Professionalizing all-volunteer nonprofit organizations: an intervention study based on the competing values framework and self-determination theory

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Abstract

Purpose – Professionalization is an important issue in many all-volunteer nonprofit organizations (e.g. recreational sports clubs). Therefore, this study relied on the competing values framework and self-determination theory to investigate whether a newly developed intervention can effectively strengthen the management processes and leadership styles in all-volunteer sports clubs.

Design/methodology/approach – For this purpose, a rigorous non-equivalent pre-test post-test control group design was used. The intervention involved two sessions organized in sports clubs in which internal stakeholders (e.g. board members, coaches, volunteers) were invited to discuss change initiatives aimed at enhancing the organizational processes.

Findings – An effect on both the management processes and leadership styles was found. As for the management processes, the intervention had an impact on the internal processes, with especially the development of an internal communication plan and the annual assessment of the organization's operations being promoted by the intervention. Regarding the leadership styles, the intervention had an effect on the controlling and chaotic leadership style, with leaders becoming less chaotic and controlling in situations in which (respectively) the business plan was established and the tasks were distributed within the organization.

Originality/value – This intervention study adopted an innovative approach to organizational intervention research by focusing on the enhancement of both the management processes and the leadership styles. Its principles are also relevant and valuable to organizations operating in other organizational contexts.

Keywords All-volunteer nonprofit organizations, Competing values framework, Intervention study, Organizational change, Self-determination theory

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

All organizations —whether for-profit, governmental or nonprofit— are operating within a rapidly changing environment, with specific aspirations of numerous stakeholders (Balduck *et al.*, 2015; Yu *et al.*, 2022). To anticipate environmental changes, these organizations need to

install effective management processes (Shilbury and Moore, 2006). For instance, stable, well-organized communication with the organization's stakeholders may help to know their changing demands and expectations. At the same time, it is important that organizational leaders rely on effective leadership when they engage with these management processes to keep all stakeholders motivated and help the organization overcome the challenges of change (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Grabowski *et al.*, 2015). To illustrate, it is crucial that leaders adopt a curious, open, and flexible attitude when they communicate with stakeholders as it allows them to better understand and nurture their demands and expectations.

Optimizing and professionalizing management processes and motivating leadership styles are critical concerns for many organizations, particularly all-volunteer nonprofit organizations (De Clerck *et al.*, 2021a, b). Unlike paid-staff organizations, which operate under a hierarchical structure with designated roles and responsibilities, all-volunteer nonprofit organizations rely solely on the contributions of volunteers who are motivated by personal values and interests (Dowling *et al.*, 2014). While many volunteers bring valuable skills and knowledge to the organization, they may not always possess the same level of professional management and leadership expertise as paid staff (Balduck *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, all-volunteer nonprofit organizations often operate with limited financial resources when compared to paid-staff organizations, which may impede their ability to invest in professional development (Dowling *et al.*, 2014).

To enhance their professionalism, all-volunteer nonprofit organizations should transition from their amateur roots to a more rationalized functioning that aligns with the objectives of enhancing the organization's performance and ensuring its service role towards its stakeholders (Clausen *et al.*, 2018). Without professional management and leadership practices in place, all-volunteer organizations may struggle to achieve their objectives efficiently, leading to inadequate allocation of human and financial resources (De Clerck *et al.*, 2021a, b; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011).

Recognizing the pressing need for professionalization of all-volunteer nonprofit organizations, we investigate the potential of an intervention to enhance the volunteer leaders' reliance on effective management processes and leadership skills. To this end, we rely on the competing values framework (CVF; Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981) and self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 2000) respectively. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this study furnishes leaders and managers with valuable insights that they can apply to enhance the management and leadership within their organization.

In this article, we first highlight the importance of CVF-related management processes and SDT's motivating leadership styles within the broader organizational context. We focus on CVF- and SDT-based (intervention) programs that have been implemented to enhance these processes, utilizing their core principles to develop a new intervention. Finally, we use a robust nonequivalent pretest posttest control group design to test the effectiveness of the intervention, investigating whether the volunteer leaders (i.e. the board) report a higher reliance on effective management processes and motivating leadership (and a lower reliance on demotivating leadership) following the intervention.

The importance of effective management processes: a comprehensive CVF approach
Several studies have provided an overview of effective management operations, which include goal setting, obtaining resources from the environment, determining effective internal processes, providing training programs and task distribution (Cameron, 2015; Iecovich, 2004). Given the multifaceted and often contradictory nature of these management activities, scholars have tried to integrate these effective management processes in multidimensional models such as the Denison Organizational Culture Model (Denison, 1990) and the CVF (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981). These models consider effective management processes to be embedded in the organizational culture, which is defined as

the norms, values, and beliefs of the organization's members (Denison *et al.*, 2014). They guide the behavior of the members and facilitate shared meaning (Denison *et al.*, 2014).

Especially, the CVF is considered to be a comprehensive framework identifying essential management processes related to the organizational culture (Rojas, 2000; Schneider *et al.*, 2013). The CVF distinguishes two perspectives on effective management processes, illustrated by two axes as depicted in Figure 1.

The horizontal axis represents the organizational focus of an organization, ranging from an internal focus on the development of people in the organization to an external focus on the development of the organization itself (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). The vertical axis delineates the organizational structure of the organization, spanning from an emphasis on stability and consistency to an emphasis on flexibility and responsiveness (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). These two perspectives converge in four distinct models representing the organizational culture: the human relations (internal focus, flexible structure), internal process (internal focus, stable structure), open system (external focus, flexible structure), and rational goal (external focus, stable structure) model. Each (culture) model highlights specific management processes contributing to organizational effectiveness. The human relations model emphasizes the importance of cultivating a cohesive and skilled workforce. The internal process model values effective communication, task distribution, and evaluation by employing meticulous planning. The open system model places emphasis on innovation, building strong relationships with the external environment and acquisition of resources to adapt to environmental changes. The rational goal model underscores the significance of business planning, goal setting, and a drive for productivity and achievement (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Shilbury and Moore, 2006). CVF theory further stipulates that for an organization to be effective, it should perform well across all management processes related to the CVF (culture) models (Quinn and Rohrbaugh, 1981).

