especially strong in sport: Pressures of commodification of athletes (e.g., Griffin, 2011), the massification of the sport (e.g., DeSensi, 2014), the pressure to win at all costs (e.g., Sagas & Wigley, 2014).

3.1.1.2 *Moral identity*

The Multilevel model also highlights the importance of the ethical and moral development of a leader. Two things are proposed; that "leader moral identity symbolization and internalization contribute to ethical leadership behavior in sport" and "that higher levels of moral identity development decrease the manifestation of the darker traits of leadership behavior".

These proposals are based in the processes of leader moral identity symbolization and internalization (Peachey et al. 2015, Burton, Peachey 2014). In social learning theory a leader that is regarded as attractive, credible, and legitimate role model could make ethics messages salient. Followers would then then model their behavior on that of the leader. Leaders that behave ethically will hence have subordinates who also behave ethically and continue to do so (Burton, Peachey 2014).

3.1.1.3 Lived experience and participation in sport

Another antecedent to leadership is the lived experience of a person. In an article Sinclair pushes for reflection of personal histories to understand one's "beliefs, practices, and assumptions about authority and leadership" (Sinclair 2010).

In the context of sport leadership Peachey, et al. specifically identifies participation in sport as a common feature among sport leaders (Peachey et al. 2015, Burton, Peachey 2014). This shared experience will then shape leadership behavior in sport organizations.

3.1.2 Leadership processes

3.1.2.1 Fans and alumni

Fans and alumni of sport programs are proposed to have unique influence on leadership processes in a sport context. Specifically fans are proposed to "have more power, legitimacy, and urgency of claims than customers or alumni in other business sectors". Within the Multilevel Model these conditions have arisen from the degree that sport fans identify with a team and the passion associated with the sport (Peachey et al. 2015).

3.1.2.2 Governance structure

Another unique influence on sport organizations is the governing structures of leagues and championships in which organizations participate. It is proposed that sport organizations uniquely have to both compete and collaborate amongst each other. Organizations can be active members of governing bodies at a multitude of levels, from youth conferences to international associations, where they cooperate with other parties to decide on structure, regulations, guidelines etc. The organizations are then the same parties which make the competition in tournaments.

3.1.2.3 Athletes and coaches

The athletes and coaches of an organization serve as another contextual factor that influences leadership.

As is the case in most leader-follower relationships the followers may place certain expectations on their leaders. Often this is the case with athletes and coaches, their expectations "could be at odds with the leader's preferred direction for the organization (e.g., coaching transitions, player trades, and player recruitment)" (Peachey et al. 2015, Sinclair 2010).

Athletes and coaches many times have considerable influence in an organization. It is proposed that many times this power is much greater than that of internal stakeholders in other business sectors, as coaches and athletes

often are attributed a celebrity status that "accentuate power, legitimacy, and urgency that may influence the decision-making strategies of sport leaders" (Peachey et al. 2015).

3.1.2.4 Culture

The authors bring up organizational culture as an interesting context to study in process of leadership in sport. Although organizational culture has not been previously explored in the domain of leadership in sport organizations Peachy et al. argue that it should (Peachey et al. 2015).

We will hence examine culture and we will do that using the three levels of culture model (Schein 2010).

The first level within the model is artefacts and describe the tangible or verbally identifiable elements in an organization. The second level is espoused values and describes an organizations stated values. The third level is basic assumptions and describe things that are taken for granted within an organization (Schein 2010).

3.1.2.5 Stereotypes

Another insight within the model is that the stereotypes might constrain individual perceptions of fitness for leadership. Most sports are dominated by white, able-bodied, heterosexual men (Fink et al. 2001). This group hold the majority of leadership positions in professional and international sport (Lapchick, 2013). The influence of this group is visible at all levels of the model: dyadic, group and organizational. Consequently it is proposed that women and other minority groups are deprived of opportunities to assume leader roles (Peachey et al. 2015).

4.0 Results

4.1 The world of eSports

For the sake of contextualizing our findings on organizations and leadership within eSports, it's important to emphasize that, much like traditional sport organizations, eSports teams operate within wildly different environments. Most would argue that for a traditional sports athlete competing at the highest competitive level, switching to another sport would be more difficult than it would be for her eSports counterpart to go pro in another eSports. However, there are still significant differences as games promote or require different skills, team compositions and competition formats.

4.1.1 ESport games as products

Unlike traditional sports like football or gymnastics, the games which make the playing field for eSports are products which are developed, monetized, updated and owned by companies. These companies hold the right to change or remove a game from the market permanently and hold a significant stake in the game's success as both a product and an eSports. If FIFA was to disappear today, football would still be played competitively and leisurely, whereas the infrastructure behind online multiplayer games are crucial to their ability to function

The rights of developers extend further than changing their game. As owners of the IP⁶ they have the right to, and often will, impose regulations how of competition is carried out. Riot, developer of League of Legends, has set the rules for the League of Legends Championship Series and have recently demanded that all participating teams have coaches. League of Legends is considered one of the stricter eSports in terms of competitive regulations and developer control and this varies greatly between different eSports.

GM1 expresses his frustration over the situation as he believes that teams should have more influence on the state of competition in eSports. Despite there being organizations such as the IESF⁷ and unions⁸ which aim to enhance cooperation between eSport teams, GM2 believes that they are ineffective as most of them hold no authority over teams. GM1 and CGO say that they simply do not care about them. At the same time, they all claim to welcome more cooperation.

