The contest off the field

An explorative study of how Sports Managers in male Swedish football clubs think about player retention

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Abstract

Att kunna behålla de bästa spelarna kan vara skillnaden mellan en bra och dålig säsong. Det är därför viktigt att föreningar har en kunskap om hur man behåller sina spelare, och kunskapen inom detta är bristfällig då de är ett outforskat område. Syftet med denna studie är att utforska och få en inblick i hur svenska sportchefer resonerar kring arbetet med att behålla spelare. Det är en kvalitativ undersökning och i studien förekommer fyra sportchefer från svenska fotbollsklubbar som intervjuats angående deras tankar kring att behålla spelare. Resultatet som framkommit i studien indikerar att det viktigt är att behålla sina spelare, men det är svårt i dagens fotboll. De största faktorerna som påverkar spelare till att vara kvar i klubbar är lön, utvecklingsmöjligheter och status. Om det finns en möjlighet för spelare att tjäna mer pengar, få bättre möjligheter att utvecklas, samt möjlighet att spela för en klubb på högre sportslig nivå, försämras möjligheten för klubbar att behålla spelare. Klubbarna försöker dock att behålla sina spelare genom att erbjuda en bra miljö med bra faciliteter, bra tränare och en välfungerande organisation. Klubbarna vill behålla alla spelare som bidrar till laget på något sätt. En aspekt som också framhålls av sportcheferna som viktig för möjligheten att behålla spelare är ökad rörlighet som beror på bosmanregeln. Detta gör att spelarna enklare kan byta klubb.

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Introduction

Cash is king; people only care about their salary and how much they will be economically compensated for their work. This is one of the most common assumptions when people talk about why people choose to stay or leave an organization, but this is not the whole picture. A study made by Lee and Way (2010) indicates that salary is not the most important aspect when people choose to stay in or leave an organization; they imply retention is more based on the performance at work and also where and whom they work with.

Retention is a big aspect in sport; not only for those in the clubs. Engaged supporters asks themselves at the end of the seasons who will stay and who will go. Their engagement in these questions is important because it affects the club results, therefore how to retain players is one of the most important aspects for sports organizations. Retaining the best player could give the club an advantage against other teams. The goal of sports organization would be to find out which players make the team better and how to retain them. Another goal for the organization should be to shape systems which make players satisfied, motivated and committed, factors linked with retention. (Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008).

Player retention has largely escaped the attention of sport management researchers. The importance of retaining employees is on the other hand well known in other fields of science, including human resource management (HRM), which is all policies and practices an organization do to affect the employees behaviour and performance (Taylor et alt., 2008). Whittington and Timothy (2010) suggested that the dramatic globalization of economic activity the last century has made the need to retain and attract high-performance employees crucial. Further, Whittington and colleagues declare maintaining the knowledge and abilities people possess could be the only advantage an organization might have against their competitors in the future. The importance of having the most skilled employees could be the difference between success and failure. When this knowledge is more widely spread it will be harder to retain employees due to the increased organizational awareness of the value in retaining skilled employees (Dibble, 1999). Skilled people also attract other skilled people, and if they leave, the organization loses the knowledge and if an organization loses an employee they need to recruit a new employee which is expensive (Morgan, 2008). Therefore there is a more costly effect of employee turnover in organizations who offer some sort of education (Van Dick et al., 2004).

Human resources researchers have not examined players in sports organizations. There is however, a correlation and many similarities between the sports organization management and the management of business organizations. Weinberg and McDermott (2002) found more resemblances than differences between sports leaders and business leaders regarding perceptions of key factors to raise organizational success. Leaders from both fields had similar views on what factors contributed to success, such as leadership, group cohesion and communication. The authors did however, state that there is a need for more research between sports organizations and management in other business areas before any conclusion can be drawn between the management in the different areas. Jones (2002) also found similarities

between sport management and the business world and concluded it is possible to draw lines between the two areas and both would gain valuable knowledge from each other. He also suggested that there is a need of interdisciplinary studies of similarities and differences between performance business teams and performance in sport teams.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of the investigation is to provide insight into how sport managers in male Swedish football clubs think about player retention and explore their views on the importance of player retention. The insight is important because player retention has an impact on the sport organizations and their results. The questions that guide the research are the following:

1. What factors do sport managers believe are the most important aspects to work with to retain players?
2. How do the sports managers think about which players they should retain?
3. What is the sports managers view on player retention in the area of football today?

Background

The background section is dived into literature regarding different aspects of what influences retention. The first part is a literature review regarding retention. The theoretical framework is used to explain the difference in the work of HRM and problematize the work of retention in a football organization.

Literature review

Area of football

The football game has changed in so many ways over the years, the rules of the game have changed, and the preparations have changed among many other things. It is not only about the joy of the game anymore, there is a more serious note nowadays or as Peterson (2002) explained the athletes need to see the gravity in the game. Because of these changes and since the sport has entered the professionalized era the need for alternative types of knowledge has become acute. The world of sports has gone from being a playful spare time activity into a multi economic industry. There are more people involved in the area beyond the football field like; economist, club chiefs, scouts among others (Peterson, 2002). Professional knowledge is important due to the complexity of managing and leading a sport organization. Managers need to have a broad knowledge that covers many different aspects of organizations such as leadership, personnel support, group cohesion, organizational culture and the importance of how to use their resources in the best way (Fletcher & Arnold, 2011).

According to Gilmore (2009) there is a need of HRM to maximize player retention. The organizations could gain more from their resources if they have competent human resources. Therefore she stated without skilled people around the pitch, there will not be possible to gain the best of the clubs resources. In research about HRM and football management, Forslund (2010) found that one problematic aspect between the two research areas is the definition and

categorization of similar aspects. He argued, when a club signs a player it could be viewed the same as when an organization recruits an employee. In the sport context though, it is categorized as a transfer. In the organizational context it would be called recruitment. Forslund (2010) concluded that we tend to look at the differences between the sport world and the organizational world instead of the similarities.

Employee retention
There may be a gap in sports science research concerning player retention, but the issue is thoroughly researched in different science fields. In management literature there is an aspect called employee retention. There is however a difference in focus of the research about retention. Some studies were focused on retaining all employees (Kyndt, Dochy, Michielsen, & Moeyaert, 2009; Lee et al., 2010; Sheridan, 1992) while others focused on how to retain the best employees (D'Amato & Herzfeldt, 2008; Deery, 2008; Hiltrop, 1999; Morgan, 2008) still others focused on turnovers, and the affecting causes for why an employee chooses to leave an organization (Cole & Bruch, 2006; Côte & Morgan, 2002; Joo & Park, 2010; Mor Barak, Levin, Nissly & Lane, 2006; Van Dick et al., 2004). Some studies have also examined the turnover intentions.

