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Considerations and actions to effectively encourage team sport in an organisation: A qualitative study

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Previous research confirms that organisational team sport interventions hold benefits for the organisation. But the question remains: what actions can organisations take to encourage organisational team sport? The purpose of this study was to explore employees' perceptions of actions that organisations can take to encourage team sport in an organisation. The qualitative exploratory study was conducted among 63 sport participants and 9 sport coordinators of nine different financial organisations in the Gauteng region, South Africa. The data were collected by means of focus group and individual interviews. The results indicated that there are several actions an organisation can take to encourage team sport. The findings of this study contribute valuable new knowledge to the literature because the researcher knows of no other studies that have been done in this field.

Key words: Competitive advantage, effective organisations, organisational team sport.

INTRODUCTION

Managers need to reframe how they think about giving their organisation a competitive advantage (Bolman and Deal, 2008). Organisations have become too reliant on tools and processes to solve their problems, but it is the employees and their inherent understanding of the context, challenge and reality of what is achievable that are at the centre of any major solution. Employees can be trained to go through the motions, but ultimately it is their quality of commitment and thinking that yields results (Ashley, 2011). According to Wright et al. (1994), many organisations focus on only the SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) framework, but fail to focus on human resources in the organisation (environmental determinants of the organisation's performance) to sustain a competitive advantage. Organisational team sport interventions can be seen as one of these "environmental determinants" of an organisation to sustain a competitive advantage.

In a study done by Joubert and De Beer (2012), it was found that organisational team sport interventions hold certain benefits for the company: client service improves; employees are able to work harmoniously with one another/have good interpersonal relationships and they are healthier and more motivated; moreover, the organisation is more profitable, enabling it to make social

investments. It was found that organisational team sport contributes towards an organisation's requirements for an effective workforce.

This article is a follow-up article on Joubert and De Beer's previous study on organisational team sport as a diversity management intervention. The purpose of this current study was to explore employees' perceptions of actions that organisations can take to encourage team sport in an organisation. The findings of this study contribute valuable new knowledge to the literature on actions that organisations can take to encourage team sport in an organisation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a substantial amount of research linking sport success and productivity (Posten, 1998). 'Feel good' feelings about sport have a noteworthy impact on the world of work, including improved client service, healthier and more motivated employees, good interpersonal relationships among employees and more profitable organisations (Ashton et al., 2003). When sport is used in the workplace, it enables employees to focus on their similarities instead of their differences (Joubert and De

Beer, 2010). Once the barriers have been overcome, this can provide access to knowledge, skills and abilities in the organisation because the group works together towards mutual goals. When the goals and efforts of the teams and individuals in the organisation are in alignment, the organisation can move forward through strong leadership and supportive systems. In this study the findings indicated that organisational team sport holds many benefits for an organisation. It is a means of creating opportunities to share goals, increase trust and respect, improve commitment, enhance employees' knowledge of other employees and improve communication among employees. Although several studies have been done on the importance of organisational team sport for the organisation (which will be discussed in the subsequent section), the author could find no studies that were done with regard to the actions that organisations can take to encourage team sport in an organisation.

Case study 1: Impact of sport on workplaces in the United Kingdom (UK)

The Social Issues Research Centre (SIRC) conducted a study that assessed the impact of success and failure in sport on the UK workplace (Chandler, 2006). One-on-one interviews and focus group interviews were conducted from a national sample of 2 000 participants, ranging between the ages of 18 and 70 years. Quantitative and qualitative research was applied.

The findings revealed that success in sport positively influenced the participants' approach to work; success in sport encouraged the participants to be more productive in their work (Chandler, 2006). The participants reported that they talked about sport with their colleagues almost on a daily basis and that sport conversations enabled them to communicate more effectively with their co-workers. Some of the female participants talked about sport to become more accepted in work-related conversations. The participants also indicated that the hierarchical barriers between the chief executive officers (CEOs) and their managers were broken down through conversations about sport (Chandler, 2006). The main conclusion from this study is that sport may have a positive influence on the world of work and the employees' behaviour in organisations.

Case study 2: Influence of sport participation on work success

In a study done by Standard Chartered Bank (Sawer, 2007), it was found that employees who participate in team sport are more successful in their work than are non-participants. It was noted that fast-growing organisations have more employees participating in team sport than slower-growing organisations. This may indicate that the employees who participate in team sport have higher

energy levels, which lead to more rapid organisational growth. It was found that employees who participate in team sport are generally more motivated to improve the organisation's performance and productivity (Sawer, 2007). This study indicated that there is a positive correlation between participation in team sport and organisational benefits. The participants agreed that their participation in sport had enhanced the relationship between employees and management and that they had become better acquainted with other colleagues in other departments.