CVF studies in the for-profit context have confirmed that a balanced focus on the management processes of the four CVF models was connected to operational and financial performance, as well as to the members' quality of life and commitment (see Hartnell *et al.*, 2019 for a meta-analysis). In the not-for-profit context, the recent work of De Clerck *et al.* (2021a, b) in all-volunteer sports organizations revealed that the management processes of the four CVF models also correlated with the ability to effectively deploy volunteers within the organization. Yet, this study was cross-sectional and did not examine how change can be realized.
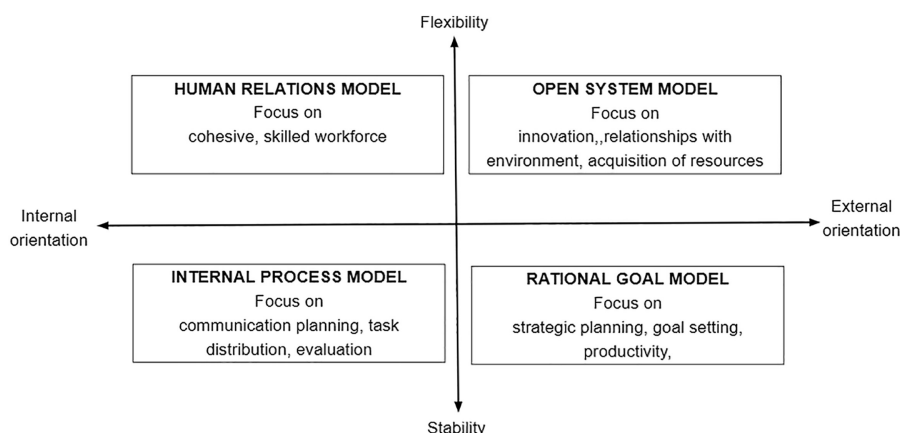
Source(s): Figure based on Quinn, R. E., & Rohrbaugh, J. (1981). A competing values approach to organizational effectiveness. Public Productivity Review, 5, 122-140

A few studies have developed intervention programs aimed at strengthening the management processes related to the CVF models in for-profit organizations (e.g. Igo and Skitmore, 2006) and not-for-profit organizations (e.g. Grabowski *et al.*, 2015). In these programs, internal stakeholders (e.g. employees, volunteers) assessed the current and desired organizational culture. Based on the discrepancies between these cultures, CVF-based change initiatives were developed. According to CVF scholars, the involvement of the internal stakeholders in the identification of areas of organizational change is essential to fundamentally change the organizational culture (Cameron and Quinn, 2011). It is thus essential to develop intervention tools that may effectively foster this internal stakeholder involvement.

The importance of effective leadership: a comprehensive SDT approach

Whereas these CVF studies focused primarily on the importance of effective management processes, recent managerial competency research has indicated that organizational leaders also need to possess the leadership skills to implement management processes in an effective and motivating way (Balduck *et al.*, 2010; Cameron and Quinn, 2011). The importance of effective leadership has garnered considerable attention in both for-profit (e.g. Anderson and Sun, 2017; Slemp *et al.*, 2018) and not-for-profit literature (Chelladurai, 2007; Crosby and Bryson, 2018). Notably, numerous studies have highlighted the positive impact of transformational leadership, which refers to leaders articulating an inspirational vision of a desirable future that motivates followers to sacrifice their self-interests (Bass and Avolio, 1993). These studies have consistently demonstrated the relation between transformational leadership and beneficial work outcomes such as employees' commitment (Peng *et al.*, 2020) and volunteers' proactive behavior (do Nascimento *et al.*, 2018).

In this study, we rely on SDT (Deci and Ryan, 2000), a macro theory on human motivation, to study leadership. SDT provides an integrative perspective on motivating and demotivating leadership styles that impact the functioning and emotional experiences of followers within the organization. Recent SDT research has identified two distinct motivating leadership styles: an autonomy-supportive and structuring leadership style (Deci *et al.*, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2017). An autonomy-supportive leadership style entails low-directive motivating leadership, with leaders adopting a receptive and flexible attitude to foster self-initiation (Deci and Ryan, 2000. A structuring leadership style is a more directive motivating style, where leaders provide help and assistance and suggest strategies to make others feel more competent (Ryan and Deci, 2017; Slemp *et al.*, 2018).

In addition to these motivating leadership styles, SDT identifies demotivating leadership styles (Deci *et al.*, 2017; Ryan and Deci, 2017). One demotivating leadership style is a controlling style, where leaders deliver instructions in a directive and pressuring manner, demanding strict adherence to their own perspective and way of thinking (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Another demotivating leadership style is a chaotic style, which is characterized by leaders abdicating their leading role and leaving the initiative up to others who are unsure of what to do and what is expected (Deci *et al.*, 2017). Although less directive than a controlling leadership style, a chaotic leadership style still hampers followers' well-functioning as it creates confusion and a lack of clarity (Deci *et al.*, 2017).

Recent SDT work has related the motivating autonomy-supportive and structuring leadership styles to workers' well-being, motivation and performance in both the for-profit (Deci *et al.*, 2017; Slemp *et al.*, 2018) and nonprofit context (De Clerck *et al.*, 2021a; Oostlander *et al.*, 2014). The study of De Clerck *et al.* (2021a) also revealed the drawbacks of a controlling and chaotic leadership style, relating these demotivating behaviors to maladaptive forms of volunteers' motivation.

While these (cross-sectional) studies revealed that four (de)motivating leadership styles hold significant importance, SDT intervention studies focused primarily on the enhancing leaders' autonomy support (Slemp *et al.*, 2021). These studies relied on robust pretest–posttest

control groupdesigns to assess the effects of the intervention (Slemp *et al.*, 2021). The results indicated that it was possible to train autonomy-supportive leadership behaviors in for-profit organizations (e.g. Forest *et al.*, 2014) and not-for-profit organizations (Forner, 2019). When successfully done, the training had a positive impact on the motivation, behavior and affective experiences of the people within the organization (Slemp *et al.*, 2021).

The present study
The present study was conducted in all-volunteer nonprofit organizations, and more specifically, all-volunteer sports clubs. In these organizations, enhancing management and motivating leadership skills requires special attention as they are fully driven by volunteer work, having no paid staff or professional management but the Board of Directors managing the sports club on a voluntary basis. Therefore, we aimed to draw from the strengths in both CVF and SDT (intervention) literature to take an innovative approach to intervention research.