4.1.2 The state of competition

During the past couple of years developers have chosen to take a more active role in the eSports scene around their games. Independent organizations have historically been the main organizers of eSports tournaments and leagues and, in some eSports, remain important to the industry. However, every single one of the eSports among the top ten in terms of prize money have their world championships arranged by their respective developer. These developer-sponsored competitions tend to dominate the competitive scene in scope and attractiveness to teams.

⁶ Intellectual ORG1, such as brands

⁷ International E-Sports Federation <http://ie-sf.com/en/about/introduction.php>

⁸ <http://www.kotaku.com.au/2015/10/professional-teams-form-esports-union-make-excessive-demands/>

Game	IP owner	Prize money	Hrs watched on Twitch.tv
Dota 2	Valve	\$31,018,392	125.4
League of Legends	Riot	\$7,697,750	142.8
Counterstrike: Global Offensive	Valve	\$6,190,730	125.1
Smite	Hi-Rez Studios	\$3,709,088	No data
StarCraft II	Blizzard Entertainment	\$2,816,751	17.5
Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare	Activision	\$2,471,347	No data
Heroes of the Storm	Blizzard Entertainment	\$2,420,079	No data
Hearthstone	Blizzard Entertainment	\$2,366,161	29.7
World of Tanks	Wargaming	\$1,037,054	No data
Heroes of Newerth	S2	\$810,839	No data

Figure 3 – Hours watched (in millions) on Twitch.tv only accounts for viewership of eSports events on Twitch.tv, the world's biggest game streaming platform.⁹

4.1.3 Fans and media

Where there's competition, there are fans. This holds true to sports and eSports alike. According to interviewees; fans and media paint the picture of the organization and its individuals to the eSports community. These stakeholders have more of an indirect impact than a direct one to decision-making and organization policy.

"The fans can reinforce your own feelings [...] If you're doing well and you get praised and it feels really good. If you're doing poorly and you get a lot of flak it's not great obviously."

- TEAM CAP

Other interviewees admitted to fans and media reinforcing pre-existing feelings. If already unsure about a player or a team's performance, the doubts of the fans or the media may confirm a manager's suspicions, and eventually lead to change. No interviewees would admit to making meaningful changes due to pressure from the fans or media.

Fan following and media coverage can affect organizational operations, as the organization must hire PR professionals, invest in media training and be active in their communication. TEAM CAP mentions that media and fan perception can affect a player's value, as it is in the interest of sponsors to work with well-renowned

⁹ Figures were collected from <http://esportearnings.com> and Newzoo's 2015 report on the eSports industry <http://www.gamesindustry.biz/articles/2016-04-06-esports-driving-over-21-percent-of-twitch-viewership-newzoo>

organizations and players. It is also in the interest of tournament organizers to attract the teams with the biggest fan followings to increase their viewership. PLAYER recalls times where upset fans have sent emails to team sponsors, as they realize their influential power.

COACH recalls a time when, after lackluster performance by his team rumours started flourishing about the impending separation of the team from ORG2. The intensity of discussion on online forums led to internal concern, as members organizations began questioning what the actual truth was. Ultimately CGO had to step in and deny the rumors both internally and externally.

4.2 The eSports Organization

In this study we examine the leadership that takes place within eSports organizations that run competitive teams. There is a plethora of organizations that operate in very different circumstances that fall under this definition. Some teams participate in amateur competitions on weekends and evenings and their player base consists of hobby gamers. Other teams are professional and compete in high-profile competitions with large prize pools. Most teams have chosen to limit themselves to only one or a few eSports, while there are teams which field a larger amount of teams in different eSports.

Under these contexts teams have chosen to structure themselves in different ways. The four organizations used for the purpose of this study have several features in common, but there are also significant differences between them.

4.2.1 Corporate/sporting split

A recurring theme in all the organizations was the separation of the sporting sections and the corporate sections.

COACH, former coach and manager of an ORG2 team described the role of the main office:

"The main organization manages everything external. They manage all the finances. I would call them a classic company. They have a finance department, a PR department, they have graphical artists and marketing people. They manage all the contact with sponsors and that's how they get money... That's why we as managers had to go through them when we were doing interviews or going to events."

He added that the players mainly focused on their sporting performance. It was his responsibility to communicate with the main office about everything related to tournaments, travel and sponsorships. COACH and the team decided to leave ORG2 as a unit when they felt their needs were no longer being prioritized.

PLAYER of ORG1 meant that he usually only spoke to people within the organization about travel arrangements and sponsorships. He focused on becoming a better player and spoke to his manager mainly of administrative things, who in turn spoke to management as required.

While this arrangement mostly appears intended across all organizations GM2 of ORG4 expressed frustration that their players did not want to be more involved in the business aspects of their organization:

"Teams spoke to us like we were a sponsor and I dislike that... If you are not interested in being part of a bigger context we are not interested. Everyone has a stake in this project and we need to pull in the same direction in order to improve as an organization."

Indeed all management that we interviewed highlighted that they wanted player feedback. "Players have really have no contact with the corporate part of our organization, but we are a flat organization and we want players to say what they think" said GM1, and added that a long-term goal of ORG1 is to increase player involvement and stakes in the organization.