The purpose of these two studies was to demonstrate the benefits of organisational team sport for the organisation. According to Chandler's study, the benefits of organisational team sport for organisations are improved motivation, improved production, the breaking down of hierarchical barriers and common ground for cooperation. In the study done by Sawer (2007), it was confirmed that the benefits of organisational team sport for organisations are that employees who participate in team sport are more successful in their work because they are more motivated, have higher energy levels and that sport improves relationships between co-workers.

The abovementioned studies, as well as the study done by Joubert and De Beer (2012), confirm that organisational team sport interventions hold benefits for the organisation. However, limited or no research has been done on what actions an organisation can take to encourage team sport in an organisation.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Employees and sport coordinators from nine different financial organisations in Gauteng, South Africa who participated in organisational team sport were approached to be part of the study. Participants were diverse with regard to race, gender, age, religion, language, marital status and job designation. The purpose of considering a variety of diverse participants was to explore their different views and experiences regarding organisational team sport. A total of 63 sport participants and 9 sport coordinators were included in the sample. Details of the biographical characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Focus group and individual interviews were conducted in a private boardroom, which ensured the privacy and comfort of the participants and minimal disturbances. Another ethical consideration was to ensure that the employees' written, informed consent was obtained prior to their participation in the study (Silverman, 2002). Confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that the data were available only to the researcher.

Data collection

The focus group interviews were semi-structured. Participants were encouraged to describe their views and experiences in a particular situation and the interviewer was free to explore any matter that arose (Grbich, 1999). This balanced type of interview was used in order to allow the researcher to answer the question of whether participation in organisational team sport is a benefit for the organisation. The use of guiding and open-ended questions

Table 1. Biographical characteristics of the participants.

Participant	Race	Gender	Age (year)	Religion	Language	Marital status	Job designation	Number of participating in organisational team sport (year)
Organisation 1								
1	Black	Female	24	Christian	Ndebele	Married	Marketing assistant	3 (netball)
2	White	Female	24	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Client care advisor	1 (netball)
3	Black	Female	24	Christian	Zulu	Single	Sales advisor	1 (netball)
4	Black	Female	21	Christian	Ndebele	Single	Client care advisor	3 (netball)
5	White	Female	25	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Senior advisor	2 (netball)
6	Black	Female	31	Christian	South Sotho	Single	Advisor	6 (netball)
Organisation 2								
7	Indian	Male	34	Hindu	English	Single	Sales	5 (cricket)
8	White	Female	37	Christian	Afrikaans	Divorced	Analyst	1 (cricket)
9	White	Female	37	Christian	Afrikaans	Divorced	Sales	2 (cricket)
10	White	Female	42	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Personal assistant	8 (cricket)
11	Indian	Male	28	Tamil	English	Single	Administrator	4 (cricket)
12	Black	Male	27	Christian	Xhosa	Single	Administrator	3 (cricket)
13	White	Male	34	Christian	Afrikaans	Divorced	IT developer	10 (cricket)
Organisation 3								
14	White	Male	40	Christian	Afrikaans	Divorced	Business analyst	4 (cricket)
15	Black	Male	24	Christian	Tswana	Single	Actuarial analyst	1 (cricket)
16	Coloured	Male	29	Christian	English	Married	Operational manager	6 (cricket)
17	White	Male	25	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Actuarial analyst	2 (cricket)
18	White	Male	25	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Actuarial analyst	5 (cricket)
19	White	Female	34	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Sales	4 (cricket)
20	Black	Female	28	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Marketing	1 (cricket)
Organisation 4								
21	White	Male	24	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Marketing	5 (soccer)
22	White	Female	34	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Administrator	2 (soccer)
23	Black	Female	28	Christian	Zulu	Single	Service consultant	1 (soccer)
24	White	Female	42	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Personal assistant	8 (soccer)
25	Black	Female	31	Catholic	Setswana	Single	Tele-underwriter	1 (soccer)
26	Indian	Male	21	Christian	English	Single	Service consultant	1½ (soccer)

Table 1. Contd.