First, in terms of the intervention content, we adopted a more integrative approach by focusing on all essential management processes as identified by the CVF (i.e. the human relations model, internal process model, open system model, and rational goal model), as well as a broad range of (de)motivating leadership styles as distinguished within SDT (i.e. an autonomy-supportive, structuring, controlling, and chaotic leadership style).

Second, in terms of the intervention's approach, we aimed to involve internal stakeholders (board members, coaches, volunteers, members . . .) in the development of initiatives to enhance the management processes and motivating leadership styles. We considered this to be an essential intervention component for successful implementation of the proposed change initiatives (Cameron and Quinn, 2011)). In addition, we placed great importance on conducting this active involvement within an autonomy-supportive environment (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Ryan and Deci, 2017). Such an environment enables participants to freely express their opinion without fear of suppressing their doubt and critical thoughts.

Third, in terms of methodology, we used a robust nonequivalent pretest posttest control group design to test the impact of the intervention. Our focus was on evaluating the intervention's effects at the proximal level, relying on the sports club leaders' (i.e. the board's) perceptions to determine the successful implementation of developed change initiatives (Aelterman *et al.*, 2014; Slemp *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, we aimed to observe changes in the board's reliance on management processes and (de)motivating leadership style, enabling us to gain an understanding of the immediate impact of the developed intervention (Aelterman *et al.*, 2014; Slemp *et al.*, 2021).

We formulated the following hypotheses. First, we expected, consistent with previous CVF studies (e.g. Grabowski *et al.*, 2015) that after the implementation of the intervention, the boards of the sports clubs in the intervention group would report a higher reliance on the management processes related to the human relations (H1a), internal process (H1b), open system (H1c), and rational goal (H1d) model, when compared to those in the control group. Second, we expected, in line with previous SDT leadership intervention studies (e.g. Slemp *et al.*, 2021) that after the implementation of the intervention, the boards of the sports clubs in the intervention group would indicate they were more likely to adopt an autonomy-supportive (H2a), and structuring (H2b) leadership style, and less likely to rely on a controlling (H2c) and chaotic (H2d) leadership style than the boards of clubs in the control group.

Method
Sample and procedure
The intervention was developed in cooperation with the Flemish Sports Federation, the umbrella federation of all Flemish sports federations (located in Flanders, Belgium).

The intervention was named "Clubgrade." To recruit sports clubs for the Clubgrade-intervention study, a call to participate was included in the newsletter of the Flemish Sports Federation. As indicated by the flowchart (see Figure 2), 42 sports clubs expressed interest in the study. Yet, 6 clubs were not eligible for participation due to the absence of a formally organized volunteer board. The other 36 interested (formally organized) sports clubs received more information about the research and its timeline, and were asked to forward this information to all board members in the sports club. After receiving this information, each sports club was asked to formally confirm their participation. Two sports clubs that did not affirm their participation were excluded from our study.

The 34 participating sports clubs were randomly assigned to either the intervention (n = 17 clubs) or control condition (n = 17 clubs) based on their day of application. Only
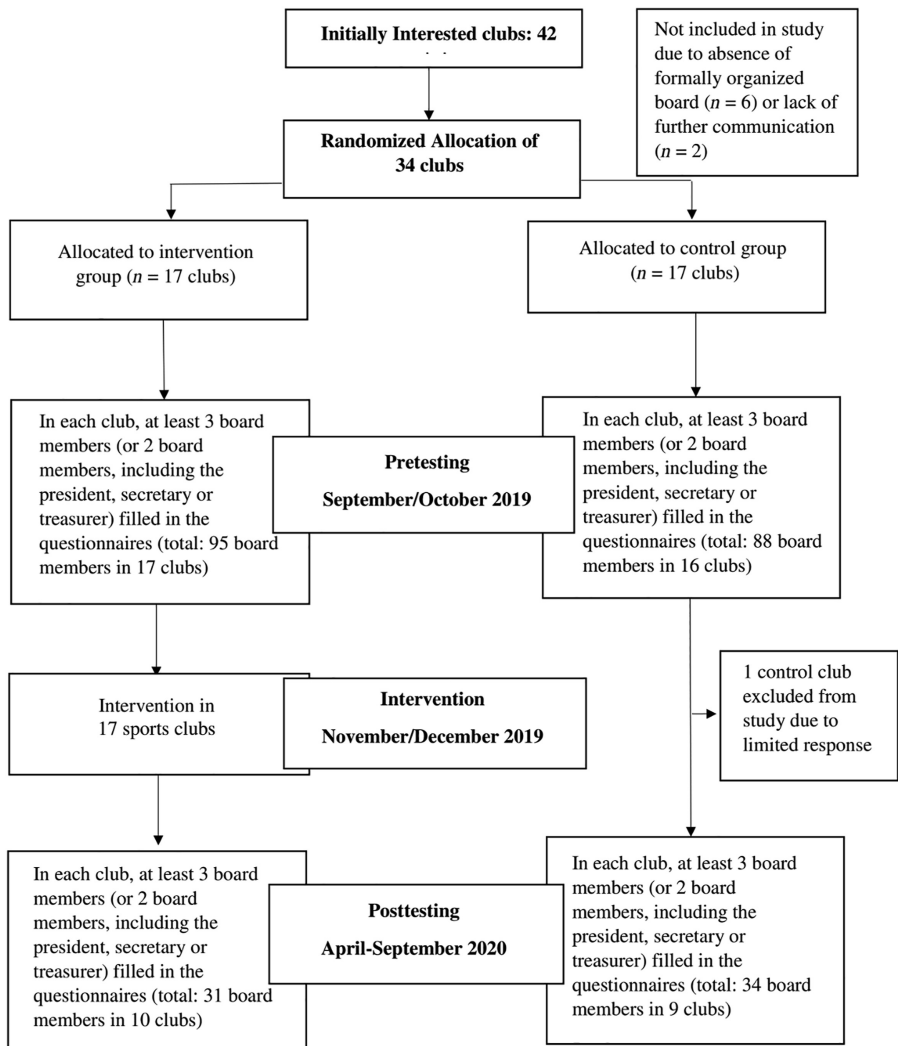
Figure 2.
Flowchart of the intervention

sports clubs in the intervention group were informed about the intervention that was going to be organized in their sports club in November/December 2019, whereas sports clubs in the control group were not aware of an intervention being part of the study.