PLAYER added that while he felt that the formal interactions with the business aspects of the organization was few, he felt that the informal interactions was more frequent. In particular he highlighted how he used to play with GM1 over the internet. During these interactions he was often asked for input on potential sponsorship and was encouraged to stream his gameplay online.

CGO added that players are able to influence organizations now more than ever as their competitors otherwise might lure them away. However, this is something that not all players realize.

While the teams and players largely were not involved in the corporate aspects of the company, to what extent then was the corporate sections involved with the teams? The trend in this case was not quite as clear.

PLAYER of ORG1 meant that he was largely left to his own devices. He managed his own training and made tactical decisions and preparations for tournaments. The organization provided all players with a manager, who mostly provided support with administrative tasks

COACH of ORG2 felt that management left most of the responsibility to him and the players.

"My hands were free. Contracts and players had to be approved by CGO but there was a mutual trust. He trusted my decisions."

TEAM CAP and GM2's descriptions of their organizations were similar in this regard.

4.2.2 Leadership in eSports organizations

When identifying the leaders of and within eSports organizations we encountered mentions of both formal leaders and informal leaders. Formal leaders are those whose formal position in the organizational hierarchy grant them the power to exert control of others, while informal leaders are those perceived as leaders by others due to other factors than their formal position. (Pielstick 2000) We also saw the separation of leaders “off-the-field” and “on-the-field”.

4.2.2.1 Identified formal leadership positions

4.2.2.1.1 The team captain

In eSports where player compete in teams, one team member is usually designated as captain. Although the existence of the captain is usually a given, the responsibilities of this person may vary.

TEAM CAP of ORG3 describes his responsibilities as Team captain:

“I do a lot of our preparation for matches. I do analysis on enemy teams we're going to play. Find out how we're going to approach the individual game. Then I have the most say in the drafting. I do most of it by myself then take some input from the team. I make some of the big and important calls in the game such as [...] and just keep the team on the same page.”

The Team Captain mostly serves as the leader of the group of players that makes a team. From our interviews, we have learned that this person usually does not directly interact with the organization on behalf of the team, but rather chooses to focus on team internal affairs.

4.2.2.1.2 Coaches and managers

Some organizations with sufficient funds choose to hire coaches for their teams. Coaches are often players who have ended their professional careers as players. There are several benefits to having a coach, according to TEAM CAP and COACH:

“... the main thing we would use a coach for could be segmented into two parts: One is analyzing our own games, and our play so we get a different angle on how we can improve [...] Gives you some new perspective that can help you a lot as a team [...]

The other thing would probably be as a sparring partner for drafting; helping me doing the homework when we go into matches. Finding out what's the enemy team's strengths? What are their weaknesses? What are we looking to exploit?"

- TEAM CAP

"... I was supposed to find out what worked and what didn't in the team; finding areas of improvement and figure out how to improve on them. [...] That's mostly what I did, and also talent scouting."

- COACH

While the coach handles tactics, practice and teamwork, administrative tasks such as travel arrangements, salaries and accommodation are left to the manager. In the case of COACH and ORG2, he acted as both coach and manager. In his opinion he served as the main point of contact between the corporate part of the organization and the team.

4.2.2.1.3 The CGO

Organizations which have several teams may employ a Chief Gaming Officer, a person responsible for managing the entire lineup of teams. According to CGO, this includes strategy, organization, administration, recruitment, player management and well-being as well as their commercial interests. His day-to-day communication with the players generally happens through managers and coaches, with exceptions. While the managers and coaches have a strong influence on the decisions made within the teams, the CGO has the final say on player contracts after receiving go-ahead on costs from the organization's finance department.

4.2.2.1.4 The General Manager

Some of the interviewees hold positions as general managers of their respective organizations. These are the equivalent of the business world's CEO. They hold the executive responsibility for the entirety of the organization's operations. Their scope of leadership expands outside team management and competition but also includes commercial matters such as finance, marketing, sales and HR. Due to the youth of the eSports industry, a considerable share of General Managers, owners and other executives of eSports organizations are former professional players themselves.

However, as of the last couple of years there has been an influx of people without professional gaming backgrounds in management positions. Some have joined top management of established eSports organizations while others have invested in teams themselves.

4.2.2.2 What makes a leader?

It's not only formal position which decides whether or not an individual is considered a leader. When asked about leadership and who is considered a leader and why, the interviewees' responses had some recurring themes:

4.2.2.2.1 Credibility is everything

According to GM2 the most important, if not the only important consideration when recruiting someone to a leadership role in an eSports organization is experience and credibility. Having played a game relevant to the position competitively is considered a major advantage, much more so than having held a leadership position before. GM2 considers this a flaw to the collective mind set of the eSports world, as competitive experience doesn't necessarily translate into performance as a leader. He argues that this holds true to leadership positions both on-the-field and off-the-field, as he himself attributes his own competitive success to his team consisting of good leaders and team workers.

TEAM CAP argues that his long-time experience as a captain is the reason for him being chosen the captain of his team. CGO identifies himself as a leader because of his background as a player, long experience in the organization and broad knowledge.

"... and I also believe that because of my experience as a professional player in eSports, players in our organization come to me and decisions are made."

GM1 points to the practical nature of eSports organizations. Hands-on experience of the games themselves is more highly appreciated than "softer" values.