One factor associated with retention is organizational commitment, which is the affective attachment the employee has towards the organization. Psychological aspects could relate to the feeling of loss and emptiness if the employee leaves the organization. Another aspect for not leaving could be the feeling of duty towards the organization (Joo et al., 2010). According to Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch and Topolnytsky (2002) affective commitment is correlated to job satisfaction, which is the most common factors that affect organizational retention. This was found in a meta- analysis including 155 different studies and a total of 50 146 participants. Joo et al. (2010) found the similar results in a survey done with employees (n=241) working in three separate industries where the results pointed job satisfaction and organizational commitment as the most influential aspects of retaining employees. Similar results were produced by Deery (2008) where she in a literature review suggested that job satisfaction and commitment affects retention. McBain (2007) expressed that satisfaction and commitment is key factors to retain skilled employees. This conclusion was drawn from an interview study of HR-managers (n=10) and by a literature review, however he also pointed out engagement as a key factor as well. Edgar and Geare (2005) stated however that organization commitment is a decreasing factor, while the commitments for the individual careers are increasing.

Engagement is another factor in retention. Engaged employees tend to be great performers and are more willing to stay at the workplace (Whittington et al., 2010). Another aspect that showed a negative connection of keeping the employees in the organization was stress and pressure (Kyndt et al., 2009). Nowadays stress has taken a more frontline role of the research of employee turnover and has become a central aspect of turnovers (Deery, 2008).

Key factors for retention
There are some key factors in the research of retention which might help to create satisfaction, engagement and commitment, to make people more willing to stay in the organization. One of

these factors was *leadership*. According to McBain (2007) leadership was one of the most important factors for increasing engagement in an organization. If a leader is skilled in communication, giving feedback, and had a performance based focus (rather than a result focus) employee engagement will increase. According to Morgan (2008), leaders also had to value the performance of their employees and recognise and articulate the worth of the performance, not only rewarding the result with extra payment. The leader also had to work in line with the goal of the organization. According to Whittington et al. (2010) leaders would therefore benefit more when using a transformational leadership where the reward correlated with the performance of an employee and not by the result. They suggested that the engagement would also increase if the reward was correlating to the performance rather than the result.

Leader improvement and the leaders strive for develop themselves seems important to retain employees; due to the fact the leader behaviour affects the employees (Morgan, 2008). Morgan also suggested that the leader have to find out which employees are the most important for the organization in the long run. Another aspect of leadership which is of importance to retain employees was; people who perceive they have great leadership skills are more willing to stay in the organization (Kyndt et al., 2009). Hiltrop (1999) found that most people go into new jobs with exaggerated expectations and if these become unmet from the organization, it may lead to higher dissatisfaction and turnovers. Therefore he mentioned the initial stage of an employment has been seen as a highly critical aspect when generating loyalty and commitment. He also stated that a result of how people are introduced into the organization must have a special attention from the leader. Along with leadership, colleagues have an important value of retention. Whom you work with and the climate at work has a positive effect on retention (Kyndt et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2010; McBain, 2007).

Organizations that are providing a *learning and personal development* environment are more willing to retain their employees (Kyndt et al., 2009). Employees who strive to develop themselves needs to have challenging jobs in order for the organizations to be able to retain them. According to Hiltrop (1999) organization should put talented employees, before they are prepared, in challenging jobs. He also expressed offering good opportunities for self-development is a way to keep employees. There is a higher job satisfaction and commitment when the organizations have a performance orientation goal and when the employees perceive the organizational culture as personal developing (Joo et al., 2010). There could however be a complexity in retaining highly educated employees because they have a higher desire to be challenged in their jobs (Kyndt et al., 2009). Highly educated employees are looking for work which gives them the perceived feeling of autonomy and flexibility (Hiltrop, 1999).

Age is another aspect that affected retention of the employees. D'Amato et al. (2008), Hall & Mansfield, 1975 and Mor Barak et al. (2006) indicated older employees were looking for security even if the desire for self-actualization was high, while younger employees were ranking self- actualization as their primary objective. They also suggested younger employees were more willing to leave an organization for another because of the perceived idea that a new organization could lead to self-actualization.

Theoretical framework

Human resource management

To simplify the area of HRM, Doherty (1998) has categorized the different human resource aspects into a model (figure 1). The model is categorized into three categories; external environment, internal environment and outcomes.
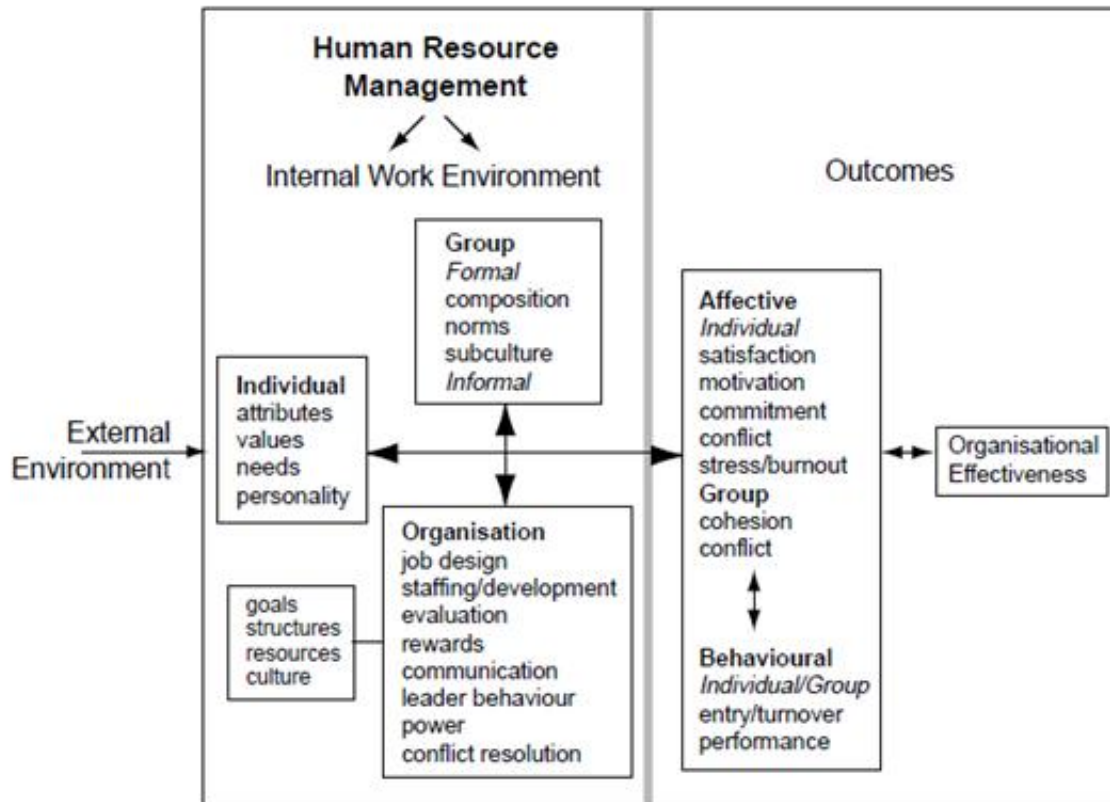