In order to obtain a clear insight into the board's reliance on management processes and (de)motivating styles, it was necessary that in each club, at least 3 board members (or 2 board members, including the president, secretary, or treasurer) filled in the questionnaires. In total, 183 board members (130 men; 71%) out of 34 sports clubs filled in the questionnaires during the pretest. At baseline, participating board members had an average age of 46.20 years (SD = 12.74) and were on average 7.32 years (SD = 8.46) members of the board. After the pretest, one sports club of the control group was excluded from the study due to limited response.

The intervention was organized in November/December 2019 in 17 sports clubs, with the other 16 sports clubs (i.e. control group) continuing their daily operations. After the intervention, board members who filled in the questionnaire in the pretest were asked to fill out the questionnaire again in April 2020 (i.e. posttest). In total, 10 sports clubs of the intervention group (i.e. 59% of the total number of intervention clubs), and 9 sports clubs of the control group (i.e. 53% of the total number of control clubs) were included in our study. In these sports clubs, respectively, 31 board members (i.e. 33% of the total number of board members) and 34 board members (i.e. 39% of the total number of board members) filled in the questionnaires in the pre- and posttest. The significant dropout of sports clubs was mainly due to the COVID-19 crisis, forcing sports clubs to shut down their (sports) activities in March 2020.

The dropout analyses indicated that there were no significant baseline differences in the perceptions of the board's reliance on the management processes related to the CVF models (all $F < 0.25$, ns), motivating styles (both $F < 0.49$, ns) and demotivating style (both $F < 3.42$, ns) between the board members included in our study ($n = 65$) and those that dropped out from the study ($n = 118$).

Measures
The survey used in this study was based on the validated measures of De Clerck *et al.* (2021a, b). The questionnaire was slightly adapted to better fit the context of an intervention study in sports clubs. In this survey, board members rated all items on a 7-point Likert scale, which ranged from 1 (*does not describe my board at all*) to 7 (*does describe my board extremely well*).

The board's reliance on management processes. To assess the board's reliance on management processes, we used 4 items related to the human relations model (e.g. the board has a recognition system for volunteer administrators), 5 items to the internal process model (e.g. the board has an internal communication plan), 6 items to the open system model (e.g. the board is seeking alternative sources of income) and 4 items to the rational goal model, e.g. the board establishes strategic goals). The internal consistencies of the four scales as assessed by Cronbach's alpha ranged from acceptable to excellent. At the pretest, the Cronbach's alpha of the scales was 0.70 (human relations model), 0.79 (internal process model), 0.63 (open system model), and 0.82 (rational goal model). At the posttest, the Cronbach's alpha of the scales was 0.67 (human relations model), 0.81 (internal process model), 0.71 (open system model), and 0.84 (rational goal model).

The Board's reliance on (de)motivating leadership styles. The board's (de)motivating leadership styles were measured within 13 situations or tasks related to each model of the CVF. For instance, a situation related to the rational goal model was "The board receives a (policy) proposal from stakeholders," with the board members rating their autonomy-supportive style (i.e. "The board listens curiously to the proposal and asks how they see the further elaboration"), structuring style (i.e. "The board diligently follows up on the

development of the (policy) proposal"), controlling style (i.e. "The board makes clear that the board will decide what needs to be done. The board is already pleased that they are willing to cooperate") and chaotic style (i.e. "The board makes clear that it is not able to make time for that kind of proposals") within this situation. In total, the questionnaire consisted of 9 items relating to an autonomy-supportive style, 8 items to a structuring style, 8 items to a controlling style, and 9 items to a chaotic style. The internal reliabilities of the board's (de) motivating styles as assessed by Cronbach's alpha ranged from acceptable to excellent. At the pretest, the Cronbach's alpha of the scales was 0.78 (autonomy-supportive), 0.80 (structuring), 0.85 (controlling), and 0.85 (chaotic). At the posttest, the Cronbach's alpha of the scales was 0.82 (autonomy support), 0.84 (structuring), 0.69 (controlling); and 0.71 (chaotic).

Clubgrade intervention

The Clubgrade intervention involved two sessions organized in all-volunteer sports clubs. In the first session, internal stakeholders (e.g. board members, coaches, volunteers, members) were asked to sit down around a template, which showed the four CVF (culture) models (see Figure 3).

This session was guided by a trained facilitator (Gerwing, 2016). (S)he relied on a CVF-based template to construct the organizational culture and necessary culture changes related to a question/problem identified by the sports club (e.g. "We want to attract more volunteers"). To this end, (s)he used three different steps. In the first step, the participants discussed the existing organizational culture (i.e. where are we today) in relation to the central question with each participant receiving cards on which they wrote down their ideas regarding the current situation. In the second step of the group discussion, participants
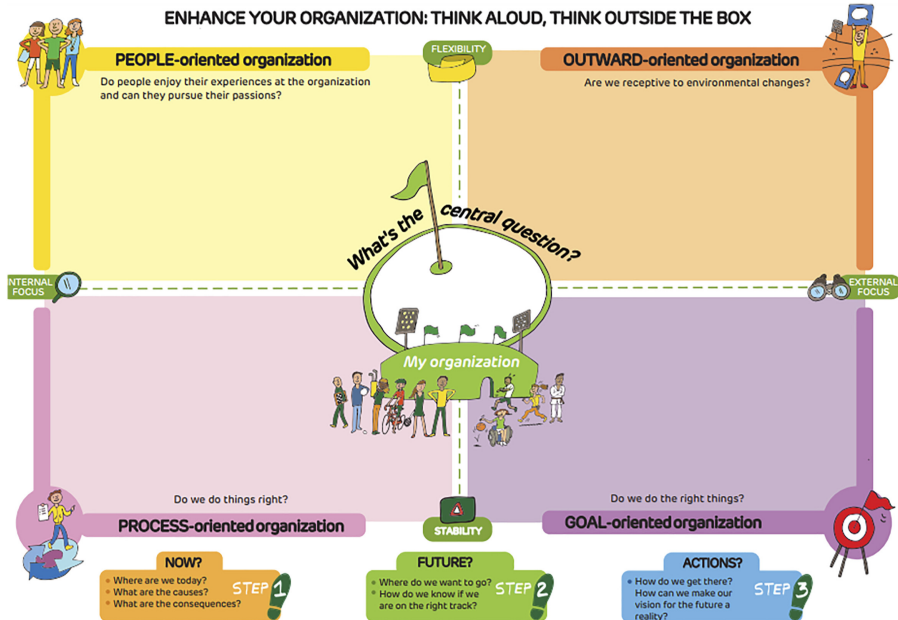
Figure 3.
CVF-based template used in the first session of the intervention