Organisation 5								
27	White	Female	28	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Client care	1 (soccer)
28	White	Male	32	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Actuary	2 (soccer)
29	Black	Male	27	Christian	Sepedi	Single	IT developer	4 (soccer)
30	Coloured	Male	26	Christian	English	Single	Service consultant	5 (soccer)
31	White	Female	32	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Call centre agent	7 (soccer)
32	Black	Female	36	None	Xhosa	Married	Head business intelligence	3 (soccer)
Organisation 6								
33	Indian	Male	33	Christian	English	Married	Relationship manager	6 (volleyball)
34	Indian	Male	34	Hindu	English	Married	Marketing assistant	8 (volleyball)
35	White	Female	28	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Service consultant	1 (volleyball)
36	Indian	Male	36	Hindu	English	Single	Fund consultant	5 (volleyball)
37	Indian	Male	43	Christian	English	Married	Financial controller	3 (volleyball)
38	White	Female	37	Christian	Afrikaans	Divorced	Service consultant	1 (volleyball)
39	Indian	Male	28	Tamil	English	Married	Database analyst	1 (volleyball)
40	White	Female	42	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Personal assistant	8 (volleyball)
Organisation 7								
41	Indian	Male	27	Hindu	English	Single	Actuary	1 (cricket)
42	White	Male	31	Christian	English	Married	Underwriting consultant	1 (cricket)
43	Coloured	Male	26	Hyron	English	Single	IT developer	3 (cricket)
44	White	Male	39	Catholic	English	Married	Sales	4 (cricket)
45	Indian	Male	28	Tamil	English	Single	Finance	3 (cricket)
46	White	Male	31	Christian	Afrikaans	Married	Claims	9 (cricket)
47	Black	Male	29	Christian	English	Married	Claims	3 (cricket)
Organisation 8								
48	White	Male	27	Catholic	English	Engaged	Team leader	4 (cricket)
49	Indian	Male	23	Hindu	English	Single	Credit controller	1 (cricket)
50	Black	Male	20	None	English	Single	Credit controller	1 (cricket)
51	White	Male	35	Evolutionist	English	Single	Consultant	2 (cricket)
52	White	Male	29	Baptist	English	Engaged	Service specialist	1 (cricket)
53	White	Male	25	Christian	Afrikaans	Single	Client relationship manager	1 (cricket)
54	Indian	Male	29	Hindu	English	Married	Team leader	6 (cricket)
55	Indian	Male	25	Christian	English	Single	Consultant	1 (cricket)

Table 1. Contd.

Organisation 9								
56	Black	Male	37	Christian	Tswana	Married	Reinsurance clerk	14 (soccer)
57	Black	Male	24	Christian	Tswana	Single	Sales consultant	1 (soccer)
58	Black	Male	25	Christian	Zulu	Single	Claims specialist	1 (soccer)
59	White	Male	31	Catholic	English	Married	Assistant manager	10 (soccer)
60	White	Male	32	Catholic	English	Married	Systems analyst	12 (soccer)
61	Indian	Male	35	Muslim	English	Married	Motor liability	8 (soccer)
62	Black	Male	28	Christian	Zulu	Single	Sales consultant	5 (soccer)
63	Black	Male	20	Christian	Zulu	Single	Admin clerk	3 (soccer)

Biographical characteristics of sport coordinators							
Sport co-ordinator	Race	Age	Gender	Language	Religion	Marital status	Number of being a sport coordinator in the organisation
1	Black	27	Male	Sepedi	Christian	Single	3
2	Black	25	Male	Zulu	Christian	Single	3
3	White	42	Female	Afrikaans	Christian	Married	8
4	White	40	Male	Afrikaans	Christian	Divorced	4
5	Coloured	26	Male	English	Christian	Single	5
6	White	42	Female	Afrikaans	Christian	Single	8
7	Indian	33	Male	English	Christian	Married	6
8	Indian	28	Male	English	Hindu	Single	3
9	White	27	Male	English	Catholic	Single	3

simultaneously afforded the participants the opportunity to express themselves freely (Hein, 1980). The researcher used a reliable tape recorder in a quiet environment (Kvale, 1996). She also compiled field notes that contained facts about the interviews, the participants' impressions and feelings and the interview setting.

Data analysis

The qualitative data (focus group interviews) were analysed by making use of Tesch's content analysis method (Tesch, 1990). The data were coded and categorised, and themes were developed that featured the experiences and words of the participants to identify the indicators of an

organisational team sport intervention that contributes to the effective management of a diverse workforce.