Figure 1. A model of managing human resource (Doherty, 1998)

External environment is how the outside world effects the internal work environment of the organization. Every individual brings something unique into an organization because of their characteristics of being an individual, with their different backgrounds. The external environment also affects the goals, resource and the work in the organization (Doherty, 1998).

The internal environment is divided into three categories which all affects the outcomes of the organization, the individual-, the group- and the organizational aspect. The individual aspect is the specific employees' attributes ideals, needs and personality traits. The group aspect includes informal or formal groups which have been created to reach a specific goal. The formal groups is defined by how they are put together, group member size, heterogeneity, norms accepted in the group and subculture like underlying values. All of this will determine which attitude and behavior a group will have. The informal groups are in differ to the formal groups and are often found out of friendship which can have an effect on the member attitudes. The organizational aspect is such as job designs, rewards, staffing and development.

The organization aspect is determined by the internal goals, culture and economy (resources) of the organization (Doherty, 1998).

All aspects of the external- and internal work environment are affected by the outcomes of the organization. The outcomes are split into two categories; affective and behavioral, which is an effect of the internal work environment. This outcome influences the organizational effectiveness. Every aspect of the HRM model is affecting the outcome of the organization therefore it is of importance organizations find strategies how to work with all these aspects according to Doherty (1998).

Value conflicts
The model of Doherty (1998), illustrated a lot of aspects which affects the work of human resources management. According to Sundqvist (2009) there is an intrinsic value conflict in the football environment which affects the football organizations. To clarify these conflict values there is a four field model (figure 2) which is between individualism and collectivism, and team strength versus group strength. In order to understand the model it is important to understand the difference between the fields and the concept of each field.
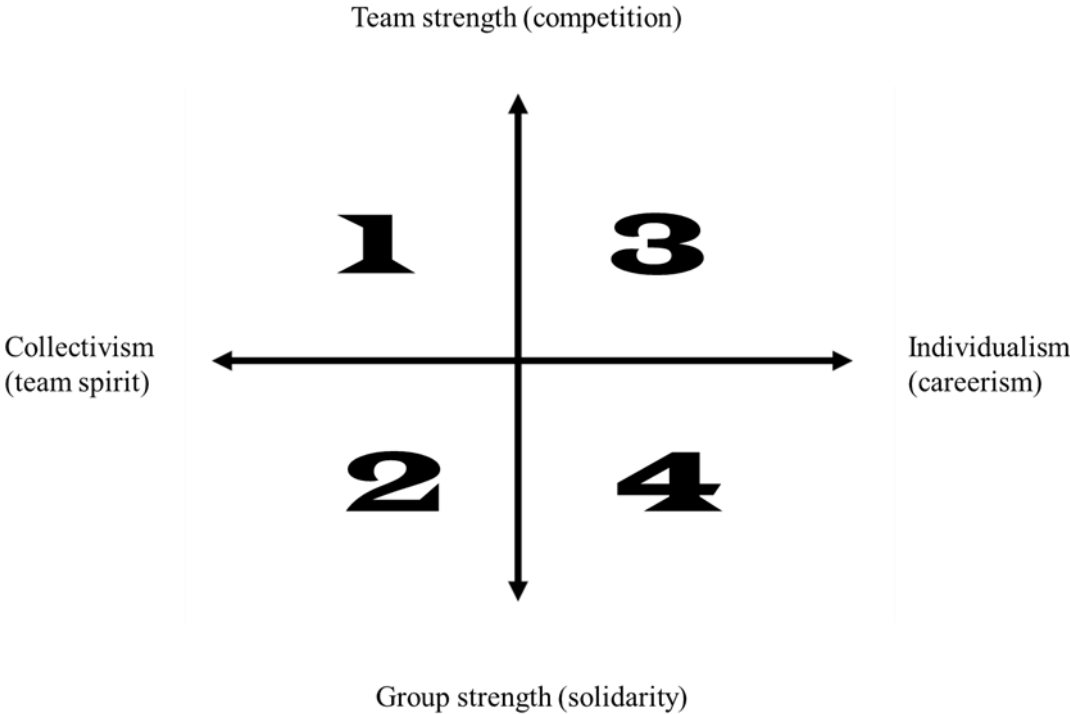
Figure 2. The ideological four-field model (Sundqvist, 2009)

There is a difference between team strength and group strength. In team strength the focus is on the match results. The team focuses on the best players and the players who are not strong enough to contribute to a good result are not important. The players as individuals are only important as long as they contribute to the team results. Loyalty is something the club only give to good players. Group strength however is the attention more on the group cohesion. All players are important, whether the player is skilled or not. The cohesion of the group is most important, even more important than the match result (Sundqvist, 2009).

There is also a difference between individualism and collectivism. In an individualistic environment the most important aspect is that; the best player can reach their development peak, regardless from which team they belongs to. Collectivism is about the individuals' importance to create a strong collective. The group is more important than the individuals in the team. The worst conflict between individualism and collectivism is when a player decides to leave a strong collective, to improve his own career (Sundqvist, 2009).

Individualism is growing stronger in the elite clubs and their academies. The goal of the elite club academies is to develop players who are good enough to represent their senior team. This forms an environment where the players have to improve themself in order to stay at the clubs. If the players are good enough they will proceed in the organization whether their team performed good or not. When a player rises to the senior team he will leave as soon there is a better or more lucrative possibility, due to how he has been teached. The players learn from an early stage their development is more important than the teams result (Sundqvist, 2009).