4.2.2.2.2 The value of flexibility

Unlike the majority of traditional sports, eSports athletes often see the fundamentals of the games in which they compete change significantly. Developers can, and regularly will update their games. This rapidly changing environment demands flexibility from those who seek to excel over a longer period of time. CGO argues that having agile leaders who can adapt to these circumstances is crucial to their success as an organization:

"In regards to our recruitment we are very eager on each team having a distinct leader who is open-minded, good at giving and receiving feedback and also agile. The games change more rapidly than football or ice hockey for that matter [...] It's remarkable that we've been successful in eSports over the course of more than 10 years, through different patches and set ups. I don't think you can attribute that to luck or chance."

According to TEAM CAP, the changing nature of eSports is a significant contributor to the rapid rise and fall of teams in the eSports scene. In his experience, teams can find themselves being on top during one tournament but then finish in last place shortly thereafter.

"Every single patch when something is popular, there is a sort of way of dealing with it out there. Teams might not realize it, or they may - and the ones who have at the right time are the ones who are going to shine that tournament [...] But the way they have figured it out might not be that good three weeks later after the tournament when everyone knows how they play and they can adapt and prepare for that playstyle."

GM2 brings up some mentality issues eSports leaders can face in regards to this. He has seen that many players don't see past the current trend or norm prevailing in their game. This leads to difficulties for captains or coaches who seek to disrupt the status quo will as they will be met with cynicism.

4.2.2.2.3 Leadership by democracy or lone wolf leadership?

It seems to be the consensus of the interviewees that executive power and authority to make decisions regarding the organization or team should lie with formal positions. However, it should also be noted that five out of six respondents saw a democratic, consensus-driven approach to leadership as the preferred method. It was only PLAYER who wishes his leaders had acted somewhat more "authoritarian".

TEAM CAP points out that while his preferred method of leadership involves bringing the whole team together, taking all perspectives into account and then coming to a consensus, that's not how all eSports leaders operate and no method is objectively correct. According to him there are more authoritarian leaders who also achieve success.

4.2.2.2.4 The supportive leader

Several interviewees bring up the notion of the supportive leader; the one that others turn to for support in difficult times.

When GM2 thinks of a display of good leadership he recalls times when he has directed heated discussions from emotions and rage to other subjects like tactics. TEAM CAP and COACH both value the ability to stay level-headed in tough situations in a leader, who should then attempt to calm or motivate those who are under pressure.

He also believes that the leader should be a conflict solver who intervenes in conflict so players can focus on the game. COACH agrees with GM2's idea of the conflict solving leader.

4.3 The culture of eSports Organizations

4.3.1 Organizational philosophy

When asked to describe the culture in their organization, all interviewees touched upon their organization's relationship to the importance of victory. Every organization we looked at had formulated its own definition of success.

CGO at ORG2 said that "performance first" is at the core of their culture.

"We want to create a culture, an environment and a strategy that is based in player performance [...] We invest in the players' environment when we make decisions. Marketing, sponsorship activities, video production, whatever it may pertain to we never let it have a detrimental effect on practice, competition and the players' well-being. [...] If you look at the number of medals and wins we have I think that we are in the top among the biggest organization."

Both GM1 and TEAM CAP of ORG1 and ORG3 respectively, also placed great importance on winning.

"Everyone has been on the same page in terms of what we should achieve. We have had the same vision from day one up until today. We want to be a championship winning team."

- GM1

TEAM CAP argued that this is something that all teams that compete are characterized by. In his opinion professional players play Dota because they love it, but winning is what they concentrate their efforts on, so for him and most players it is the most important thing.

The one organization that did not place emphasis on the importance of winning was ORG4. Rather than achieving the most victories, its mission since inception has been inclusion, to be a place where everyone who wants to compete in eSports can feel welcome, practice and compete under one banner. Such a philosophy has its practical implications, such as having several teams within one eSport under the same name, a situation which has created conflict in the past. Better teams may not want to be associated with their weaker namesakes.

"In traditional sports one team competes within several divisions and age groups. And it works for them... It should not be an issue for us either."

- GM 2

4.3.2 Individual motivation

We asked the interviewees what motivates them as individuals in order to see how well their philosophies corresponded to their organizations.

COACH of ORG2 responded that, in line with ORG2's philosophy, his main ambition has always been to win and be the best:

"I think what spurred me the most was that I've always enjoyed competing – I've always wanted to win and be the best. It's always been my driving force in everything I do. If I can't be the best at something then I don't even want to do it. I don't have the reaction speed required to compete at the highest level anymore. Then I saw this (coaching) as an opportunity to contribute my knowledge and experience and help others become better."

Transitioning from being a competitive player to coaching one of ORG2's teams, COACH equalizes his team's success to his individual success.

CGO shares this sentiment:

"I've always been a proactive person who enjoys building teams, include people and I think that's key to being consistent over time in athletics and competition. During my career as a player I made the choice to help in other areas than the Counter-Strike¹⁰ team [in which CGO played]."

When Counter-Strike 1.6 fell out of popularity, CGO decided to discontinue his player career and become CGO and shareholder in ORG2.

