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Author(s): Riivari, Elina; Heikkinen, Suvi

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Virtuousness in Sports Organizations: Examination of Ethical Organizational Culture and Its Virtues

Elina Riivari & Suvi Heikkinen

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Virtuousness in Sports Organizations: Examination of Ethical Organizational Culture and Its Virtues

Elina Riivari  and Suvi Heikkinen 

School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to examine the ethical organizational culture of top sports organizations in Finland. We were especially interested in how employees of sports organizations evaluate perceptions of ethical organizational culture and perceive specific ethical organizational virtues. We applied a mixed methods approach. We gathered the empirical material through questionnaires and interviews with representatives from Finland's top sports organizations. The findings show that the questionnaire participants evaluated the perceptions of ethical organizational culture of the Finnish top sports organizations as being quite ethical. The findings also show that the ethical organizational virtues of transparency, discussability, congruency of management, and supportability have a special role in maintaining and developing but also challenging organizational ethics in sports organizations. This study contributes to the discussion on ethical organizational virtues and deepens the understanding of the virtuousness of organizations in the field of sports management research.

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corporate ethical virtues; CEV model; ethical culture; sports management; mixed methods

1. Introduction

The discussion of ethical behavior in the field of sports commonly focuses on the wrongdoings of an individual or a group of individuals and, thus, involves, for example, cheating, the use of doping and match fixing. As such, the understanding of sports organizations' management and organizational practices from the perspective of ethics and ethical behavior is seldom researched (Day et al., 2012; Pritchard & Burton, 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). However, ethical conduct is important not only for individuals but also for organizations in the field of sports. Thus, we examine the perceptions of ethical organizational culture of top sports organizations in Finland and in particular how the employees evaluate and perceive their organization's ethical culture and virtues.

Sports illustrate organizational phenomena, including loyalty, change, compensation systems, organizational structures, and gender norms in leadership (e.g.,

CONTACT Elina Riivari  elina.riivari@jyu.fi  School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland

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García-Fernández et al., 2018; Garner et al., 2016; Gómez et al., 2008; Ryan & Dickson, 2018; Wagstaff et al., 2016). The field of sports has multiple paradoxical characteristics and, thus, offers an interesting setting for examining organizational ethics. Smith and Stewart (2010) noted two different subsets within the field of sports that influence how sports can be organized and managed. On one hand, it has been claimed that a sports organization is “a unique cultural institution” with a set of unusual characteristics whereby standard business management practices lead often to unwanted outcomes, such as poor decision-making (Smith & Stewart, 2010, p. 1). It is worth noting that for example no other field of business would accept the level of scrutiny and standards set for performance (e.g., medals, international success by athletes) that exist in sports organizations.

On the other hand, it has been stated that a sports organization can be viewed and managed using a business-as-usual approach, meaning that it is dependent on political decisions, market pressures, and stakeholder demands. According to Gómez et al. (2008), the influence of the political, economic, and social environments in which the organizations operate is the most important consideration when sports organizations are studied. Sports organizations are influenced by high political pressures, hard competition for resources, issues with social proximity, and high media interest. These paradoxes not only make sports unique organizational settings but also offer a fruitful scene for scrutiny of organizational ethics.

Previous research has noted the importance of an organizational culture to enable and ensure overall ethicality of an organization (e.g., Baucus & Beck-Dudley, 2005; Whetstone, 2005). Ethical organizational culture includes the perceptions of the conditions that are available for (un)ethical behavior. In other words, ethical organizational culture refers to the procedural elements of the organization’s informal context (Huhtala et al., 2021). In this study, we chose to focus on ethical organizational culture based on virtue ethics theory (Kaptein, 2008; Solomon, 2004). Virtue ethics highlights the idea of intrinsic motivation for successful organizational behavior instead of focusing on principles or rules that prevent it (Kaptein, 2017).

Ethical organizational culture is a central element of the maintenance and development of (un)ethical behavior within organizations (Collier, 1995, 1998; Kaptein, 2008; Treviño, 1990; Treviño & Weaver, 2003). There is an established tradition of normative measurement of ethical culture (e.g. De Bode et al., 2013; Huhtala et al., 2018; Kaptein, 2008) that is based on the unitary approach of organizational culture (Sinclair, 1993). According to this approach, organizational culture is based on shared values and meanings that can be actively managed in organizations. Unitary approach has been criticized on its’ strong emphasis on management control and managerial ideology that can be harmful, undesired or ethically questionable. Moreover, the idea of unitary, actively managed ethical culture has been questioned (Sinclair, 1993; Smircich, 1983). It has been also criticized on that it ignores the subculture perspectives (Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Ogbonna & Harris, 2014) and expects that strong cultures foster good performance and organizational outcomes (e.g. Alvesson, 2010; Sinclair, 1993). Despite the criticism and different approaches to study organizational culture the value of the unitary approach is in its attention to the cohesive culture and its capacity to reveal the shared and generalized assumptions about ethical behavior and ethicality in an organization (Sinclair, 1993). Creating and

maintaining a strong culture doesn't guarantee ethical behavior but can offer various resources for employees to support ethical conduct, for example clear expectations, and support for ethical decision-making or facing and discussing ethical problems (Kaptein, 2008).

We apply the Corporate Ethical Virtues (CEV) model (Kaptein, 1998, 2008), which comprises eight virtues (clarity, congruency of supervisors, congruency of management, feasibility, supportability, transparency, discussability, and sanctionability) that support ethical conduct in an organization. In the context of sports, the concept of virtue ethics has been discussed mainly at the individual level (e.g., virtuous character, individual excellence) (e.g., DeSensi & Rosenberg, 2003; Hardman et al., 2010; McNamee, 2008). The applied CEV model provides a normative and multidimensional tool for examining ethical organizational culture and offers one of the most thoroughly defined, developed, tested and applied sets of ethical virtues in an organizational setting (De Bode et al., 2013; Huhtala et al., 2011; Huhtala, 2013 Huhtala et al., 2018; Kangas et al., 2014; Kangas et al., 2015; Kaptein, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2017; Riivari & Lämsä, 2014). In other words, the CEV model offers an instrument to examine, evaluate, and develop ethical virtues at the organizational level.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the ethical organizational culture of top sports organizations. Since systematic research is still lacking on ethical organizational culture and employee perceptions of ethical organizational virtues in the context of top sports, more in-depth knowledge and understanding of the topic is needed. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How do the employees of Finland's top sports organizations evaluate the perceptions of ethical organizational culture? (2) How do the employees of Finland's top sports organizations perceive the ethical organizational culture and its specific virtues? In order to answer the research questions, we gathered both quantitative and qualitative research data and used a mixed method to study how the topic was perceived by employees in the Finnish sport organizations. This study contributes to the discussion on ethical organizational culture of top sports organizations by widening the understanding of organizational ethics and deepening the understanding of ethical organizational virtues in the field. We identify and present an overview of ethical organizational culture and ethical organizational virtues in the Finnish top sports organizations. In particular, we show that some ethical organizational virtues have a significant role in building and maintaining the ethical organizational culture. This study makes visible those ethical virtues that are important to the development of ethical organizational culture in sports organizations. Moreover, our study discusses what implications the understanding of ethical organizational virtues and virtuousness have for managing sports organizations.