Source(s): Figure based on Quinn, R. E., & Rohrbaugh, J. (1981). A competing values approach to organizational effectiveness. Public Productivity Review, 5, 122-140

described their desired culture, with each participant receiving cards on which they wrote down their ideas regarding the warranted future situation. Plotting the current and preferred culture profiles on the template helped to identify possible discrepancies. Furthermore, it became clear which models were less or more present in the organization. In the third step of the group discussion, initiatives that could resolve discrepancies between the current and preferred culture or could tackle the absence of crucial processes in the organization were discussed (see De Clerck *et al.*, 2022 for more details). Importantly, the facilitator pointed to the importance of engaging with each of the CVF quadrants to a certain extent, stimulating the internal stakeholders to develop change initiatives related to each of the four CVF quadrants. These included the development or further elaboration of training opportunities for volunteers (human relations model), an internal communication plan (internal process model), innovative communication techniques (open system model), or a mission and vision (rational goal model).

As the first session focused primarily on the development of change initiatives to enhance CVF-related management processes, a survey was distributed within the sports club to evaluate whether there was also a need to work on the board's motivating style within the sports club. This questionnaire described CVF-based management situations in which internal stakeholders were involved or may be involved. These included "There are tensions between important stakeholders (human relations model)", "The board organizes a meeting with stakeholders to evaluate the past sports season (internal process model)", "The board learns that stakeholders have expectations regarding the sports club's management (open system model)", "The board is responsible for developing a business plan (rational goal model)". The internal stakeholders were asked to give their opinion regarding the board's (de) motivating styles within these situations.

The facilitator and internal stakeholders discussed the results of the survey in the second session, which was organized approximately six weeks after the first session. The discussion was led by a trained analyst. Based on his/her analysis, new change initiatives such as the creation of working groups to involve all sports club members in the change initiatives emerged. At the end of this session, a project plan was established which included the change initiatives that were developed during the first and second session. Since the sports clubs wanted to initiate their change initiatives within a reasonable period of time (max. 2 months), it also included practical details regarding the implementation of the change initiatives (e.g. task distribution, timeline).

Plan of analyses

Before studying the effects of the intervention, we verified the condition comparability by performing a one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA).

To examine the effect of the intervention on the board's reliance on effective management related to the CVF models and (de)motivating leadership styles, three one-way repeated-measures MANOVAs were employed. Given the nested structure of our data, multilevel analyses were considered. However, since our small sample size at level 2 may lead to biased estimates of the level 2-standard errors (Maas and Hox, 2005), we proceeded with single-level (i.e. organizational-level) repeated measures MANOVAs by aggregating the scores of the board members of each sports club (Van Mierlo *et al.*, 2009).

Results

Preliminary analyses

We performed a one-way MANOVA including the board's reliance on management processes related to the human relations model, internal process model, open system model, and rational goal model, and an autonomy-supportive, structuring, controlling, and chaotic style at baseline as

dependent variables, and the condition as a fixed factor. The results revealed that the multivariate effect was not significant, $F(8,10) = 1.95$, $p = 0.16$. Overall, these findings indicated that the sports clubs were indeed randomly assigned to the intervention and control group, and that the sports clubs in the intervention and control group had an equal amount of room for change.

Primary analyses
Intervention effects on the Board's reliance on management processes. Table 1 reveals that the multivariate time × condition interaction effect for the board's reliance on management processes related to the CVF models was significant.

Also the univariate time × condition interaction effect for the board's reliance on management processes related to the internal process model was significant, with mean scores showing that in the intervention group, the board's reliance on the management processes of the internal process model increased from the pretest ($M = 4.64$; $SD = 0.86$) to the posttest ($M = 4.81$; $SD = 0.56$), whereas in the control group, the board's reliance on management processes of the internal process model decreased from the pretest ($M = 5.29$; $SD = 0.70$) to the posttest ($M = 4.72$; $SD = 0.70$). This finding supported H1b. However, the univariate time × condition interaction effect was not significant for the management processes related to the other CVF models including the human relations (H1a not supported), open system (H1c not supported) and rational goal (H1d not supported) model.

To enhance our understanding of the intervention's significant impact on the internal process model, we examined the items within the internal processes model (not displayed in Table 1). The results revealed that the time × condition interaction was significant for internal communication planning and an annual assessment of the sports club's activities. More specifically, the board's internal communication planning in the intervention group

Management processes related to the CVF models	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Δ	F (time)		F (condition)		F (time x condition)	
					η^2		η^2		η^2
Multivariate effects				1.31	0.27	0.75	0.18	3.50*	0.50
Univariate effects									
Human relations model									
Intervention group	4.21 (0.99)	4.43 (0.79)	0.22						
Control group	4.85 (0.92)	4.56 (0.85)	−0.29						
Total	4.51 (0.99)	4.49 (0.87)	−0.02	0.03	0.00	1.07	0.06	1.60	0.09
Internal processes model									
Intervention group	4.64 (0.86)	4.81 (0.56)	0.17						
Control group	5.29 (0.70)	4.72 (0.70)	−0.57						
Total	4.95 (0.83)	4.81 (0.56)	−0.14	1.49	0.08	0.94	0.05	5.07*	0.23
Open system model									
Intervention group	3.84 (0.50)	3.75 (0.48)	−0.09						
Control group	4.19 (0.61)	4.01 (0.43)	−0.17						
Total	4.01 (0.57)	3.88 (0.47)	−0.12	0.80	0.05	2.67	0.14	0.08	0.01
Rational goal model									
Intervention group	4.80 (0.79)	4.79 (0.66)	−0.01						
Control group	5.41 (0.64)	5.00 (0.84)	−0.41						
Total	5.09 (0.77)	4.89 (0.74)	−0.20	1.05	0.06	2.38	0.12	0.92	0.05

Table 1.
Intervention effects from pretest to posttest for management processes

Note(s): *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
Source(s): Authors' work

increased (on average) from the pretest ($M = 4.40$; $SD = 1.26$) to the posttest ($M = 4.92$; $SD = 0.67$), while the means of the control group decreased from the pretest ($M = 5.23$; $SD = 0.73$) to the posttest ($M = 4.50$; $SD = 1.04$). In addition, the board's annual assessment of the sports club's activities in the intervention group increased (on average) from the pretest ($M = 5.10$; $SD = 0.83$) to the posttest ($M = 5.52$; $SD = 0.73$), while the means of the control group decreased from the pretest ($M = 5.78$; $SD = 0.97$) to the posttest ($M = 5.28$; $SD = 1.06$).