This opinion is also expressed by both GM1 and TEAM CAP. GM1 states that he's never satisfied with getting 2nd place and that the same goes for the majority of players he's known. PLAYER, who played for ORG1 believes that his own success mattered more to him than it did to the team, something he doesn't see as a given. His previous team put more pressure on him perform.

4.3.3 Perceived stereotypes

When asked about stereotypes and norms which impact perceptions about eSport athletes and professionals, we saw that the responses could be split up into three categories; internal and external stereotypes, as well as stereotypes related to gender. Internal stereotypes are the stereotypes which are perceived by those within eSports organizations themselves while external stereotypes are those which are perceived by those outside said organizations (or even the eSports industry as a whole). It should be noted that these external stereotypes are described from the perspective of "insiders" of eSports and do not certainly reflect the actual stereotypes perceived by "outsiders".

4.3.3.1 External stereotypes

Both GM1 and PLAYER believe that the public's general preconception of eSports and eSports athletes can be summarized as "a bunch of young guys sitting at home, out of shape, just playing video games". This is a view which, at large, belittles the professional aspect of competitive gaming and also establishes the typical eSports athlete as a young man.

TEAM CAP agrees that this has been the predominant view of eSports but stresses that it's shifting away towards a more balanced impression. He argues that playing video games is a very common pastime among the

¹⁰ A game for the PC. One team controls the terrorists and the other the counter-terrorists. They try to achieve different objectives and kill each other. Developed and published by Valve Inc.

general population today which makes it less “geeky”. The increase in media coverage and offline events contribute to humanizing the scene and making it more relatable to outsiders.

4.3.3.2 Internal stereotypes

PLAYER explains that his view on eSport athletes is much more varied than the external perspective. He explains that those involved in eSports know that athletes need to take care of their physique, health and well-being if they are to excel. According to CGO and GM2, eSport insiders mostly view themselves as being practical and meritocratic people and those who have achievements have more credibility. Due to the youth of the industry, most organization owners, leaders and other influential individuals seldom have much prior experience in other industries, or an education particularly relevant to their position. In CGO’s opinion, they are passionate people who, with the benefit of having an entrepreneurial mind set, found themselves where they are today. This notion can be seen as the ideal of who an eSports leader should be.

As eSports grows as an industry and organizations grow larger with a larger variety of functions, the profile of leaders and management is shifting. Individuals without eSports backgrounds make up a larger share than before, due to their experience in other business sectors becoming increasingly relevant.

4.3.3.3 Gender

Stereotypes about an industry can act as entry barriers, which in turn may reinforce the stereotypes. It is evident to an observer of the eSports scene that the majority of athletes and personalities are male. This gender distribution disparity gives cause to question whether or not there are any entry barriers specifically to females. When asked about the existence of any such entry barriers, TEAM CAP had a strong opinion on the matter:

“I am of the conviction that a big part of the reason that we don't see as many female eSport athletes is: At that point in time when a lot of the players grow and they get into a position of becoming competitive... Again, cross-check with football. When is it that someone becomes a talent? It's probably when you're 10 to 15 years old [...] If you look at that in gaming I think that's just an age group where it's very different for girls and boys what they spend their spare time on. [...]”

TEAM CAP then goes on to argue that the under-representation of women in eSports is largely due to statistical reasons, stemming from differing gaming behaviours in the critical age range. A smaller amount of women in

the age range 10-15 play video games to the extent that their male peers do, resulting in a smaller probability of going pro.

GM1, PLAYER and GM2 believe that there is a social stigma towards women who play extensive amounts of video games, which may discourage women from reaching the hours spent necessary to excel at an eSport. This stigma still affects female players who have gone professional. PLAYER has witnessed female eSport athletes being targeted cyber-bullying because of their gender. GM2 has experiences of tournament administrators discriminating against a female player.

All respondents agree that women don't have any inherent disadvantages to men in regards to physique or similar aspects, and that women who've made their way into professional gaming should feasibly have the same chances as men to find success. PLAYER is of the opinion that by performing well, an eSports personality can "get away with anything". He points out female eSport athletes who enjoy respect and popularity thanks to their achievements.

4.4 Leadership process example

Thus far, we have collected the data from the conducted interviews and presented them into categories according to what we perceived were major recurring themes. These specific themes and factors were usually described as a part of an example. In order to put some of these themes into context, we have chosen to include the process of a major management decision made in ORG2, shared with us by CGO.

At the end of 2014, ORG2 chose to replace four of the players in one of their teams, leaving only one player behind to rebuild the team around. The decision was ultimately CGO's to make, with final sign-off from the rest of the management team. It was mostly CGO and the team manager who were engaged in the discussions surrounding this decision (CGO mentions that this event took place before it became mandatory to have full-time coaches in the affected eSport. Had this change taken place today, the manager's role in it would have been taken by the coach).

CGO mentions that he and others in the organization were strongly of the opinion that teams should be built around a small core group of players with different roles, where one was the clear leader. Due to the high pace of change in eSports, having a leader which can stay relevant over a long time is very valuable. This is why CGO advocated replacing players which were not considered leaders in favor of the player with leadership skill, despite them being considered more individually skilled at the game.

This decision sparked a conflict within ORG2, with those responsible for sponsorship and fan relations disagreeing with CGO's standpoint. They thought that the separation of the younger, highly skilled players

from the organization would see a negative reaction from sponsors and fans. CGO argued that the proposed change would result in better long-term performance from the team, which would better adhere to ORG2's organizational "performance first" philosophy.