2. Ethical Organizational Culture

Ethical culture refers to an organization's ability to support employees' ethical actions and help them avoid unethical ones (Collier, 1995; Kaptein, 2008). Ethical organizational culture consists of organizational practices, traditions, and conditions that either support or obstruct ethically sustainable behavior (Kaptein, 2008; Treviño &

Weaver, 2003). Kaptein (2008) has drawn a view of ethical organizational culture from virtue ethics theory and includes the idea that ethical culture consists of organizational ethical virtues that encourage employees to act ethically. In this study, we define ethical organizational culture as the virtuousness of an organization (cf. Kaptein, 2008) and use Kaptein's (2008, 2009, 2010) normative and multidimensional CEV model to conceptualize it. The CEV model is based on Solomon's (2000, 2004) virtue theory of business ethics. According to this theory, organizations need certain virtues to be ethical. These ethical virtues form the framework for ethical organizational behavior. The CEV model assumes that the stronger the presence of the virtues are, the better they are as they should lead to more ethical behavior and less unethical behavior (Kaptein, 2017). Ethical organizational virtues can be developed, although as features of organizational culture, developing them is not simple or self-evident (Kaptein, 2009; Schein, 2010).

The CEV model comprises the following eight dimensions: clarity, congruency of supervisor, congruency of management, feasibility, supportability, transparency, discussability, and sanctionability. These ethical virtues provide the conditions for ethical conduct in an organization. The ethicality of an organization can be evaluated according to how well the members of the organization assess the CEV model's dimensions (Kaptein, 2008).

Clarity, which is the first ethical organizational virtue, refers to the official expectations of employees' ethical behavior; these expectations should be clear and justified (Kaptein, 2008). For example, the types of actions that are considered ethical or unethical should be clear to all organization members. Unclear rules governing ethical behavior could increase the risk of unethical behavior.

The congruency of supervisors and management are the second and third virtues, respectively. Here, congruency emphasizes the importance of supervisors' and managers' actions. In their positions as role models, supervisors and managers are exemplars of the organization's ethical expectations that accord with the organization's official norms and rules. Supervisors and managers should also show other employees that they meet the organization's expectations (Kaptein, 2008). The value of integrity is relevant to congruency. Integrity is one of the main virtues of business ethics (Solomon, 1992) and a prerequisite for the development of trust within organizations (Mayer et al., 1995).

The fourth virtue, feasibility, refers to the resources that enable employees to act according to the official norms, rules, and requirements for ethical behavior (Kaptein, 2008). These resources include money, time, information, supplies, and tools. The fifth virtue is supportability, which refers to the support that an organization provides for its employees to meet normative expectations. From the organization's perspective, it is important to encourage employees to meet official expectations and to act ethically. Supportability refers to organizational practices such as mutual trust, respect, and the sharing of aims and purposes toward the common good.

The sixth virtue, transparency, refers to employees' awareness of the consequences of others' actions in the organization. Transparency helps employees understand the expectations of ethical behavior and to take responsibility for their actions. In practice, transparency refers to openness about and awareness of the consequences of

actions toward colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. The seventh virtue, discussability, refers to employees' opportunities to discuss ethical topics in the workplace. Organizations should offer appropriate official and unofficial channels through which employees can openly share their ideas and experiences of ethical issues and discuss related topics.

The eighth virtue, sanctionability, refers to rewards for ethical behavior and sanctions for unethical behavior. According to Kaptein (2008), ethical behavior should be supported with rewards, and no unethical behavior should be tolerated, as it might lead to further acceptance of such behavior. The definition of ethical organizational culture as the virtuousness of an organization includes an absolute ethical element. All virtues underline the importance of integrity because they create and maintain the ethical organizational culture.

Although the CEV model has not yet been applied in prior research in the context of sports organization, some studies have examined organizational culture and ethics in the field. For example, MacIntosh and Doherty (2005) studied organizational culture in the private fitness industry and found that it influences employees' attitudes and behavior, such as the intention to leave, but not organizational performance. In another organizational culture study, MacIntosh et al. (2010) found that values are shared within different industries (for-profit and non-profit organizations), highlighting the existence of industry-wide cultures. Their result supported the notion that industry-relevant demands and dynamics influence the values, norms, beliefs, and underlying assumptions—or organizational culture—that shape the ideas of how things should be done (Smith & Shilbury, 2004). Moreover, prior research in Finland has shown that Finnish sports organizations are characterized by close and centralized social networks that hold the power to shape organizations (Lehtonen, 2017). As previous studies have been conducted mainly in other contexts (e.g. United States, Canada), we lack sufficient research on the Finnish context.

In their review article, Peachey et al. (2015) noted that ethics and organizational culture are among the main themes emerging within sports organization and leadership research, which currently focuses on ethical and servant leadership. Moreover, they have called for future studies on organizational culture, which would provide a context for examining leadership in sports organizations (Peachey et al., 2015). We answer this call by focusing on the ethical organizational culture in sports organizations in which leadership dimension is included. In addition, previous research has suggested that promoting and developing ethical leadership is crucial for sports organizations and their future success (Sagas & Wigley, 2014; Staurowsky, 2014). In another study, Burton et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between ethical leadership and ethical climate in sports organizations. The ethical behavior of top management and executive leadership has been recognized as a powerful tool that can be used to influence and strategize organizational behavior (Thomas et al., 2004). As the research of ethical leadership in sports has focused mainly on coaching, teams, and college sports, our contribution is to shed light on sports organizations' ethical organizational culture. We argue that leaders have a significant role in developing and maintaining shared ideas and this (un)ethical organizational culture not only hierarchically but also across an organization (Schaubroeck et al., 2012).

3. Finnish Top Sports Organizations as Research Context

Sports has had a strong connectivity to national identity in Finland (Aslama & Pantti, 2007; Laine, 2006). Historically, competitive sports were regarded as a vehicle through which a small, peripheral, poor nation was able to gain international prestige and to construct an image of itself as a viable nation (Blain et al., 1993); this ultimately had an effect on how sports were and continues to be perceived in Finland. Nordic sports organizations reflect their countries' welfare state model (Ronglan, 2015). The sports system, therefore, requires a balance to be maintained between top sports and sports for all. In Finland, sports organizations receive the main proportion of their funding from the state. Another feature that is specific to sports is its strong sectoral nature (Hoye et al., 2008). Sports organizations can vary significantly; they can be anything from corporate or business to not-for-profit and may have public backgrounds, which have different features and characteristics (e.g., regulation, strategy, organizational structure and culture, governance, and management systems).