Intervention effects on the board's reliance on motivating leadership styles. Table 2 reveals insignificant multivariate an univariate time × condition interaction effects for the board's autonomy-supportive (H2a not supported) and structuring (H2b not supported) leadership styles.

Intervention effects on the board's reliance on demotivating styles. Table 3 shows a significant multivariate time × condition interaction effect for the board's demotivating styles. It also reveals a univariate time × condition interaction effect for a controlling leadership style, with inspection of the mean scores pointing to a decrease from the pretest ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 0.56$) to the posttest ($M = 2.50$; $SD = 0.42$) in the intervention group, and an increase from the pretest ($M = 2.50$; $SD = 0.71$) to the posttest ($M = 2.76$; $SD = 0.51$) in the control group (H2c supported). Also the univariate time × condition interaction effect for a chaotic leadership style was significant, with mean scores revealing a decrease from the pretest ($M = 2.82$; $SD = 0.48$) to the posttest ($M = 2.49$; $SD = 0.36$) in the intervention group, and an increase from the pretest ($M = 2.29$; $SD = 0.62$) to the posttest ($M = 2.47$; $SD = 0.50$) in the control group (H2d supported).

Inspection of the items (not displayed in Table 3) pointed to a significant time × condition interaction for the item "When the board establishes a business plan, the board makes it clear that they don't need the stakeholders' approval" related to a controlling style, showing a decrease from the pretest ($M = 3.43$; $SD = 0.96$) to the posttest ($M = 2.81$; $SD = 0.94$) in the intervention group, and an increase from the pretest ($M = 3.31$; $SD = 0.93$) to the posttest ($M = 3.62$; $SD = 1.01$) in the control group. In addition, a significant time × condition interaction was found for the item "When tasks are distributed within the sports club, the board does not interfere. Other people should figure it out on their own" related to a chaotic style, revealing a decrease from the pretest ($M = 2.71$; $SD = 0.75$) to the posttest ($M = 2.27$;

Motivating leadership styles	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Δ	F (time)		F (condition)		F (time condition)	
					η^2		η^2		η^2
Multivariate effects				0.30	0.04	5.87*	0.42	1.16	0.13
Univariate effects									
Autonomy-supportive leadership style									
Intervention group	4.92 (0.58)	5.01 (0.41)	0.09						
Control group	5.57 (0.33)	5.31 (0.57)	−0.26						
Total	5.23 (0.57)	5.15 (0.50)	−0.07	0.54	0.03	5.97*	0.26	2.41	0.13
Structuring leadership style									
Intervention group	4.29 (0.60)	4.41 (0.53)	0.13						
Control group	5.25 (0.61)	4.99 (0.52)	−0.25						
Total	4.74 (0.75)	4.69 (0.59)	−0.05	0.25	0.02	12.32**	0.42	2 20	0.11

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$
Source(s): Authors' work

Table 2.
Intervention effects
from pretest to posttest
for motivating
leadership styles

Demotivating leadership styles	Pretest M (SD)	Posttest M (SD)	Δ	F (time)	η^2	F (condition)	η^2	F (time condition)	η^2
Multivariate effect				1.07	0.12	2.52	0.24	5.35*	0.50
Univariate effects									
Controlling leadership style									
Intervention group	2.61 (0.56)	2.50 (0.42)	−0.12						
Control group	2.50 (0.71)	2.76 (0.51)	0.26						
Total	2.56 (0.62)	2.62 (0.47)	−0.06	0.77	0.04	0.10	0.01	5.87*	0.26
Chaotic leadership style									
Intervention group	2.82 (0.48)	2.49 (0.36)	−0.34						
Control group	2.29 (0.62)	2.47 (0.50)	0.18						
Total	2.57 (0.60)	2.48 (0.42)	0.09	0.82	0.05	1.68	0.09	8.80**	0.34

Note(s): *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$
Source(s): Authors' work

Table 3.
Intervention effects from pretest to posttest for demotivating leadership styles

$SD = 0.81$) in the intervention group, and an increase from the pretest ($M = 2.02$; $SD = 0.59$) to the posttest ($M = 2.72$; $SD = 0.78$) in the control group.

Discussion

Professionalization of all-volunteer nonprofit organizations is an urgent and important matter (Balduck *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, building on the strengths of previous CVF and SDT intervention studies, we set up an intervention in all-volunteer sports clubs aimed at enhancing the volunteer board's reliance on effective management processes and motivating leadership styles (and reducing their reliance on demotivating leadership styles).

The board's reliance on management processes

In the present study, we first tested the effects of the intervention on the volunteer board's reliance on management processes related to the CVF. The boards of the intervention group reported that there was a growth margin to enhance these processes, scoring the management processes related to the four CVF models on average not higher than 4.80 (on a 7-point scale) at the pretest. To enhance these management processes, internal stakeholders developed change initiatives based on the discrepancies between the actual and desired culture, hereby relying on the CVF-based template. The results revealed an impact of the intervention on the board's reliance on internal processes, with especially the development of an internal communication plan and the annual assessment of the organization's operations being affected by the intervention. This finding confirms the ability of volunteer leaders in all-volunteer nonprofit organizations to effectively strengthen their reliance on internal processes (e.g. Grabowski *et al.*, 2015), while also pointing out the successful impact of the intervention in achieving this outcome. Interestingly, this effect was attributed to an increase in the board's reliance on internal processes in the intervention group coupled with a decrease in the control group. The latter finding could potentially be linked to the COVID-19 crisis which may have created a more "pessimistic" view of the sports club's operations. This may also mean that the Clubgrade intervention served as a "buffer" for the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, urging sports organizations in the intervention group to enhance their internal operations despite the crisis.