As expected, the decision was met with criticism from media and fans. However, it resulted in a very successful 2015 with many major victories for the ORG2 line up.

5.0 Analysis

We are studying the applicability of the Multilevel Model on eSport organizations. Throughout the study we have been able to attain data which serve to explain the eSports industry and the conditions under which team organizations and their leaders operate. From said data we attempt to derive whether or not the principal differentiating factors described in the Multilevel Model are equally relevant in an eSport setting as they are in a sport setting.

5.1 Antecedents to leadership

5.1.1 Participation in eSport

The Multilevel Model includes the leader's own identity as a significant factor which influences leadership style, the leadership process and decision-making. When studying leadership in sport management specifically, the model urges scholars to consider that participation in sport has an impact on leadership.

Whether or not the impact of participation in eSport is a relevant factor to consider when studying leadership in an eSport setting depends on the extent to which eSport leaders have said participation experience.

Judging from the results, the opinion that participation in eSport is important to becoming and being a leader is present in the industry. In our study, all the interviewees who hold leadership positions (GM2, CGO and GM1) have played competitively before they transitioned into their leadership roles. In addition, they are of the firm belief that such is the norm within the eSport industry, to the point where it's almost a necessity for having a leadership position.

However, these sentiments were not shared by everyone. TEAM CAP and COACH were of a different opinion. None of them saw competitive experience as a necessity for becoming a leader. While understanding of eSports as an industry is crucial, they believed there were alternative ways of acquiring the necessary know-how.

Results are inconclusive to whether or not participation in eSport is perceived as a must-have for leaders. However, partly due to the young age of the industry, most leaders today have been eSport athletes themselves.

Whether or not participation in eSports has an effect on leadership is yet to be thoroughly researched by scholars, but it wouldn't be unlikely, considering the similarities between sports and eSports. TEAM CAP and PLAYER both believe that their own as professional players have made them more apt leaders. Furthermore, from PLAYER's perspective, leaders who have practiced eSports themselves can more easily relate to the players which in turn make them better leaders.

To conclude, the prevalence of eSports participation among eSports leaders and the similarities to traditional sport makes a strong case for participation in eSports being a relevant factor to consider.

5.1.2 Darker traits and moral identity

The model makes predictions in regard to the traits of leaders. It is suggested that the pressures of winning will cause darker traits to be more prevalent among sports leaders, but that the extent of moral identity development will decrease this manifestation.

This analysis begins by examining to what extent darker traits are manifested among eSport leaders.

The first observation of note is that none of our interviewees listed any darker traits when asked to describe an eSport leader. They generally describe the leader as someone who is flexible, supportive and who has a past within competitive eSports (although, as mentioned earlier, it's not considered a necessity by everyone).

However, it is not certain that darker traits are not present. TEAM CAP makes the following statement; no leadership method is objectively correct as long as they bring the desired outcome of winning. Even if darker traits are not present in an organization, the pressure of winning could yet make them acceptable to its members. Hence, in a theoretical context this suggests that the "sexual selection" forces are weaker in competitive teams and that traits are selected for (emerge) exclusively based on their effectiveness.

Whether these are biased toward darker traits is something that we have not been able to verify in this study.

It is easier to study the effectiveness moral identity has as a restricting influence on the darker traits. ESport organizations generally do not foster youth athletes to the same extent as traditional sport clubs. This would imply that eSport athletes who go on to take leadership positions have not had the same opportunity to be influenced by symbolization and internalization of ethical leadership as their sport counterparts. The exception found in our study would be ORG4, which arranges activities targeted towards a younger audience, perhaps showing the future of eSports.

To conclude, the pressure of winning creates conditions for darker traits to emerge and be accepted. Admittedly, no evident cases of such darker traits have been observed, perhaps due to their nature. Also moral identity gained from eSports practice has not had the opportunity to offset such darker traits in eSports, given that organizations don't indulge in youth programs or practice.

5.2. The leadership process

5.2.1 Culture

The Multilevel model does not draw any conclusions on how organizational culture influences leadership uniquely in a sport setting. Because of its unequivocal position, the authors urge scholars to fill this knowledge gap. We therefore investigate how organizational culture expresses itself and impacts leadership in eSport organizations.

In the results from our interviews, we found expressions of organizational culture. For the sake of fair comparison of cultures, these expressions were organized under Schein's three levels of culture; artifacts, values and assumptions. In several examples described to us we could explicitly discern the impact organizational culture had on the process of leadership.

The most obvious expressions of culture we came across in the interviews were organizational values. The ORG2 team overhaul described in the results section is a fitting example. ORG2's policy to value competitive performance above all else not only served to guide CGO's stance towards the decision made, but also gave him leverage towards the other parties involved in the matter. An expressed value of this nature puts a disproportionate amount of power in the hands of the CGO, as it indirectly places his or her area of responsibility above the other departments' in order of importance and priority. Similar core values were also held by ORG1, while at the same time aspiring to be a flat, democratic organization with a friendly attitude.

ORG4's organizational values differ from ORG2's and ORG1's. Here, inclusion and support are valued higher than athletic performance. The organization GM2 described differs wildly from ORG2 in its expressed values.