However, top sports in Finland lack the degree of legitimacy seen in other Nordic countries. For example, the role of federations and elite sports clubs has been emphasized in advancing top sports and they are funded mainly with public funds coming from the ministry as commercial sponsorships are scarce (Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018). Moreover, the top sports has lacked authority and competence to change the system, structures and priorities for development. (Andersen & Ronglan, 2012.) As a system, Finnish organized sports represent the European sports model, also called the pyramid structure, where non-governmental bodies act as links to certain sports in combining international and grassroots practices (Henry, 2009). In Finland, the sports are organized by 70 nationwide federations that are responsible for developing sports culture and competition. The Finnish sports system has been renewed in 2008–2015, and research has shown the continued operation of elite and centralized networks. (Lehtonen, 2015, 2017.) Moreover, there is a strong yearn for looking accountability by enhancing gender equality not only in sport but also in leadership and board positions in the field of Finnish sport (Mikkonen et al., 2021). Holding sport organizations as accountable and legitimate in their ethical behavior, is not important only for top sports organizations in Finland but all over the world (Ronglan, 2015). Thus, this context makes it possible to widen the understanding of organizational ethics in the context of top sports.

A particular feature of Finland is that its tight social networks are perceived as contributing to a high sense of trust in society. In addition, being one of the least corrupt countries in the world, Finland often ranks highly in global surveys (e.g., Transparency International, 2018). While such close networks can facilitate mutual trust, there is a dark side—they can also cause ethically questionable behavior and malpractice within organizations (e.g., problems with transparency or lack of appropriate self-regulation) (c.f. Nielsen, 2003). During the data collection of this study, top sports organizations, their leadership and organizational practices were under public debate and there were several claims on ethical misconduct on issues as misuse of public funding, recruitment of officials, remuneration practices, and training methods.

4. Method

4.1. *The Mixed-Methods Approach*

The empirical data consisted of questionnaires and qualitative interviews. Thus, this study applied a mixed-methods approach by combining quantitative and qualitative data analyses. In this section, we describe the mixed-methods process, as suggested by Creswell (2014), used in this study. While mixed-methods is a well-known and significant research approach in the social and behavioral sciences, it is a rather new research approach in the field of sports management (van der Roest et al., 2015). The basic idea of a mixed-methods study is to combine qualitative and quantitative research approaches within the methodology of a single study or set of studies (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 17). In other words, mixed-methods research includes both qualitative and quantitative research “for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Johnson et al., 2007, p. 123). Rather than viewing qualitative and quantitative methodologies as separate, mixed-methods views this dichotomy on a continuum with a wide range of options derived from different methodological standpoints (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) in which both of these components have equal status but are complementary (Morse, 1991).

In this study, we apply a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014). We consider the MM research approach to be a “QUAN+QUAL” approach (Morse, 1991), whereby quantitative and qualitative components have equal status. We apply this approach to the formulation of the research question and sampling and to the data analysis and interpretation. Thus, we apply quantitative methods to the first research question and qualitative methods to the second. We chose this mixed-methods design to provide a comprehensive view of ethical organizational culture in Finland’s top sports context (c.f. Creswell, 2014; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In addition, we consider that the qualitative data of our study provides a rich contextual understanding, thus complementing the more general findings that the quantitative section of this study can offer (Bryman, 2006).

4.2. *Research Material and Analysis*

We applied concurrent mixed-methods sampling, which combines both probability and purposeful sampling strategies (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In the first phase, we collected data from 42 Finnish top sports organizations between 2016 and 2017 using a standardized questionnaire survey available via the Internet. All participating organizations played an active role in promoting top sports in Finland. The studied organizations belong to central organizations (e.g., the Finnish Olympic Committee), sports federations (e.g., soccer associations), private sector organizations (e.g., ice-hockey leagues), regional training centers (e.g., sports academies), and other organizations (e.g., sports managers and non-profit sports clubs). They mainly represented public organizations and NGOs but also private sector organizations. Most often, they were either small or medium-sized organizations (ranging from 2 to 70 members), which is typical for Finnish sports organizations. The questionnaire was available as an internet survey. Of the 854

people to whom the Webropol survey link was sent, 188 responded, a response rate of 22%.

The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 65 years of age, with the average being 42 (SD = 11.55). Of the participants, 56.9% (n=107) were men, and 43.1% (n=81) were women. Regarding positions in the organization, 45.2% were experts or specialists, 29.8% were managers or supervisors, 10.1% were coaches, 6.4% were athletes, and 8% were classified as other employees. Of the participants, 60.1% had an academic degree, and 39.9% had a non-academic (e.g., vocational or college) degree. The majority of the participants (70.2%) had been working for more than 10 years. Over one third of the participants (35.1%) had been working in their current positions for one to five years. Most of the respondents worked full-time and had permanent employment (66%). Half of the respondents (50.5%) worked at sports federations. [Table 1](#) presents the background information of the survey participants.

Ethical organizational culture was measured using the CEV questionnaire (Kaptein, 2008). We used a shortened version of the CEV scale, consisting of 32 items (De Bode et al., 2013; Huhtala et al., 2018). The structure of the shortened version of the CEV scale used for measuring and evaluating perceptions of ethical culture has previously been tested and validated using data from the United States and Finland (De Bode et al., 2013; Huhtala et al., 2018). Each of the eight ethical organizational virtues was measured using four response items (see Appendix 1 for example items for each virtue). Participants responded to each item using a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Same 6-point scale has been used in previous studies validating and refining the CEV measurement (e.g. Kaptein, 2008; De Bode et al., 2013; Huhtala et al., 2018).

The background variables included the respondent's age (years), gender (man/woman/third gender), position in the organization, education (highest degree and field), work experience (total/in current organization/in current position) and organization type (central organization/sports federation/private sector organization/regional training center/other organization).