However, although the intervention aimed to enhance the management processes related to all four CVF models, the intervention did not affect the management processes related to the other CVF models, that is the human relations model, open system model, and rational goal model. Perhaps small all-volunteer nonprofit organizations focus —despite the holistic approach to organizational change in the intervention— especially on the development of the internal processes since they consider this to be "a quick win" for their organization (see also the study of Grabowski *et al.*, 2015). Yet, more (long-term) research is needed to investigate whether this reasoning holds any truth.

The board's reliance on a (de)motivating leadership style
Another important goal of the intervention was to influence the board's reliance on a (de) motivating leadership style by discussing possible discrepancies between the perceived (de) motivating leadership styles within the sports club, as well as solutions to reduce these discrepancies. There seemed to be a potential to increase the motivating leadership style, with the boards of the intervention group scoring their autonomy-supportive leadership style on average 4.92/7 at the pretest, and their structuring leadership style on average 4.29/7. In addition, there seemed to be a margin to decrease the demotivating leadership style, with the boards of the intervention group reporting an especially high reliance on a chaotic style at the pretest (mean score of 2.82/7).

Yet surprisingly, this intervention did not affect the board's motivating style. However, an impact of the intervention on the board's demotivating style was found, and more specifically on the board's controlling and chaotic style within situations in which (respectively), the business plan was established and the tasks were distributed within the organization. Similar to the internal processes, this effect was caused by an opposite decrease/increase in the intervention and control group, which may be due to the COVID-19 crisis causing a higher reliance on a demotivating style in the control group. Again, this may imply that the intervention had a "buffering role" in the COVID-19 crisis, with the boards of the intervention group still decreasing their reliance on a demotivating leadership style in spite of times of crisis.

Together, these findings indicate that the intervention successfully fostered the board's awareness regarding the detrimental effects of demotivating leadership, particularly the lack of involvement of internal stakeholders (e.g. volunteers) in business planning and task distribution. This result proves that volunteer leaders have the ability to adapt and transform their leadership behaviors and attitudes within the organization. Moreover, and most importantly, it highlights the successful impact of the intervention in facilitating positive change in these leadership behaviors. However, it appeared that board members moved hereby from demotivating leadership style towards a more passive style, rather than to an active reliance on a motivating leadership style, which is essential to foster psychological growth and optimal functioning in the organization (Deci *et al.*, 2017).

The lack of effect of the intervention on the motivating leadership styles deserves specific attention as it is inconsistent with previous SDT-based intervention studies (e.g. Forner, 2019; Slemp *et al.*, 2021), pointing to pre–post improvements in leaders' orientations to be autonomy supportive. However, it is important to note that these interventions consisted of theoretical sessions guided by trained educators in which the SDT principles were explained in detail to the leaders (e.g. Forner, 2019; Slemp *et al.*, 2021). In our intervention, the external experts guiding the sessions (facilitator or analyst) can take on this role. For instance, when during the intervention, the internal stakeholders decide to optimize task distribution within the organization, the experts can point to the importance of providing opportunities for everyone in the sports club to decide which tasks they prefer, and how much time they can invest in those tasks (i.e. an autonomy-supportive leadership style), as well as communicating clear

expectations and guidelines so that the stakeholders feel competent to master their assigned tasks (i.e. a structuring leadership style). Thus, the training of the experts can be further optimized to better guide the board in adopting a motivating style.

Why was this intervention successful? Reviewing the intervention's essential components
Considering the intervention's substantial short-term impact on both the management processes and (de)motivating leadership styles, a pertinent question arises: Why was this intervention successful? To shed light on this question, it is imperative to delve in the crucial components that underpinned the intervention and have demonstrated their effectiveness in prior research. Notably, De Clerck *et al.* (2022) conducted a qualitative study to examine what participants valued most about the intervention, providing valuable insights.

The first pivotal component was the use of strong theoretical underpinnings to develop concrete intervention tools (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Slemp *et al.*, 2021). More precisely, we relied on the CVF to develop a template (see Figure 3) that was used in the first session to discuss potential change initiatives. In addition, we used SDT to develop a questionnaire that instigated a discussion in the second session on how these change initiatives should be implemented (i.e. in a motivating way; see Method). Importantly, the facilitator played a crucial role in introducing and elucidating the theoretical principles of CVF and SDT during the intervention (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022).

Second, the active involvement of internal stakeholders proved pivotal in identifying essential change initiatives (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Fernandez and Rainey, 2017). The CVF-based template played a central role in facilitating this process (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; De Clerck *et al.*, 2022). Participants found value in the template as it compelled them to consider the existing club culture, the desired culture, and potential change initiatives. Notably, the discussion around the preferred culture was perceived as innovative, setting the approach apart from conventional discussions that often revolve around identifying current problems and possible solutions. The emphasis on an ideal organizational culture served as a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of the developed change initiatives. Moreover, the template proved invaluable in guiding participants through a thoughtful examination of the four competing CVF models. It encouraged them to consider both internal and external factors while aiding them in discerning situations where flexibility is advantageous and instances where stability is more appropriate.

Overall, involving internal stakeholders in the intervention was instrumental in cultivating widespread support for the proposed changes, with actively involved stakeholders sharing a unified vision and readiness to invest their energy in developing these initiatives (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Fernandez and Rainey, 2017). In addition, individuals actively participating in the change process could act as internal change agents, spreading enthusiasm and fostering cohesion within the organization.

Third, the intervention was conducted within an autonomy-supportive environment (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Mitchell *et al.*, 2012). This was evident in the creation of a nurturing and constructive setting that facilitated an open dialogue and encouraged participants to voice their opinions without fear of criticism. Despite sporadic disagreements, participants consistently found common ground, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose within the organization. The facilitator played a pivotal role in creating an autonomy-supportive environment, making every participant feel that their opinions mattered (De Clerck *et al.*, 2022; Gerwing, 2016). The facilitators refrained from imposing their own ideas on the group and never dismissed any opinions as incorrect. They actively engaged all participants in the discussion, ensuring that even those less involved had the opportunity to contribute their insights.