Field one is about *collective* and *team strength*. "A winning team" is the goal of this field. This means the players are only important if they are good enough. The players can be seen as pawns, which the coach uses to get a winning collective (Sundqvist, 2009).

Field two is *collective* and *group strength*; the goal is not based on the match results. The goal is instead based on solidarity and the social part of the group. The group is the most valued part and to be a part of the group is more important than match results. The goal for the players is to create a strong and solidary group based on social values (Sundqvist, 2009).

Field three is about the *individual* and *team strength*. The goal is to give the best players the opportunity to develop their ability to proceed to better teams. The team is only a group which can help the individual to become a better player. This field is found in the elite clubs youth academies; where the collective is used as a platform to help good players to become better (Sundqvist, 2009).

Field four is about the *individual* and *group strength*. The most important parts of this field are the solidarity in the group and every individuals´ possibility to develop themselves as players. The group is built on social values where everybody are welcomed into the team, whether if they are good players or not. The goal is the players' development instead of short-term results (Sundqvist, 2009).

Sundqvist (2009) concluded the main conflict is between the individualism and the collectivism. A manager therefore needs to understand which players in the team that are the most important. He needs to conclude if the few most skilled players are the main base for the team or if it is the average players.

Method

The method is divided into six parts dealing with research approach; sampling; interviewing; analysis; ethics; and a description of the interviewees and their clubs.

Approach

The approach of the research was a multi- case design, which is when two or more investigation units are studied to create a deep view of the area (Yin, 2009). This research was explorative. The method used to obtain data was through interviews. Due to the relatively unexplored nature of the research area, an explorative method was the most suitable (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The interview method was most appropriate when the aim of data collection was to gain opinions, views and experience about player retention (Denscombe, 2009).

The epistemology in the research was interpretivism. The knowledge in this study was therefore based on the principle that there is no objective reality. The reality is created by a person interacting with the world. The reality of the participants is interpreted by the researchers (Bryman, 2011). The results presented in the study are therefore the researchers constructions of the participants reality.

Sampling

The sampling procedure used in this study was a two-step sampling. The first step was to choose clubs which were interesting according to the purpose. The second step was to find interviewees from the clubs (Ahrne & Svensson, 2011). The clubs and interview person was chosen because they were expected to have the knowledge which could provide the best answers in line with the research and this is called a subjective sampling (Denscombe, 2009). The clubs chosen all had a male senior team in one of the three highest divisions in Sweden. This sampling was chosen due to the opinion that match results are more important in the higher divisions than in lower series.

In total, four clubs were contacted by mail where the purpose was presented and asked who in the club could answer best in line with the purpose. All contacted clubs agreed to participate in the research. The requirements of the interviewees were written in the mail and they were: 1) Work in a position where they are handling with the sport part of the organization 2) Work in a position where they handle the recruitment of players 3) Work in a position where they are negotiating the players pay and role. When we got the answer from the clubs with the name of the persons, we contacted them and arranged an interview. The names of person that are handling these questions are often called Sport Manager in Sweden. There is however a problem in the definition of sport managers though there was a difference in their work duties and three of the sport managers were working full time in their position and one was working with these questions but was not full time employed.

One view of sport managers' area of work was that they could handle different parts of the sport organization such as planning and organize the organizations resources, handle the human resources, leading the organization to accomplish its goals (Sawyer & Smith, 1999). Another view was that the sport manager procedure in every part of the sport area (Broberg et al., 2004). Both views indicated the wide of the work range a sport manager handles.

According to these opinions there is hard to define exactly what a sport manager works by just reference him as a sport manager. Therefore all of the interviewees in this research are referenced as sport managers though they all work at some of these areas.

The *players* in this study are 15 years old or older male football players in Sweden. This due to when they have their fifteenth birthday they need to have a license to play for a specific club, which denies them from changing clubs without an approval from their current club (Svenska Fotbollsförbundet, n.d.).

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain information from the interviewees, which involved open-ended questions in the interview guide (see appendix 1) (Gratton & Jones, 2010). The questions were based on the research questions and the concepts of the HRM-model (figure 1). This meant that the choice of the theory was done before the interviews, and theory helped to guide the investigation. Each participant was interviewed once and the interviews length was between 45 minutes and 80 minutes. The interviews were recorded with an agreement from the participants and the interviews were done at each participant's choice of location. The interviews were done by the two researchers however the same researcher always led the interviews. The transcriptions were done verbatim.

Data analysis

To be comfortable with the material the interviews was read before the schematization. The material was analyzed with a content analyze (Gratton & Jones, 2010), where the first step was to assign units of meaning which was coded, and due to the fact that the interviews were done in Swedish the used data had to be translated into English by the researchers. In the next step the codes were categorized into general dimensions. These general dimensions were concluded by the research questions. The procedure was as following:

Table 1, Example of the coding process

Raw data	Codes	General dimension
The environment is of course important, facilities and training opportunities. You need to have good opportunities to practice.	Facilities	Key factors to retain players
It is everything around the team, the leaders and the teammates is very important.	Human resources	Key factors to retain players

Ethics

The ethical consideration in the research was based on the four ethical principles, the information requirement, the consent to claim, the confidentiality obligation and the utilization requirement (Bryman, 2011). Before every interview the purpose of the research

was presented and the participants were told they could stop and cancel at any time. The interviewees were told the information would only be used in the research and their interviews would be confidential. The information could not be connected to a person and the names of the interviewees in the document are fictitious.

Interview participants

The first sport manager was Greg[1]. He was working at one of the most successful football teams in Sweden. The club competed in the top division and the interest from supporters, sponsors and media was huge. Their main goal for the senior team was to compete in the European tournaments and be one of the top three teams in Sweden every season. The goal with the youth academy was to develop players which were good enough to play in the senior team and in the European tournaments.

The second sport manager was Tom. He was working at a club in the top division in Sweden. The team has been struggling between the two highest divisions but has established themselves in the top division. The interest for the club was not as high as the other clubs at the same level. The main goal for the organization was to play regularly in the top division and their goal with the youth academy was to develop players to their senior team.

The third sport manager was Sven. He was working at a club in the third highest division in Sweden. The team has been relegated from the top- and the second highest division in recent years. The club has been one of the biggest clubs in Sweden, but has been struggling with economic problems recently. The main goal with the organization was to play steadily in the top two divisions and their goal with the youth academy was to develop players to their senior team.