In the second phase, we conducted interviews with 49 individuals working in the field of top sports in Finland. The authors and two other researchers involved in the project carried out the interviews in 2017 using a stimulus-based method. According to Törrönen (2002), a stimulus-based method uses photos or pieces of texts to encourage participants to initiate a conversation. The importance lies in finding texts that represent crucial situations or events related to the subject matter in the examined context for the purpose of generating meanings and encouraging study participants to express their experiences and cultural knowledge of the issue (Törrönen, 2002). In our interview guide, we had 16 stimuli, and we created a package of slides to support discussion in the interview; each slide contained a photo or a recent claim about sports organizations or a sports-related research result. As an example, the stimuli included pictures of the Olympic circles, men and women managers (e.g., a traditional Finnish ice hockey manager and an international women's tennis manager), and a president of FIFA, as well as research claims, such as "Old boys' networks are the most common form of corruption in Finland." The stimuli covered various aspects of ethics in sports organizations,

Table 1. Participants of the quantitative study.

| | Total |
|---|--------|
| Sample size | 854 |
| Responses received | 188 |
| Response rate | 22.0 % |
| Age (years) | 42 |
| Average | 17-65 |
| Range | 11.55 |
| SD | |
| Gender | 56.9% |
| Men | |
| Women | 43.1% |
| Third gender/don't want to tell | 0% |
| Position | |
| Expert/specialist | 45.2% |
| Manager/supervisor | 29.8 % |
| Coach | 10.1% |
| Athlete | 6.4% |
| Other (e.g. entrepreneur, trainee) | 8.0% |
| Education | |
| Academic degree | 60.1% |
| Other degree | 39.9% |
| Field of education / the highest degree | |
| Sports | 36.2% |
| Other (e.g. business, education) | 62.8% |
| Work experience in total (years) | 2.1% |
| Less than a year | 14.9% |
| 1-5 years | 12.8% |
| 6-10 years | 70.2% |
| over 10 years | |
| Work experience in current organization (years) | |
| Less than a year | 14.4% |
| 1-5 years | 29.3% |
| 6-10 years | 19.7% |
| over 10 years | 29.3% |
| does not have a working contract | 7.4% |
| Work experience in current position (years) | 21.8% |
| Less than a year | 35.1% |
| 1-5 years | 20.7% |
| 6-10 years | 22.3% |
| over 10 years | |
| Type of employment | 66.0% |
| Full time permanent | 3.2% |
| Part time permanent | 17.0% |
| Full time terminable | 5.3% |
| Part time terminable | 8.5% |
| Other | |
| Organization Type | |
| Central Organizations | 17.6% |
| Sports Federations | 50.5% |
| Private Sector Organizations | 8.0% |
| Regional Training Centers | 6.9% |
| Other Organizations | 17.0% |

including leadership, funding, values, ethical misconduct, gender, corruption, and doping.

We used a purposeful sampling strategy to select the individuals for the interviews based on their explicit leadership or honorary member position in the field of top sports (Patton, 2002). The selected interviewees worked at several federations and organizations, primarily public organizations or NGOs but some private organizations as well. Altogether, we interviewed 17 women and 32 men from 33 to 66 years of

age, with a mean age of 49.8. Notably, the proportion of women was high (16%) when compared, for example, to that of women holding chairperson positions in Finnish sports federations (Turpeinen & Hakamäki, 2018). We chose the interviewees to complement the data collected in the first phase. Each interview lasted between 55 and 110 minutes.

The quantitative questionnaire data underwent descriptive statistical analyses (e.g., counting sum variables, conducting reliability tests, and comparing means), correlation analyses, and variance analyses (Oneway ANOVA). We used IBM SPSS Statistics version 24 software to conduct the statistical analyses.

The qualitative interview data underwent qualitative content analysis (Krippendorff, 2013) to shed light on the second research question and to enable the formulation of a more comprehensive view of the studied phenomena. For our theory-driven content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), we used the CEV model and the eight specific virtues to analyze the particular meanings. We began by reading the interviews multiple times; we then imported the interview data to NVivo 11 computer software. NVivo 11 was used to support our qualitative analysis and increase its transparency and credibility. We coded all the extracts that dealt with ethical issues in sports organizations. We then coded the data again using a coding protocol, keeping with the eight virtues of the CEV model (Kaptein, 2008). We repeated this round three times, and each virtue formed one coding node. After multiple rounds of coding and uncoding, we had eight different coded virtues based on our qualitative data. Then, to take the analysis further, we wanted to interpret and understand the actual positive and negative meanings related to each virtue, as this would enable a more nuanced view of the virtues. We relied upon a continuous process of peer debriefing to reflect on and critically analyze the interpretation of findings, which contributed to the clarification and finalization of the virtues. The findings section describes the content of the four virtues that emerged in the qualitative data—the two that were mentioned the most and the two that were brought up the least—to complement the quantitative research results.

5. Findings

In this section, we focus on the ethical organizational culture and its specific virtues as highlighted in our data. First, we present the findings on the evaluations of the perceptions of ethical organizational culture and its specific virtues. In the second section, we present the findings on employees' perceptions of ethical organizational culture and virtues.

5.1. Evaluations of Ethical Organizational Culture and Virtues

Table 2 shows the means, standard deviations, and alphas for ethical organizational culture and its specific virtues. Overall, the interviewees evaluated the perceptions of ethical organizational cultures of Finnish sports organizations as being quite ethical (mean = 4.36; range: = 1.66–5.88; std = 0.87; scale = 1–6). This result is in line with those of previous studies that have examined ethical

Table 2. Evaluations of ethical organizational culture in Finnish top sports organizations.

| | <i>N</i> | Min | Max | Mean | Std. | Cronbach's alpha |
|---------------------------|----------|------|------|------|------|------------------|
| Corporate Ethical Virtues | 187 | 1.66 | 5.88 | 4.36 | 0.87 | 0.969 |
| Clarity | 188 | 1.25 | 6.00 | 4.51 | 1.03 | 0.898 |
| Congruency of supervisor | 188 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 4.51 | 1.26 | 0.962 |
| Congruency of management | 188 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 4.24 | 1.13 | 0.922 |
| Feasibility | 188 | 1.25 | 6.00 | 4.86 | 0.99 | 0.833 |
| Supportability | 187 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 4.19 | 1.08 | 0.877 |
| Transparency | 187 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 4.13 | 0.88 | 0.823 |
| Discussability | 187 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 4.58 | 1.09 | 0.954 |
| Sanctionability | 187 | 1.00 | 6.00 | 3.88 | 0.96 | 0.764 |

organizational culture in Finland (see, e.g., Huhtala, 2013; Kangas, 2016; Riivari, 2016).

The highest scores for specific virtues were given for feasibility (mean = 4.86; std = 0.99) and discussability (mean = 4.58; std = 1.09). Feasibility refers to the possibility (i.e., lack of barriers) to comply with normative expectations for ethical behavior, such as support for personal values and sufficient resources for ethical behavior. Discussability includes items that refer to the possibilities for employees to discuss ethical topics in the workplace. The lowest scores for specific virtues were for sanctionability (mean = 3.88; std = 0.96) and transparency (mean = 4.13; std = 0.88). However, neither of these virtues received especially low scores—both means were close to 4 (scale = 1– 6). Sanctionability refers to the rewards and punishments related to ethical and/or unethical behavior, and transparency refers to one's awareness of the consequences of one's actions. These findings do not agree with criticism of the consensus-based approach to organizational culture; rather, they show that perceptions of ethical culture and its virtues are consistently given high ratings in Finnish top sports organizations. One reason for this could be that Finland is ranked as one of the most equal, transparent, and happiest societies in the world, an achievement that requires transparency and supportability, for example.