There are also less obvious ways in which organizational culture manifests itself. According to the interviewees, performance and the achievement of victory is the top priority of athlete and leader within eSports. Such beliefs are in themselves expressions of culture, categorized by Schein as assumptions. Such assumptions would have profound impact on leader priorities and style of communication.

Consequences of such assumptions are noticeable when studying the case of ORG4. To GM2, the individual players' lack of involvement in organizational issues at a higher level than their own team's performance was a

major concern. He brought up moments of dissatisfaction from players who had to share the organization's name with teams of lesser skill. We consider this conflict to be the result of having organizational values which clash with underlying assumptions.

In conclusion, we found no evidence of a prevailing organizational culture at the organizational values level. However, the underlying assumption of individuals that winning is the top priority can be observed in all organizations that are part of our study. Therefore, it is possible that the Multilevel Model holds relevance in regards to organizational culture as a principal factor in an eSports setting and needs to be studied further.

5.2.2 Governance

The proposal within the model is that these sport organizations are unique in the regard that they compete and collaborate with their counterparts. This is different from other business sectors where organizations mainly compete among each other.

At a first glance this is also the case in eSport organizations. Particularly noticeable is the competitive aspects between teams. ESport as a term implies competition and the objective of one team is to win over others. As established in the culture section winning is important for all organizations. Hence, the sense of competition is very present among players and leaders.

The collaboration aspects are less prevalent. As described in the results section, there exist organizations that aim to facilitate collaboration between eSport organizations and through said collaboration develop the industry. However, there seemed to be little faith in the effectiveness of such organizations among our interviewees.

In conclusion, eSport organizations are competitive and they have also made efforts to collaborate. These collaboration efforts have thus far been proven ineffective.

5.2.3 Athletes and coaches

The model proposes that coaches and athletes place expectations on their leaders in regards to what they need to be successful and that these expectations may be at odds with the leaders preferred direction for the organization. Furthermore the model proposes that coaches and athletes have the ability to affect their organizations based on their celebrity status.

In our study we found a few situations where there was a mismatch between player and coach expectations and the leader's preferred direction. PLAYER of ORG1 wished that the leaders would create more opportunities

for him to train with feedback. COACH of ORG2 felt that the organization did not focus enough on the team he coached.

Two circumstances in particular suggest that athletes have significant power within an organization. (1) Management in all organizations highlight that they value player feedback and players felt that their opinion were valued by their leaders. (2) CGO argues that athletes today are able to influence an eSport organization to a greater extent than they have ever done before since the risk that displeased players leave for other organizations has grown in recent times.

Yet there are also clear signs of weak player power. (1) Due to their concerns not being prioritized, COACH's team saw no other choice but to leave ORG2. (2) CGO and GM1 highlight how they at their own volition can sign or drop players at any time.

The differences in treatment could be due to different celebrity statuses, implying that players with more fans have bigger power. In support of this, all interviewees highlighted that players with more fans are more valuable to the organization. Such a relationship would contradict the way management act according to themselves. As an example CGO says that fan opinion is not what he bases his team decisions on. In his words competitive performance is the number one priority.

It is likely that management value both the celebrity status and the competitive performance of an athlete, and that both of these provide the athlete with power. Both PLAYER and GM2 agree that the performance of an athlete and the number of fans an athlete have are often closely correlated, where the latter follows from the former. Certainly, managers may value fan following and athletic performance differently. However, any such perceived value disparity is likely to often be inconsequential to the outcome of decisions, due to the close correlation between fan following and athletic performance.

Overall the proposals hold up when studying eSport organizations. Celebrity status may not always be the primary antecedent to athlete or coach power, albeit they are likely to be closely correlated.

5.2.4 Fans & alumni

During the study, it was made evident that the term alumni is not applicable to eSports, as it refers to alumni of academic institutions which participate in intercollegiate sports. While there are some universities which field eSports teams under their banner, these rarely gather the attention from major parts of the student and alumni body, but rather eSports enthusiasts. Therefore we suggest to ignore the impact of alumni in eSports at this stage, with reservation for their potential influence in the future.

Fans, however, proved to be an influential stakeholder to consider. When asked, interviewees would not admit to being influenced by fans to the extent of basing major decisions on fan opinions. Through further discussion, we encountered a number of cases where fans could influence and impact the operations of eSport organizations:

COACH's example regarding the flourishing rumours around his team showcases how powerful fans can be, as they managed to become the source of doubt and misunderstanding within an organization.

Fans are at times emotionally invested in teams and players, which leads to an urgency to their claims. PLAYER's testimony of fans sending emails to team sponsors as a result of their concerns with team decisions shows how their urgency can translate into action that impacts the organization.

The fact that PR and marketing departments and activities become essential to larger organizations is a testament to the legitimacy of fan influences.

In conclusion, our results point towards the Multilevel Model accurately describing the unique importance of fans to eSports leaders.

5.2.5 Stereotypes

In the Multilevel Model, stereotypes act as a constraining force to the leadership process. If the model holds true to eSports, minority groups within the scene would find themselves at risk of not being deemed acceptable leaders. The model specifically brings up gender as a reason for discrimination within sports.