The fourth sport manager was Peter. He was working at a club in the third highest division in Sweden. The team has been struggling between the third and second division over the last seasons. The main goal of the club was to establish itself in the second highest division. The goal with the youth team was to develop players that can play in their senior team or in a higher ranked club. They also had in their structure that everyone is welcome to play in their youth clubs up to the age of nineteen.

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[1] All names are pseudonyms

Analysis

The following sections are description and analyses of the research question one, two and three. Each question will be discussed in light of the literature review and the theoretical framework. Under the reflection part the result is summed up and discussed in a wider perspective in light of the theoretical framework and the literature review. Finally a discussion of the used method and implication for future research are ending this part.

Important aspects of player retention

Organization

A working organization was an important part for retaining players' according to the sports managers. Sven considered you need to have a good structure where all the employees know their role whether they are players or administrative staff. Tom suggested the importance of having clear goals and strategies of the organizations actions. An organization needed to have good facilities, skilled employees in the organizations and skilled coaches on the field. Greg had the same opinion and stated:

> If we have good facilities, a good organization, you get your salary… the players feel that they can develop their football skills… if we are good at these factors it might help us to retain our players for a longer period.

Having good facilities was according to the sports managers an important part in the work of player retention. They discussed much focus is spent on getting better facilities, due to its importance in the competition of keeping the players. The facilities also had an impact on the work of signing new players. Tom declared that players lay much focus on the first impression which often was the facilities. Every part was regarded making the players feel comfortable and giving them the best opportunities to develop, quoting Greg:

> … good locker rooms, we have players' lounge, very good football fields. If you have had it like this before, you will not change to a club that does not have it like that. It is like if you have been living in a great apartment you will not move to a new apartment that is worse than what you have.

The match arena also had an impact on the player retention, two of the sport managers thought their arena was attracting players due to the geographic environment and also the standard of the arena was top in the division. One sport manager however considered their arena had the lowest standard in the division, which made it harder to retain and recruit players.

Human resources

Having skilled employees in the organization is a factor the mangers highlighted as important in retaining players; they believed having the right person in the right role is of necessity. This was the same opinion as Gilmore (2009). She suggested a football organization could get an advantage against the competitors through having skilled employees. She stated a club needs a strategy with their HRM to gain the most from the employees. Therefore it could be concluded as useless to have skilled employees if the organizations do not have a strategy of

how to use them. Tom explained another aspect where the employees need to have an understanding of how football organization works:

> Of course, money is important due to the fact that you can have full time employees, but the most important fact is that the employees are engaged and understand this is not a regular work, this includes working weekdays and evenings.

Suggested to Whittington et al. (2010) engaged employees tend to be great performers and therefore it could be indicated what Tom believed that engaged people in the organization are important. According to Sven a football organization needed to have knowledge about the administrative part which includes someone who is in charge of the club. The managers also described the needs for human resources around the football team like physiotherapists, scouts, chefs and fitness coaches. Tom argued the importance of having employed full time workers to help develop the organization. However the football coach was the most important person in the work of player retention according to the managers, Peter indicates:

> Have a good coach is about making the players feel like they are developing, if we do not have good coaches or coaches with a bad reputation who do not play the football the players want, they will not stay in our club.

The attributes of the coach should be direct, honest and fair which is discussed by the managers. The importance of leader attributes are also considered by McBain (2007), although it is not the same attributes highlighted as the managers. This difference could probably be explained by the context difference where some leadership attributes seems more attractive in the football context, and when the managers suggest leadership skills they meant the attributes of the coach. Tom declared a coach cannot hide behind "If and maybes", he needs to answer the questions and be honest, which is also indicated by Greg. Sven believed a coach also needed to strengthen the players' personal attributes and engage them. He also stated the coach needs to have a performance based focus rather than a result based focus. This is also highlighted by Whittington et al. (2010) and Morgan (2008), which suggested that a leader should reward the effort instead of the results. Sven thought:

> As long as the players perform their best, it is okay not to always win. Due to the fact that players can do a very good performance and still lose the game.

Having educated coaches is a necessity. The clubs worked with education in different ways, some clubs had their own education weeks where they had lectures for the leaders and some clubs were paying for all the education the coaches needed. The players' satisfaction is also regulated by the coach. Sven discussed that a coach who is skilled contributes to players' satisfaction while an unskilled coach creates player turnovers. Peter highlighted there is a difference in motivating the players:

> It is always easy to motivate the players that are playing regularly; it is the easiest job in the world, which all coaches are good at. It is however when the coaches needs to motivate the ones that are not playing his leadership skills displays. He needs to get them to go the same way as the others even if they are not playing for the next couple of weeks, and that is hard.

Apart from the coach the managers stated the teammates as an important aspect in player retention. According to McBain (2007) and Lee et al. (2010) the colleague affects employee

retention. They did however not conclude this in a football context but the teammates could be seen as colleagues and therefore affects the player retention. Peter declared the teammates were even more important than the coaches. Therefore the structure of the group is highlighted as an important factor in the work of retention by the managers. The managers' explained that a team needs to have different roles like positions, personal attributes and salary homogeneity. Sven stated:

> I have been involved in a team where the players who had low salary performed better than players with high salary. It was a difficult situation because you have got two groups in the team. Therefore the group salary is an important factor and you need to think of the salary structure. What is the value of a specific player and that fact is a hard thing.

External environment and salary
The managers mentioned the importance of constructing a satisfying environment for the players outside the football field. This included jobs, education, apartments and taking care of the players' family. The lower division clubs laid more focus on helping the players to get a job or education, while in the higher division clubs, the focus was more on giving the players the best commodities such as high attracting apartments in the city. The managers discussed that making the players families feel satisfied with their situation is also an important aspect of player retention. However the managers felt they could do more in this area, Tom explained:

> …take care of girlfriends and families in a different way, which perhaps could help us to in the long run, a player sign a longer contract…

The main part of player retention was the economic resources in the organizations. The salary aspect was an important aspect. Greg insisted that salary was the biggest aspect in the work of player retention. However Tom indicated that the salary needs to be fair and in line with the players perceived value for the team. Due to the tight economic structure in Peter's club the salaries was not high, and if the economy would improve, the salaries would not be the primary change in the club. Instead the money would be used to improve the organization. Therefore the economic resource was an important part, quoted by Tom:

> Without money you cannot do anything of these things you want to do, the economy is requirement in the elite sports world today

Summary
The managers believed that the organizations work such as facilities, people in the organization, team structure, coaches and their leadership style, the situation outside the football field and salary was most important to retain players. Connected to Doherty (1998) the managers highlighted many aspects as affecting retention. However some of the aspects in the model were left out such as subculture and power when the manager talked about player retention and some of the aspects in the model were concluded by the managers as extra important such as rewards, leaders and development. The reason some factors were more common is difficult to conclude, however it could be affected by the limited quantity of sport managers.