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for the studied variables. We have reported only statistically significant ($p < .01$) correlations. Some background variables (gender, age, and education) had significant correlations with some CEV dimensions in the sports organizations. Gender correlated significantly ($p < .01$) with sanctionability, indicating that the women gave this virtue a lower evaluation than the men did. Age correlated significantly ($p < .01$) with CEV and three CEV dimensions—congruence of supervisor, feasibility, and discussability—indicating that the older respondents evaluated ethical organizational culture more highly than the younger respondents did. The correlation between respondents' field of education and their evaluations of ethical organizational culture was negative ($p < .05$). Respondents with a degree from a field other than sports gave lower evaluations to all dimensions of ethical organizational culture (for feasibility, $p < .01$), compared to respondents with a degree from the field of sports. Other background variables (position, type of employment, work experience, and organization type) did not correlate with ethical organizational culture or its virtues.

We investigated the relationship between ethical organizational culture and respondents' background variables in more detail using variance analyses (Oneway ANOVA)

(Table 4). The results showed that gender played a role in the ratings of ethical organizational culture: Men gave higher rankings to CEV, supportability, transparency, discussability, and sanctionability than did women. Evaluations of ethical organizational culture also varied among different age groups: Respondents under 35 years of age gave a lower ranking to CEV ($p < .01$), congruency of supervisor ($p < .05$), congruency of management ($p < .05$), feasibility ($p < .01$), transparency ($p < .05$), discussability ($p < .01$), and sanctionability ($p < .05$) than did respondents over 50 years of age. Additionally, respondents under 30 years of age gave lower evaluations to congruency of supervisor ($p < .05$) than did respondents aged 35 to 49, and respondents aged 35 to 49 rated feasibility and discussability lower ($p < .05$) than did those over 50 years of age. The variance analyses also revealed that the variations depended on the field of the respondents' highest education level; therefore, those who obtained their highest degree in the field of sports gave higher evaluations for CEV and all of its dimensions, with the exception of clarity, than did the respondents whose highest degrees were in other fields ($p < .05$).

Table 4. Variance analyses for ethical organizational culture and background variables.

| | Mean | Std. | F | Df | P | η^2 | Bonferroni |
|----------------------------------|------|------|-------|----|-------|----------|--|
| Corporate Ethical Virtues | | | | | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Woman | 4.18 | 0.98 | 5.874 | 1 | 0.016 | 0.031 | |
| 2) Man | 4.49 | 0.76 | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) under 35 years | 4.08 | 0.93 | 5.543 | 2 | 0.005 | 0.057 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.01$ |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.32 | 0.96 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.62 | 0.63 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Sports | 4.57 | 0.92 | 6.766 | 1 | 0.010 | 0.036 | |
| 2) Other | 4.23 | 0.83 | | | | | |
| Congruency of supervisor | | | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) under 35 years | 4.01 | 1.37 | 6.098 | 2 | 0.003 | 0.062 | 1 < 2, $p < 0.05$; 1 < 3, $p < 0.01$ |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.56 | 1.38 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.82 | 0.88 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Sports | 4.79 | 1.19 | 5.597 | 1 | 0.019 | 0.030 | |
| 2) Other | 4.34 | 1.29 | | | | | |
| Congruency of management | | | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) under 35 years | 3.86 | 1.27 | 4.363 | 2 | 0.014 | 0.045 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.05$ |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.26 | 1.08 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.48 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Sports | 4.45 | 1.18 | 4.025 | 1 | 0.046 | 0.021 | |
| 2) Other | 4.11 | 1.09 | | | | | |
| Feasibility | | | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) under 35 years | 4.55 | 1.14 | 6.738 | 2 | 0.001 | 0.068 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.01$; 2 < 3, $p < 0.05$ |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.77 | 1.05 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 5.20 | 0.67 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Sports | 5.14 | 0.98 | 8.918 | 1 | 0.003 | 0.046 | |
| 2) Other | 4.69 | 0.97 | | | | | |
| Supportability | | | | | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | | | | | |
| 1) Woman | 4.01 | 1.17 | 4.121 | 1 | 0.044 | 0.022 | |
| 2) Man | 4.33 | 0.99 | | | | | |

(Continued)

Table 4. Continued

| | Mean | Std. | F | Df | P | η^2 | Bonferroni |
|---------------------------|------|------|-------|----|-------|----------|--|
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | 4.449 | 1 | 0.036 | 0.024 | |
| 1) Sports | 4.40 | 1.06 | | | | | |
| 2) Other | 4.06 | 1.08 | | | | | |
| Transparency | | | | | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | 6.557 | 1 | 0.011 | 0.034 | |
| 1) Woman | 3.94 | 0.99 | | | | | |
| 2) Man | 4.27 | 0.77 | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | 3.687 | 2 | 0.027 | 0.039 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.05$ |
| 1) under 35 years | 3.89 | 0.93 | | | | | |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.11 | 0.90 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.34 | 0.79 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | 6.763 | | 0.010 | 0.036 | |
| 1) Sports | 4.35 | 0.85 | | | | | |
| 2) Other | 4.00 | 0.88 | | | | | |
| Discussability | | | | | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | 5.241 | 1 | 0.023 | 0.028 | |
| 1) Woman | 4.37 | 1.25 | | | | | |
| 2) Man | 4.73 | 0.93 | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | 7.074 | 2 | 0.001 | 0.071 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.01$; 2 < 3, $p < 0.05$ |
| 1) under 35 years | 4.20 | 1.16 | | | | | |
| 2) 35-49 years | 4.50 | 1.22 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.95 | 0.71 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | 4.234 | 1 | 0.041 | 0.023 | |
| 1) Sports | 4.79 | 1.09 | | | | | |
| 2) Other | 4.45 | 1.08 | | | | | |
| Sanctionability | | | | | | | |
| <i>Gender</i> | | | 7.259 | 1 | 0.008 | 0.038 | |
| 1) Woman | 3.67 | 1.08 | | | | | |
| 2) Man | 4.04 | 0.83 | | | | | |
| <i>Age</i> | | | 3.880 | 2 | 0.022 | 0.040 | 1 < 3, $p < 0.05$ |
| 1) under 35 years | 3.66 | 1.00 | | | | | |
| 2) 35-49 years | 3.80 | 1.01 | | | | | |
| 3) 50 years or older | 4.14 | 0.82 | | | | | |
| <i>Field of education</i> | | | 6.756 | 1 | 0.010 | 0.036 | |
| 1) Sports | 4.12 | 0.99 | | | | | |
| 2) Other | 3.74 | 0.93 | | | | | |

5.2. Employees' Perceptions of Virtues and Their Realization in Sports Organizations

In this section, we explain the content of the four ethical organizational virtues that were analyzed from the interview data; namely transparency and discussability, which were the two most often emergent virtues, and congruency of management and supportability, which were the two least emergent virtues. Summary of the emergence of these virtues is presented in Table 5.