In our study we have been able to identify women being at a disadvantage to men when pursuing success in eSports. While the model brings up the idealization of the male physique as a reason for stereotype constraints in sports, this idealization is not practically applicable to eSports due to physique playing a lesser role. Yet, there is evidence that stereotypes constrain women in the eSports industry. We found the following two entry barriers to women pursuing a leadership position in the industry:

Firstly, TEAM CAP attests to cultural norms preventing women from playing extensive amounts of video games when they're young, naturally resulting in a smaller number of women attempting to go pro.

Secondly, PLAYER and GM2 recall cases of female eSports athletes being discriminated against because of their gender. In these cases they were mistreated by fans and tournament organizers. While it wasn't their capability as leaders that was explicitly under scrutiny in said examples, they are not without relevance to the Multilevel Model's definition of stereotype constraints. From the interviews we have learned that the most likely way to become the leader of a team organization is to first play competitively and then transition into the

leadership role. The necessity of taking the aforementioned route to leadership positions is not agreed upon among the interviewees, but it is to this date the most common one. Women would be at a disadvantage to men when attempting to achieve athletic success, due to the hostility of the environment.

As a result of the skewed gender distribution in eSports, there is a risk of women being considered as tokens. Being part of a token group can have a number of detrimental consequences, such as having the pressure of representing a whole gender laid upon the shoulders of the athlete.

Again the results strengthen the validity of Multilevel Model when applied in an eSports setting. In an industry dominated by men, women are at a disadvantage because of hostility from their surroundings when attempting to find success. This disadvantage ultimately leads to significantly slighter chances of reaching a management position within an organization. This may change in the future as other qualities than athletic background become more important and more women find their way into eSports. A number of influential teams are currently investing in female athletes and teams. The future will certainly be interesting to follow.

5.3 Unique differentiating factors to the eSport context

Thus far we have analyzed how the contextual factors suggested in the Multilevel Model apply in an eSport setting. Aspects unique to eSports have therefore not yet been examined. This section therefore lists factors we think differentiate the eSport setting from other settings. We believe that these factors are relevant for future studies in eSports and therefore suggest them as addition to the Multilevel Model when it is applied in the context of eSports. We encourage other scholars to challenge our suggestions and continue to develop a theoretical framework for leadership in eSport organization.

5.3.1 Developer

Throughout the study, the developer as an influence to leadership was discussed several times by the interviewees. The principal example is that, due to the wishes of Riot, all teams competing in League of Legends have had to recruit full-time coaches to be eligible for participation in higher-level competitions. GM1's statements about how developers set rules for competition and what he perceives as "the overall absurdity of the situation" add to the testimonials about developer influence.

The control that developers possess over eSports is extensive, due to their ownership of the rights to the game and its brand. As they choose to interfere with how their games are played competitively, players and teams must adapt to their rules. This relation is unique to eSports. If a game developer decides to remove a game from the market, it would mean the end to an eSport. Also if they make significant changes to the game, the fundamentals of the eSport changes with it.

Organizations, leaders and players must and will consider the role and stance of the developer when making decisions about their investments, career and other issues of importance.

6.0 Conclusion and discussion

6.1 Conclusion

Previous eSports scholars have called out for a leadership study that examines the possible link between eSport and traditional sport. This thesis aims to contribute research to the field of eSports by investigating the research question:

How can leadership in eSports organizations be studied with the use of theoretical frameworks from sports management theory?

The theoretical framework that we decided to use was the Multilevel Model for the analysis of leadership in sport organizations by Peachy et al. In the analysis we seek empirical validation for the applicability of the Multilevel Model on eSport organizations. The model outlines differentiating factors that have unique influence on the leadership processes in sport organizations. We have examined the extent to which these factors and conditions are also present in the context of eSports.

Overall, it appears that the model is a good fit for eSport organizations. Although we could not specifically find evidence of darker traits among leaders the conditions for them to develop appear to be in place. Moral identity development is however not relevant to examine in eSport organizations as they have no equivalent to sport youth programs. The model encourages further research in the culture of sport organizations. In our study we examined the culture of eSport organizations and found that they are all characterized by an underlying assumption that athletic performance always is the top priority. We also found that the governance of eSport organizations forced them to both compete and collaborate with each other as the model dictates. Athletes and coaches also seem to affect eSport organizations similarly to how they affect sport organizations, even if the celebrity status of the eSport counterparts is more subdued. Stereotypes constrains the opportunities of women and minorities in eSport organizations as predicted by the model. The underlying mechanisms are however different.

Finally, we found that a useful supplement to the model in an eSport setting is the study of the game developer that has designed the game being played as an eSport and has extensive ability to change it.

6.2 Discussion

6.2.1 Reliability

It is worthy to note that the sample of organizations studied in this thesis do not perfectly represent all of the world's professional eSport team organizations. As they are geographically restricted to Western Europe there is a significant risk of misrepresenting organizations in other parts of the world.

Secondly, we would have preferred to have conducted more interviews than six. While we are pleased with having interviewees at different positions in eSport organizations, having only one of certain roles represented could mean the results represent individual opinions rather than the opinions of a role.

6.2.2 Suggestions for further research

We urge scholars to challenge our findings and additions. We believe that further research is necessary to establish the link between leadership in eSport and sport organizations. Based on what we found in this study we hope to see progress in research on the prevalence of darker traits among eSport leaders, as well as the impact of organizational culture. Finally, we support that scholars research leadership in the context of eSports and apply, critique as well as improve upon the Multilevel Model with our suggested revisions.

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