Thoughts about who to retain

The managers declared there were only advantages in retaining the same players over time however the managers suggested the players needed to strive for developing themselves as players. Tom explained the need for development among the players are a necessity, it does not matter if you are a good player if you do not want to develop. Peter highlighted the same:

> As long as the players are developing and becoming better and meet the club standard, there are only advantages in keeping the same players.

The managers mentioned two kinds of players they want to retain. Two features they were looking at were the specific football skills and the leadership attributes. The football skills needed to be in line with the clubs goals and standards. The players also needed to fit into the clubs formation. Peter indicated they "…want players with speed and technique…" because these attributes fitted into their football philosophy. Players with leadership attributes are the ones who took more responsibility for the team, and conjured a team spirit and provided group cohesion. Tom explained:

> We want a number of captains..., a couple of players that do not just come for the practices and then leave, players who can take care of the team and the club. You need a number of these kinds of players

The managers also highlighted the need for continuity due to the fact that players inherit the organizational culture and will pass it over to new members of the team. The continuity of members also had an important role in the group cohesion. Tom declared that you needed to have a stable group in the team every season which included almost the same players. Sven believed that too high flexibility of team members will affect the results in a negative manner. Peter thought that a team needs some flexibility to gain new ideas and development into the team. Tom however considered that the team structure needs to be the same regardless if a player joined or left the team:

> … you need to have a strong base of players. That is why we sometimes keep a player who is not good enough for our first team but is important for the group cohesion, which sometimes could be considered strange for the outside world…

Tom believed having a strong base is the key to handling all type of players and personalities in the team. He indicated if one player is outside the group cohesion but still is good enough for the first team there might be worth bringing in a player with leadership attributes instead of transfer list him. Peter was on the same line as Tom and regarded having a strong base of player continuance as important, however he also thought that a team cannot have players outside the group cohesion, and if one player is outside he explained the most beneficial course for the team is to transfer the player.

Greg declared the football skills of a player are always the essential part of which player they should retain. Tom on the other hand suggested that the best players in the clubs are not always the most important for the club in the long run:

> There is about five youth players that has the skills to become a first team player, one will probably leave before he gets the chance because he wants to leave, two are good enough but

will leave for better clubs before they get the chance in the first team. The other two that are left behind are probably the most important for our club in the future, because this is the players who got the chance to become first team member for many years to come... there are two players in our first team that are these kinds of players. We believe they are good enough for our team but apparently other clubs do not believe that, that is why we get to retain them.

Peter had the principle that he will not stand in the way for a player who wants to leave for a bigger club; he does not negotiate transfer offers although he believed this will benefit him when he wanted to sign a new player:

We promise every player that if they got a bid from clubs in a higher division we never stop them; you can always leave our club for a club in a higher division.

However Peter indicated he tries to retain the most talented players in the youth teams and players he thought could develop to be good enough for their first team. He stated they had a very talented youth team where he lays extra attention:

We have an extraordinary good youth team that will play in the top youth league in Sweden. This will cost a lot of money which we usually do not want to pay, but we do this because we think it is necessary, if we do not do this we believe they will leave for clubs with higher rank. We need to offer the best or else they will leave, and then we have to spend money.

The managers seemed to want players which came from the geographic region the clubs are located. Tom tried to get the youth players from small clubs in the neighboring areas. Peter was on the same line as Tom and wanted players from a specific part of the city; he wanted to retain the feeling of being a smaller club.

Summary
The managers stated as long as the players contributed to any aspect the managers considered influenced the outcome; there is a winning situation in retaining the players. However they had different views on how players could contribute to the outcome of the team. The managers all believed the teams needed to have players which either contributed to the team cohesion or to the football field with their specific football skills. Knowing who the most valuable players are to the team is highlighted by the mangers as important; this is in line with Morgan (2008). He also suggested the most skilled person is not always the most important in the long run. This could indicate that the most skilled players are not always the players that will gain the club in a longer perspective.

The managers had different views on which players were the most important for the teams. According to Sundqvist (2009) and his model of value conflicts in football (figure 2), the organizations are influenced by which players they perceived as most valuable, which affects the team structure. Greg maintained the best skilled football players are the most important to retain. Referenced to Sundqvist (2009), this could have indicated a more team strength view on player retention. Peter declared he laid more focus on the players who could contribute to the team strength, which is in line with the statement Greg made. Tom however had, according to Sundqvist, a more group strength focus when he explained it is not always the best players at the moment who will contribute most to the team, it could be the third or even fourth best players who are the most important in the long run. However this could indicate

that it is not a strategy to focus on the third or fourth best players because they probably do not know which players are attractive for other clubs. It is also probably hard to know who the third or fourth best players are in the upcoming seasons.

View on player retention

Geographical location and status

The managers thought there are many factors in the field of football that affects the retention of players. They highlighted the geographical environment as an important factor. Tom declared that clubs from smaller cities got publicity and support from the local community easier. He believed citizens were more willing to back up the team in a smaller city; there is not the same competition from other football clubs or other sports. Peter also indicated the competition were bigger for clubs where there was more clubs in the same area and explained:

> We are placed in the heart of the city, and influence a lot of who we are. We got bigger clubs all around us and that makes it harder to get sponsors because they are more willing to support the bigger clubs.

The impact of the club status is also a factor the managers considered were affecting retention. Greg suggested one of the reasons that motivated the players was to play for a club with a big audience. Tom had a similar opinion and thought the audience, the club status and interest from the media had an impact on the players.

> We tried to bring back a player who once had played for us but he chose a different club even though I think we offered a contract in line with the club he chose. He chose the other club in the same division just because he wanted to play for a bigger audience and have a chance to play in the European competitions.