5.2.1. Transparency

Every interviewee mentioned the virtue of transparency (49 interviews; 226 references in the qualitative data), making it the most frequently emergent theme in the qualitative data. As previously noted, in the quantitative section of the study, transparency was among the virtues that received the lowest ratings. The frequent mentions of transparency in the interviews highlighted the perceived lack of this virtue among sports organizations and their management. While the meaning and content varied to some extent, the frequent mentions highlighted the lack of

Table 5. Summary of qualitative research data and findings.

| <i>Virtue</i> | <i>Emergence in the qualitative data</i> | <i>Organizational practices, traditions, and conditions supporting ethical culture</i> | <i>Example of excerpts from the interviews</i> |
|--------------------------|--|--|--|
| Transparency | 49 interviews; 226 references | Transparent decision-making processes, clear organizational structures, networking possibilities, gender equality | <p>"I am very annoyed about how things are handled in here when... particularly, as a woman, you notice how easily boys hold a meeting among themselves. I have many times remarked on that. I tell them that if I see that you plan something among yourselves and I should be aware of it, don't leave me outside of it." (Interviewee E23)</p> <p>"It cannot take any more than hundredth of a second, and you attach it to the corruption. So as a great as the football is as a sport, but if you consider the Federation, so it doesn't look so good" (Interviewee M19).</p> |
| Discussability | 37 interviews; 69 references | Good and trusting atmosphere for open discussion | <p>"...you need to be really strong in your own work and competence, that you have the courage to challenge yourself (and your work) by gathering outside people near you. Then you have the courage to challenge your operations by having different type of people with different competences. It means that you have different type of knowledge and competences near you, and you all together are even more stronger..." (Interviewee S48).</p> <p>"Sharing good practices, which is relevant in every society, we should have definitely much more sharing good practices. And is sport, it should be possible, and we should have more (sharing) than we now have" (Interviewee M18).</p> |
| Congruency of management | 12 interviews; 16 references | Diversity in senior management group, transparency in recruitment processes, ethically exemplary management and leadership practices | <p>"There has been an enormous change in how the central organizations in the field of sport take responsibility for their actions and how they take account of conformity with all laws and rules. It is very strong nowadays. Central organizations are actively having different studies done about themselves and about their members, and different agents are scrutinized. One could say that they take a stand on ethical issues and other central issues in the society." (Interviewee E17).</p> <p>"Well if you consider, the power is often very clustered, there are small circles, and in many cases you end up to situations where these small circles make all these decisions. It is kind of a habitual culture. And if all central top managers are men, so it leads to a certain way to act" (Interviewee E11).</p> |
| Supportability | 8 interviews; 10 references | Good governance, enabling mutual cooperation, building and maintaining trust in organization, providing management education | <p>"Well empathy and skills to connect with people, so you can motivate and get volunteers. So it is much more demanding when you don't have stripes in your collar, and you just say that this is the way we do here. It (army-like management) has been tried to use in sport world as well, well it does not lead to anything good or sustainable development" (Interviewee M18).</p> <p>"It must be idealism that we have some kind of systemic support, I don't believe in that while we have so many challenges. But I would not prefer that the sport system judges, or turns back, I think. There can be so many different kinds of supports" (Interviewee M15).</p> |

transparency among many sports organizations and their management. The interviewees reported a lack of transparency in relation to funding, decision-making, organizational structures, networking, and equality. For example, Interviewee E10 stated that when open (honorary) positions are fulfilled in sports organizations, there is a gap in the official process and that regardless of whether the applicant's skills and competence meet the levels required for the job, he or she can be hired. The interviewee highlighted that someone can be hired outside the official process, and that even these processes can be designed in such a way that particular candidates are deemed suitable:

Let's say that some international organization has an open position, and they should choose someone for that position, and they have had rather good candidates, but suddenly they choose someone else from the shadows, who might not have had anything to do with the position or have any knowledge of the topic. (Interviewee E10)

The transparency of decision-making and its embeddedness in organizational structures are related to unclear processes and responsibilities. For example, the interviewees stated that decisions are often made within an inner circle, which can be difficult to penetrate. The interviewees also claimed that, compared to international and global organizations, Finnish organizations operate more ethically. The research data also showed that the employees viewed cases of corruption and misuse of money as something that happened to a friend or a colleague but not them. The employees also indicated that funding from varied sources enhances transparency and stability in sports organizations, and in their view, the use of private money for funding increases the innovativeness of an organization. One interview highlighted this: "The funding should come from many channels. It is most healthy when the different channels of funding are in balance, because private money brings innovativeness" (Interviewee E9).

The interviewees often related the transparency of networks to gender, indicating that women tend to be excluded from the inner circles and decision-making groups. Interviewee E18 made this clear when he stated that it was a relief to finally have a woman on the board because it would change its setup from being an "old boys' network" and "a boys' club" [äijämeininki]. However, it was typical in the interview data that women often perceived that they were excluded from the decision-making. The following interview excerpt highlights this issue:

I am very annoyed about how things are handled in here when ... particularly, as a woman, you notice how easily boys hold a meeting among themselves. I have remarked on that many times. I tell them that if I see that you plan something among yourselves and I should be aware of it, don't leave me out of it. (Interviewee E23)

Taken together, a majority of interviewees considered the low share of women in leadership positions to be problematic and cause decreased transparency, thus highlighting the need to increase the number of women in management positions at sports organizations; however, not many were willing to take definite steps to remedy the situation.

5.2.2. Discussability

Among the interviewees, 37 included mentions of the virtue of discussability (69 references). In the quantitative section, discussability was ranked second highest. The interviewees considered it valuable to have open discussions in sports organizations and claimed that discussion and dialogue were either needed or were being actively encouraged:

I have learned over the years that the less you hush up issues and the more you say things directly out loud, the better, even if it hurts. Unfortunately, I have noticed the silence quite often and have probably been silent myself, too, on purpose, not to hurt anybody, but it works both ways. [...] However, I believe that this is changing; people are more courageous in talking about issues these days. (Interviewee E30)

The interviewees indicated that discussion and interaction had improved because the field of sports is so small and those in Finland tend to know one another. However, it became apparent from the interviews that, even though the community is rather tight and social proximity is low, good practices are seldom shared in the field, which is an area that might be worth developing. Most of the interviewees opined that the media pays close attention to the sports context but usually evaluates the field of sports in a harsh way:

Of course, sports are interesting anyway, but the media raises questions related to central organizations. So, one might easily think that it is ... that they [media] do it because they are mean. Well, it is clear that the media discusses these flaws where they see them. They [in central organizations] do not consider that this is the spirit of the times now ... that no one takes the easy way out. (Interviewee E5)

A common feature in the data was interviewees' observation that sports organizations are becoming more aware of their ethical issues and responsibilities and that there have been considerable changes in recent years:

There has been an enormous change in how the central organizations in the field of sports take responsibility for their actions and how they take account of conformity with all laws and rules. The change has been significant. Central organizations are actively having different studies done on themselves and their members, and different agents are scrutinized. One could say that they take a stand on ethical issues and other central issues in the society. (Interviewee E17)

However, some interviewees emphasized that improvements still needed to be made, particularly in regard to the moral courage needed to raise ethical issues in public. In particular, it was said that the organizational culture can vary greatly in terms of the degree to which it is acceptable to speak about and discuss ethical issues. These qualitative findings support the findings in the quantitative data, which highlighted changes among the younger generation that were challenging the old culture of limited discussion. The qualitative data revealed that the silenced topics—that is, those that should not be discussed nor questioned—were associated with diversity (e.g., gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, harassment, and

inappropriate behavior) and, in some cases, included the old habits and ways of doing things (e.g., the old boys' networks).