Theoretical and practical implications
Theoretical contributions of this intervention study are tightly linked to its practical implications. This is the first intervention that leverages the theoretical principles of CVF and SDT to achieve an in-depth professionalization of all-volunteer nonprofit organizations by enhancing their management processes and leadership. The research findings are relevant to both the nonprofit and broader organizational landscape, offering guidance on steps organizations can consider when trying to strengthen their management and leadership. A crucial initial step in our intervention process, which every organization should recognize, is the active involvement of internal stakeholders in the identification of change plans. To facilitate internal stakeholders' identification of essential change initiatives, we employed a CVF-based template in the first session (see Figure 3). Organizations aiming to improve their management processes can create a similar template and engage their stakeholders in discussions about the organization's operations using this template. The observed short-term success in enhancing internal communication planning suggests that this approach holds the potential for long-term improvement in the management processes associated with the CVF models.

Internal stakeholders were not only involved in developing CVF-related change initiatives but they also actively participated in evaluating the motivating leadership style. A (situation-based) questionnaire was utilized to provide all important stakeholders groups in the organization (board members, coaches, volunteers, members) with the opportunity to express their opinion regarding the motivating leadership style (for more information on the survey, see Method). Possible discrepancies were subsequently discussed with representatives of these internal stakeholder groups in the second session. This step was a pivotal part of our intervention since it confronted leaders with the stakeholders' perceptions of their motivating style, challenging them to modify their motivating attitudes and behaviors in the organization (if necessary). Other organizations can adopt a similar approach by developing a customized questionnaire tailored to their specific needs and inviting stakeholders to engage in discussions about possible discrepancies. While the findings primarily indicated short-term effects of this intervention on the leaders' reliance on demotivating behaviors, conducting a regular evaluation can encourage leaders to consistently adopt a motivating style (Slemp *et al.*, 2021), thus fostering a more motivating climate within the organization.

Importantly, organizations should appoint external facilitators who possess a strong understanding of the CVF and SDT principles. These facilitators can effectively guide internal stakeholders through the intervention's steps and provide practical advice on enhancing the management processes and motivating leadership. In addition, they can assure that the intervention is conducted in an autonomy-supportive way. Their expertise ensures a proficient and competent execution of the intervention, maximizing its potential impact.

However, the findings of this study also trigger a broader discussion regarding the imperative of professionalization for every all-volunteer nonprofit organization. While this study suggests that a certain degree of professionalism in the management processes and leadership of these organizations can help avoid common organizational problems such as resource scarcity (Dowling *et al.*, 2014; Shilbury and Ferkins, 2011), it is crucial to recognize that the critical components of successful professionalization highlighted in this study —such as organizing sessions with internal stakeholders, appointing external facilitators, implementing project plans— entail significant investments of both time and financial resources. Consequently, the scale and intensity of professionalization should be seen as a strategic decision, aligning closely with the organization's mission, goals, and capacity. While some all-volunteer nonprofit organizations may thrive with little professionalization, others may find that a more extensive professionalization effort is necessary to achieve their

objectives. In fact, overemphasizing professionalism within smaller all-volunteer nonprofit organizations such as grassroots organizations may potentially undermine their family-like bonds and divert them from their primary goal of serving the community (Forsdike *et al.*, 2019). The key lies in assessing the organization's unique circumstances and making informed decisions that best advance its mission and benefit the communities it serves. For instance, smaller grassroots organizations may find value in a more concise version of the developed intervention in which possible change initiatives are discussed within a small group of dedicated volunteers.

Limitations and future research directions

As with every study, there are a number of limitations associated with this study that also point towards future research directions. First, the COVID-19 crisis had a considerable impact on this intervention study. The COVID-19 crisis may not only have affected the results of this study as described in the discussion, but also led to design-related issues. Namely, the significant dropout of board members and sports clubs had an important impact on the power of this study, that is the probability that a test of significance will detect a deviation from the null hypothesis (should such a deviation exist). Although we find the results of this study valuable, a bigger sample is needed to fully explore the effect of the intervention.

Second, this study examined the intervention's short-term impact on a proximal outcome that is the management processes and motivating leadership style as reported by board members. While this yielded interesting results, future intervention studies should consider examining the intervention's impact at a more distal level, exploring the trickle-down effect of the intervention on the organizational volunteers' feelings toward their leaders' behaviors and their experiences and functioning in the organization (e.g. motivation, satisfaction, commitment, readiness for change). This would require a longer follow-up period (e.g. 1 year; Slemp *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, future studies could investigate the intervention's long-term impact on quantifiable variables, such as the organization's capacity or financial power, over a period of 3–4 years. This would shed light on whether the intervention has a sustainable influence on the organization's overall performance and success.

Third, our study relied on a pretest–posttest control group design to test the effects of the intervention, involving measurements conducted at both the beginning and end of the intervention. This approach allowed us to explore the effect of the entire intervention, encompassing the two sessions and developed change initiatives within working groups. While this design is acknowledged as robust for assessing the overall impact of the intervention at the proximal level, particularly in terms of the sports club leaders' perceptions of the management processes and leadership styles (Aelterman *et al.*, 2014; Slemp *et al.*, 2021), it did not give insight into which specific parts of the intervention drove change and how these elements might be further optimized. To address this limitation, future research could consider integrating other research methodologies into the intervention. For instance, embracing action research, which involves a continuous cycle of planning, action, observation, reflection, and iterative refinement, would facilitate a deeper understanding of which aspects of the intervention exert the most influence (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Such an approach would also offer valuable insights for future improvements to the intervention.

Fourth, this study was conducted in the specific context of all-volunteer sports clubs. Consequently, it is highly encouraged for scholars to assess the intervention's impact in diverse settings while drawing upon the fundamental principles of this intervention regarding content (i.e. enhancing both management processes and motivating leadership styles), approach (i.e. involving internal stakeholders in the development of change initiatives) and design (i.e. employing a rigorous controlled pre–post intervention design).

Conclusion

Relying on the principles of the CVF and SDT, the purpose of the present intervention study was to positively affect the management processes and motivating leadership styles in all-volunteer sports clubs. The findings of the present study pointed to promising short-term effects, as evidence was found for the impact of the intervention on the internal processes, which are crucial for many sports clubs, as well as an effect on the demotivating leadership styles. The principles of this intervention and practical suggestions to further optimize the intervention are also relevant and valuable to organizations operating in other contexts.

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