Results

The placement in the table at the end of the season was also highlighted as affecting player retention according to the managers. Greg discussed the importance of good results, due to the fact the football world is a result-oriented area and this according to Tom is the hardest aspect to control. Sven suggested the importance of a development- oriented environment in the youth teams and in the senior team, but the result will always matter more in the senior team. Peter explained every player wants to belong to a team that is winning, which Tom also considered:

> The players want to be in the teams that are winning; this is something we have noticed. If the club is winning more players are interesting in joining our organization.

The managers' opinion is in line with Doherty (1998) where she indicated retention is affected by the outcomes of the organization, which could be the same as the result on the field. This could be concluded as positive outcomes in the organization would provide continuance positive outcomes. The managers also thought it has become harder to retain players due to the professionalization that has occurred during the recent years, which has made playing football an accepted profession:

> People are seeing playing football as a profession and not as a hobby anymore where you were born into a club.

Professionalization

The managers also declared the player mobility is due to professionalization. The managers stated the players are more eager to earn money which gives them the opportunity to play full time football and at higher level with more status. Due to this the managers suggested players' commitments for the clubs are decreasing, the managers considered the players are more committed to their own careers. These thoughts are the same as Edgar et al. (2005) where stated organizational commitment has become less important, Tom explained:

> It has become easier to move and earn more money and move to better clubs. The children are reading about player transfer and the money the players earn which has made the money more central and the commitment not as important. This makes it harder and harder to retain players.

Sven however believed the commitment still has an affecting part in retaining players. He thought that if the culture around the club is good enough it will become easier to retain the players over a longer certain time. Greg stated that the youth academy is an aspect that could develop commitment:

> We believe the development of youth players create a commitment for the club, I really believe this… Players who have left us for clubs abroad are still speaking highly of the club

Individual characteristics

The managers suggested younger players are more interested in getting the best development when selecting clubs. The managers indicated the players chose clubs where they could reach their goals and favors their own interests, which often is to become better football player. Peter stated this does not mean players only select the biggest clubs. He considered:

> Players could choose a smaller club due to the fact that there are less skilled players in the team, which gives them a bigger opportunity to play in the first team and benefit them in the long run.

The managers indicated the older players however had other interest when selecting clubs. They lay more focus on their social situation such as family. Peter believed it is more important to simplify an older players social life: "An older player could have the benefit to skip rehab training so he could stay at home taking care of his children". The managers stated younger players are more interested in their own development while older players' attention lies on social security. These thoughts were also declared in the literature, the difference of what affects retention among younger and older were discussed by D'Amato et al. (2008), Hall et al. (1975) and Mor Barak et al. (2006). They concluded younger employees' focuses more on development and older employees more on social security.

According to Doherty (1998) the external environment influenced the needs of the individuals. This could be concluded as background and nationality of the players could affect the organization. Tom indicated the same when he explained there was more difference between players than the age. He stated the players nationality also have an impact on the player retention, both if a player chose to leave or stay:

> Often the foreign players that joins our team, has to send money back to their families in their home countries, it could be about 30, 40 or 50 percent of their salary. The economy is therefore

a big part in many foreign players choice of clubs. As long as we cannot offer more money, we are just a road stop on the way.

However he also discussed the aspect that foreign players could choose to stay to get a resident permit in Sweden. He also believed there was a difference between youth players with immigration background and players with a Swedish background, which affects the player retention:

Many of the players with immigration backgrounds do not have the same opportunities as Swedish children, where the parents have jobs and a better life situation. Then the son becomes a solution of all the future problems in the family. This influences the youth players to take every opportunity to leave and make more money.

Greg suggested the younger players have less experience where they listened more to player agents and their parents, which affects the player retention in negative manner. He explained the players are more individual and are more interested in their own career than the team.

External factors
The managers indicated the transfer market has become more mobile because of the Bosman rule[2]. The players have got the option to leave the clubs when their contract is ending, which affects the player retention in a negative manner. Tom also thought the mobility of players could have been affected by the change in organizational structure. He declared:

Past, the players who did not play for the first team used to play in the clubs b- or c team, but today these teams do not exist. Due to this the players move around between clubs at a larger scale, the players are not as tied to their neighborhood.

The managers believed the gap between smaller and bigger clubs will increase, making it harder for smaller clubs to compete. Peter thought it will be harder for them to reach to the top division because they cannot afford to hire people and are more dependent on volunteers. Sven and Tom were on the same line, Tom explained:

…Swedish football is becoming more elite-oriented, which is of necessity to compete with the biggest European clubs. This will make it harder for the smaller clubs to compete because of the economic difference… the elite clubs are becoming clearer and the gap between elite and non- elite clubs are becoming bigger.

Tom declared player retention was also affected by the hierarchy between the football leagues, where the Swedish league was ranked low, both in football standard and the salary level. Greg also believed the economic difference between Sweden and other European clubs are too big to compete with on the economic level. He states:

If a competitor could pay just a little more money than we could, the player might stay if we have a good organization. However if they pay much more than we could it do not matter if we have a better organization, better facilities, better environment because of the difference in payment is too big.

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[2] The Bosman ruling is an EU court verdict which allows players out of contract to leave their clubs for without the clubs receiving a transfer fee (Bosmandomen, 2012, 14 January).

The managers highlighted the economic gap between Sweden and other European countries, but also the difference between Swedish clubs. Tom indicated the difference between the wealthiest and the not so wealthy clubs was too small to make a difference in the sports result. He explained:

> If the biggest clubs have a salary budget on about 60 million Swedish crones, and the smaller clubs have a salary budget on about 30 millions, the difference between the clubs is not enough to win every year. To sign the best players from other countries that could make the difference on the field they would need to have a salary budget on about 90- or 120 million to make the difference and making the gap even bigger than it is today… the biggest clubs do have much, much bigger economy but the question still remains, is it big enough to leave the smaller clubs behind?

Summary
The managers' view on player retention today was summed up by the assumptions that individual differences such as age and background, geography, match results, club status, professionalization, competition and economy are big influences on player retention in the football world today.

Reflections

The main view according to the managers, player retention was hard due to players' individualism; they were motivated by their own career. Players left for higher salary and the opportunity to play for better clubs which could develop them to better football players. Therefore the managers believed there was a limited possibility to retain players when much higher ranked clubs were interested to sign them. This makes the rest of the competitive tools, which the clubs are working with such as coaches, facilities, only powerful when competing with clubs on the same economical and sport level.