5.2.3. Congruency of Management

The congruency of management was mentioned in 12 interviews (16 references). In the quantitative section, it received average evaluations. The interviewees described (senior) management as often composed of a male group that is not only difficult to penetrate but also defines the organization's leadership and management practices (see Ryan & Dickson, 2018). The interviewees reported that power and decision-making are often centered within a small group of men who determine the organization's culture and the state of its operations considered normal. The norm of leadership was described most often as masculine. One interviewee described the decision-making process as follows:

Well, sure, there are these situations, as the power is quite centralized in the end. We have small circles, which make the decisions in the end. This is kind of the culture of how to act. And if all central senior managers are men, it causes a certain way to act. (Interviewee E11)

The interviewees used senior management as an example of how to resolve ethical issues and how to legitimize their ethical wrongdoings, raising the importance of managers and their actions to provide a reference point when evaluating their ethical behavior:

But then, of course, in the end, it is about whether that leadership or manager defines how the organization should handle these issues, or if these issues are handled at all; are the issues worked out or swept under the carpet? (Interviewee E13)

The interviewees stated that fulfilling a management position of trust in sports organizations takes time and energy, and they raised a concern about how these job requirements and tasks can be performed simultaneously with demanding paid work.

5.2.4. Supportability

Only eight interviewees mentioned the virtue of organizational support (10 references). In the quantitative section, supportability received average evaluations. Interviewees reported that organizational processes, governance, trust, the enabling of cooperation, and management education are forms of support that foster ethical decision-making in organizations; however, they reported receiving minimal support in their organizations. One example of the support offered by a top sports organization was the establishment of a leadership development program for women to advance their careers to higher management positions. One interviewee reported (E3) that this program had improved gender equality in this particular organization and that the young generation was taken into change process. However, it did not happen without challenges: "Well, it was a great challenge to develop this new kind of governance which included gender equality issues, and young people's possibility of influencing sporting life" (Interviewee E3).

The interviewees also reported that sport as a context has features that might affect the level of support offered by the organizations in regard to ethical decision-making. Interviewee E15 stated that leading volunteers in sports organizations is challenging and that commercialization has increased the professionalization of sports organizations; this complexity affects organizational support. The interviewee identified the specific characteristics of top sports: “First, Finnish top sports still depend heavily on volunteer work. This commercialization and professionalization is a necessity, but it is also a challenge” (Interviewee E15). By this, the interviewee highlights the difficulty in keeping pace with the changes that sports organizations have faced in recent years, such as mergers and professionalization within the field.

6. Discussion

6.1. General Discussion

Our findings illustrate the rather multifaceted nature of ethical organizational culture in the Finnish top sports organizations. Based on the quantitative data, the perceptions of ethical organizational culture were evaluated as being quite ethical in general. This result supports those of previous studies of ethical organizational culture in the Finnish context, which shows that ethical culture typically receives quite high ratings in Finnish organizations. From individual ethical virtues, clarity typically ranks high, whereas transparency and sanctionability are rated low (e.g., Huhtala, 2013; Kangas, 2016). This implies that, in Finnish organizations, expectations for ethical behavior are clear, but the consequences of ethical or unethical behavior are less clear. The chosen mixed-methods approach shows four ethical organizational virtues that have a special role in supporting ethical organizational culture in sports organizations. The first is transparency, which received the second-lowest evaluations in the questionnaire data. The respondents gave transparency a lower rating than other ethical organizational virtues, suggesting that employees are not always aware of the consequences of their actions or that these consequences are not always visible to all members of the organization. The interview data deepened the understanding of the ethical virtue of transparency, or the lack thereof, in Finnish top sports organizations.

The interviewees raised ethical problems regarding the transparency of organizational behavior—for example, issues related to diversity and ethical problems in close networks. Conversely, the interviewees described close networks as both a vice and a virtue: Processes and procedures are easy to handle when one knows the individuals with whom one works. The interview data also indicated that the interviewees justified the level of transparency because they considered it to be much better at the domestic level (Finnish organizations) than at the international level. This notion is supported by previous research, according to which the Scandinavian welfare state model is reflected in sports organizations in Finland (Ronglan, 2015). In other words, sports organizations are seen as based on such values as equality and democracy, which are important in ensuring well-being.

In addition, our findings have shown that the interviewees perceived decision-making as seemingly transparent because the organizations followed formal

practices and processes. However, in many cases, the interviewees found that decisions were made beforehand in the cabinets and that the practices and processes were harnessed to serve the desired outcome. In previous research, Lehtonen (2017) noted the complexity and importance of different actors and their roles in decision-making processes in the field of sports in Finland. The findings of this study broaden this discussion by highlighting the ethical aspects of decision-making processes, which have been scarce in the field of sports organization research (Day et al., 2012; Pritchard & Burton, 2014; Sheth & Babiak, 2010). Moreover, our study adds the perspective of virtue ethics and emphasizes that in the development of ethical organizational virtue of transparency, there can be a great variation in the formal practices, processes and actual behavior. If these practices and behaviors are only seemingly transparent they can even hinder ethical organizational culture.

The second of the individual virtues, discussability, received the second-highest ratings in the questionnaire data. The findings suggest that the sports organizations have an open atmosphere in which ethical issues in the workplace can be raised and discussed. The interview data deepens and defines the understanding of the virtue of discussability. Most of the interviewees emphasized that open discussion was valuable for developing the field of sports and that discussion and dialogue were not only needed but were also being actively encouraged in the organizations. However, the interview data also brought forth the dark side of discussability—silenced or ignored topics that were often related to issues associated with diversity (e.g., gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, harassment, and inappropriate behavior) remained in the field of sport.

Based on virtue ethics theory, organizations not only have ethical virtues but can also produce and develop them; in other words, virtuousness is about being, doing, and becoming virtuous (e.g., Collier, 1998; Solomon, 2004). Drawing from the virtue ethics perspective, our findings suggest that having certain ethical virtues is important in building ethical organizational culture and that attention should be paid to developing, nurturing, and practicing ethical organizational virtues. For example, discussion about sensitive topics, such as diversity, could be improved by offering discussion forums or feedback channels to support developing the ethical organizational culture in the sports organizations.

Third and fourth virtues are congruency of management and supportability, which both received average evaluations in the questionnaire data and interviewees emphasized these virtues. Interviewees described how power and decision-making belong to men at the top and influences the creation and maintenance of ethical culture or hinders it. Previous research has noted the importance of ethical leadership in building an ethical working atmosphere in sports organizations (Burton et al., 2017). Our study strengthens this discussion by adding the perspective of ethical virtues, and according to our findings, the virtue of the congruency of management—namely, top management leadership behavior and decision-making—is crucial in creating ethical organizational culture in sports organizations. The interviewees recognized the need to support ethical behavior but also stated that this was lacking in practice.

Based on this study, we want to emphasize the active development of ethical organizational virtues and the importance of being, doing, and becoming virtuous and, thus, creating an ethical culture in sports organizations. Moreover, this study

has applied valuable mixed-methods approach in regard to studying ethical organizational culture and virtues within sports organizations (van der Roest et al., 2015). This approach has shed light on the complexity of the ethical organizational virtues and ethical culture in the sports organizations. Being an ethically congruent leader or manager is not only about being a moral manager and a moral person but also being an active moral entrepreneur who persistently builds and creates ethical norms in the sports organization (Kaptein, 2019).

6.2. Implications to Sports Management, Limitations, and Suggestions for Future Research

The study results imply that top sports organizations and their management should pay attention to the ethical virtues of transparency, discussability, congruency of managers and supervisors, and supportability if they wish to develop and promote an ethical organizational culture. For example, transparency and discussability require openness and sharing of information on ethically relevant topics in organizations. For sports organizations and their management this means providing mechanisms and tools for transparency and discussion forums or channels for sharing ideas and experiences on ethical topics. In addition, in order to develop the ethical virtue of congruency, sports organizations can offer ethical training for its employees in order to increase awareness on ethical aspects at work and pay attention to ethical competences when recruiting new leaders and managers. To this aspect it would be also worthwhile to consider increasing the gender diversity in the leadership positions and board positions (Mikkonen et al., 2021), which could also enhance the transparency and discussability in these organizations.

Drawing from the virtue ethics theory, our findings suggest that having certain ethical virtues is important in building ethical organizational culture and that attention should be paid to developing, nurturing, and practicing ethical organizational virtues in sports organizations. To do so, they should consider methods of incorporating responsibility and ethics into the work of all employees to ensure that the tools and instruments used to support ethical actions are not perceived as mere window dressing. The sport organizations and their management could benefit for not only engaging the top management to enhance the ethical organizational culture, but to leverage all organizational levels and functions to engaging for organizational virtuousness.

First, as we sourced the data from Finnish top sports organizations, this study emphasizes ethical culture and virtues in this specific organizational and societal context. However, the specific context can be seen as a delimitation of this study as we have provided an overview of ethical culture and ethical organizational virtues in the Finnish top sports organizations. Moreover, we have identified those specific ethical organizational virtues that can be crucial in maintaining and developing ethics in sports organizations. Ethics is considered an important theme in organizations (e.g., Collier, 1998; Huhtala et al., 2011; Kaptein, 2008, 2011; Paine, 1997; Solomon, 2004; Treviño, 1990; Treviño & Weaver, 2003) and within the field of sports (e.g., Peachey et al., 2015). It is, therefore, important to further examine empirical and qualitative studies on ethics in sports organizations.

Second, the cross-sectional study design can also be seen as a limitation. Even if our study reports perceptions of ethical culture and ethical organizational virtues, future research with longitudinal approach is needed to investigate the changes and development in ethical culture. The response rate to the quantitative study was rather low. However, considering that we sent the questionnaire to one individual at each sports organization, requesting that he or she passes the link on to other employees in his or her organization, we consider the response rate satisfactory (c.f. Baruch & Holtom, 2008).

Third, the qualitative interview data gathered for this study consist primarily of individual employees' perceptions and ideas regarding ethical issues at their organizations. As ethical culture is an organizational-level phenomenon that consists of dimensions more complicated than individual employees' ideas and experiences, the qualitative data captured only a limited view of it. Although the qualitative data gathered for this study have limitations, the results offer an alternative, detailed, and enriched view of ethical culture that cannot be provided by the results of a solely quantitative study. In the future, an ethnographic study could be conducted to offer a wider perspective on the topic paying attention also to subculture perspectives.

7. Conclusion

We conclude that the ethical organizational virtues of transparency, discussability, congruency of management, and supportability are important in maintaining and developing ethical organizational culture in sports organizations. The mixed-methods approach applied in this study highlights that ethical organizational culture and its virtues are more complex than normative ratings alone show. Moreover, our findings show how the ethical organizational virtues operate in between two extremes: deficiency and excess. Information about the multiple perceptions concerning the ethical organizational virtues are needed in order to create, evaluate and develop the ethical culture in sports organizations. We suggest that attention should be paid in sports organizations to developing, nurturing, and practicing these virtues in all organizational levels and functions. This requires consideration of the methods needed to include ethics into the work of all employees to ensure that the means used to support ethical actions are not perceived as mere window dressing.

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Notes on contributors

Elina Riivari (Ph.D., University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics, Finland), Senior Lecturer and Pedagogical Director, School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä. Dr. Riivari's research interests include ethics, innovativeness, and meaningful work in and around organizations.

Suvi Heikkinen (Dr. (Econ), University of Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics, Finland), Programme Leader and Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Business and Economics, University of Jyväskylä. Dr. Heikkinen's research interests include work-family integration, careers, ethics in management and leadership, and management in sport organizations.

ORCID

Elina Riivari  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8923-6452>

Suvi Heikkinen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6775-8535>

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Appendix

Example Items for Ethical Organizational Virtues (De Bode et al., 2013; Kaptein, 2008)

- a. Clarity: e.g. “The organization makes it sufficiently clear to me how to conduct myself appropriately toward others within the organization”
- b. Congruency of supervisor: e.g., “My supervisor sets a good example in terms of ethical behavior”
- c. Congruency of management: e.g., “The conduct of the board and (senior) management reflects a shared set of norms and values”
- d. Feasibility: e.g., “In my immediate working environment, I am not asked to do things that conflict with my conscience”
- e. Supportability: e.g., “In my immediate working environment, everyone has the best interests of the organization at heart”
- f. Transparency: e.g., “If a colleague does something which is not permitted, my manager will find out about it”
- g. Discussability: e.g., “In my immediate working environment, there is adequate opportunity to discuss unethical conduct”
- h. Sanctionability: “In my immediate working environment, ethical conduct is valued highly”