The economy is the base in football organizations according to the managers. They did not see the salary as the only reason in player retention. They explained there were many factors which affects if a player stays such as age, teammates, coaches, organization, geography, individual differences. This is in line with Lee et al. (2010) and the HRM-model (figure 1) by Doherty (1998) where they indicated retention is affected by many factors. However in the football context there seemed to be a limit when the salary is too high to compete against other methods than salary.

The professionalization has according to the managers decreased the players' commitment for the clubs. The management literature indicated commitment as one of the most important factors for employee retention (Deery, 2008; Joo et al., 2010; McBain, 2007; Meyer et al, 2002). However Edgar et al. (2005) stated commitment is decreasing. These differences might indicate a difference in significance of commitment in the context between football organizations and other research field.

The managers all suggested that satisfaction among players however affected the retention. Satisfied players are more willing to stay, which is also explained by Joo et al. (2002) and Deery (2008). Meyer et al. (2002) found that satisfied employees are more committed and

committed employees are more satisfied. This conclusion was not mentioned by the managers who all believed satisfaction was important while commitment was decreasing.

The managers highlighted the mobility and the problem with retaining players due to the Bosman rule and the individualization. Probably this is one of the factors, however according to Sundqvist (2009) and his model of value conflicts in football (figure 2), the clubs structure could also contribute to the player mobility. The consequence of the clubs youth teams who aims to produce players to their senior team, could create an individualism which makes it harder to retain the players. Sundqvist stated the clubs educate players into an individualistic view, where the players learn from an early age they need to rise through the levels in to develop. This could have affected the retention because when the players reached the highest level in the club they need to leave for higher levels. This according to Sundqvist makes it harder to retain the best players in the team. Concluded this could indicate when a club focuses on the most skilled players they focus on the players which probably will leave. Doherty (1998) gave another view on retention where the external environment also has an effect on retention. Every human is different and comes from different backgrounds which makes it hard to generalize which aspect is the most affecting when a person choses to stay.

There is according to Doherty (1998) no easy way to reach positive outcomes, an organization needs to have strategies on every aspect in the HRM-model (figure 1), because everything affects the outcomes of the organization. Gilmore (2009) indicated an organization needs to work with all the aspects to retain people and gain the most of them. All the managers agreed there was a benefit in retaining players, but they stated it is almost impossible when competing with clubs which has a much higher economic level. This is the problem the managers highlighted. The managers want to retain players, but they believed it is hard to state exactly how to do, however their thoughts about aspects such as coaches, organization, facilities seems to be of value in the work of player retention.

However, in the light of the value conflict model by Sundqvist (2009) and the HRM- model (Doherty 1998), it could be of value to widen the perspective of what affects player retention. The managers are suggesting many aspects that are affecting retention but however some aspects have less focus such as the individuals' career goals and the team structures of the club. This could be interpreted as the managers thinks it is of less importance, but however it could probably be of worth for the managers to widen their perspective to retain players.

Method discussion

The purpose of the investigation was to provide insight into how sport managers in male Swedish football clubs are thinking about player retention. This purpose could have been investigated in different ways.

The sampling of the interviewees were chosen by the fact were the participants was expected to have the knowledge to give best answers. The interviewees could have been different; other sport managers, players and coaches could also have provided opinions. The sports managers were selected out of the idea that they should have a wider insight in player retention for a club.

The interviews participants could have been selected with more restricted requirements, where all the clubs was on the same level. This might have provided a deeper knowledge in the specific division but however could have limited the wider perspective of player retention.

The interview guide was made out of the HRM model (see figure 1) concept (Doherty, 1998) and the research questions. The questions were widely opened but are pointed in a specific area, which could have affected the interviewees.

To provide credibility to the research, the interviews were led by the same researcher and with the same arrangements. The transcription was done verbatim by the two researchers to get all the information from the interviews. The credibility could have been affected by the translation from the researchers, were some of the terms were impossible to translate.

There could be transferability from the research to other contexts, due to there is a similarity to other research areas. The managers were concerned about the same aspects as in the management literature. However it is hard to state there is transferability from this research due to the limited previous research on player retention. To state if there is transferability more research needs to be done in the same area and with different methods and different samplings.

Implications

There is a need of future research in the area of player retention because it seems to be a need of knowledge about how to retain players. More research based on this purpose with different interviewees could benefit the knowledge on how to retain players; especially the view from the players themselves is of necessity. There is also a need of research in the same area done with different methods for example investigate what the clubs are doing to retain their players. In this study many aspects on player retention were shown, therefore there is a need to investigate which aspects are the most important in the work of player retention.

Based on the result it could benefit the clubs to understand why players are playing for their club. It seems like all the clubs are competing with the same methods such as facilities, development and money; therefore it could be a need for clubs to find new ways to get competitive advantages, reflect over team structure and the players career goals.

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Appendix

1. Interview Guide

What is the main goal with your organization?

What is the main goal with your senior team?

What is the main goal with your youth organization?

What are the long- and short-term goals in the club?

What is important for a club to function?

What factors, in your opinion, are the most important to rule the club?

Are there extra hard aspects to think of?

What factors are important to create a functioning and performing team?

Which player types are you interested in?

Which player types do you want to retain?

Are there some players that are more important than others to retain?

How do you know which players are most important for the team?

What player abilities are important to get a working team?

What do you regard as good leadership?

Are you looking for any specific type of leadership?

How do you evaluate the results of the organization?

How do you work with the stress and pressure in the organization?

How does the organization work in order to get players to stay?

What do you think is the most important things you as an organization have to work with in order to retain players?

What makes a player leave or remain in a club?

What things tend to create satisfaction/dissatisfaction for a player?

What aspects do you think the players think is good with in your club?

How do club culture/feelings for the club affect the work to retain the players?

What can a club do to create satisfied players?

How do the club handle players who are unhappy with their situation in the club?

How does it affect the team and organization if a player is satisfied or dissatisfied with their situation?

What are the advantages of keeping a player for a long time?

What are the disadvantages of keeping a player for a long time?

Which persons are important if players choose to stay and leave the club?

Is there any difference in the work to keep the players according to their age?

What do you think that a young respective an older player attach great importance to when deciding whether to stay or leave?

What expectations do the players have on the club?

How much focus do you spend on player retention?

Is there some difference of work with retention at junior and senior level?

What do you think about the transfer market today?

Is there any difference of the transfer market now and before?

How do you see at the future work to keep players?

How do you see the future of the transfer market and club management?

What requirements do you think will be on your club in the future to reach your goals?