RESULTS

From the information gathered (Table 2), it is clear that the participants felt that the company should actively support organisational team sport interventions through the involvement of all employees (2 participants), providing funding/ subsidies (13 participants), advertising the sport activities and making employees aware of the sport

activities (17 participants), supporting non-participants (7 participants), involving top management (2 participants), providing sport facilities for the participants (6 participants), accommodating the participants by giving them more time off (7 participants), not forcing sport activities on employees (2 participants) and supplying a sport club and clubhouse (3 participants). The participants felt that non-participating employees could also be involved in the sport activities by being spectators/supporters (9 participants) of the various sport activities.

Table 2. Questions and responses from participant's and co-ordinator's.

Question 1: Based on your experience, what actions can organisations take to encourage team sport in an organisation?	Code
Verbatim evidence	
Participant 6: Get everyone to participate by encouraging them and showing them how much fun sport can all be. Sport coordinator 9: Make sport compulsory because sport promotes good clean living.	Involvement of all employees
Participant 1: I have to say, our company does want to push the sport thing. They try to give us every opportunity they can. They pay for all our sports. They go out of their way to make sure that we have everything ... They make sure that we have the funds and the shirts.	
Participant 4: And, for instance, our soccer team and even our cricket team have a full kit. They have balls and gear everything which is paid for by the company.	
Participant 20: ... and the organisation also needs to fund the activities.	
Participant 30: ... and finance the sport events.	
Participant 29: When there are sport events, they pay for our gear. They sponsor us to play sport.	
Participant 34: We need money.	
Participant 44: The company must pay for the gear and games.	Funding
Participant 57: Our organisation sponsors us with t-shirts and they pay for our games.	
Sport coordinator 1: When an organisation markets the sport activities, they also need to put their money where their mouth is – fund the activities.	
Sport coordinator 2: Organisations need to fund the sport players ... Like our soccer team, every time we organise a game, we need to give them money, booking a game etc. And sometimes, it becomes very difficult for the participants to get the funds. Even for washing the kit.	
Sport coordinator 3: Organisations can back the sport from a financial point of view to enable the team sport to grow.	
Sport coordinator 4: The company must support them financially and with gear.	
Sport coordinator 6: Organisations can "back up" the sport from a financial point of view to enable the team sport to grow.	
Participant 1: Companies need to provide their people with the opportunities to do it. The company advertises sport vigorously.	
Participant 8: The organisation can help by organising sport activities. People don't necessarily come together and start to participate in sport all by themselves. The organisation must start with the initiation to make employees aware of the sport activities.	
Participant 17: I just think communication is also important, because when we don't know that our organisation is playing action cricket at that time, there will be no supporters.	
Participant 20: Marketing is very important in the organisation because then people will be interested.	
Participant 25: They can advertise it or maybe use it during induction. I started here last year July and during my induction the sport club was mentioned, so I made an effort to be part of the sport club.	Advertise/make employees aware
Participant 30: they must advertise ... the sport events.	
Participant 31: The company needs to advertise sport because in the soccer there are not enough women who want to play it, only men. The company advertised soccer three years ago.	
Participant 30: I remember, before I started participating in the sport event, our company had a presentation about the sport club. They had like a video of the sport club and that is how I got to know about it and got involved.	
Participant 35: ... they can even get a big tv screen at the entrance so that other employees get interested.	
Participant 39: You can advertise the sport activities on intcom.	

Table 2. Contd.

Participant 40: Not all the employees read their intcom; maybe the organisation can advertise the sport events through internal mail once a month to every employee.	
Participant 36: The organisation can also support the team events by publishing every accomplishment in the organisation's newsletter.	
Participant 46: The company must make the employees more aware of the sport events. If you consider most of the events, there are no build-up actions by the organisation. We receive a day before the sport event an e-mail, "come and support your team". But there are many employees here who have a family environment and they can't just arrange everything on number 99.	
Participant 58: And the other employees must be aware of the different sports teams.	
Sport coordinator 1: The organisation needs to market the sport activities in the organisation.	
Sport coordinator 7: It is important that the organisation advertise the events.	
Sport coordinator 5: The organisation must communicate and advertise the sporting events.	
Sport coordinator 6: The organisation can put an article of a sport participant's accomplishment in the organisation's newsletter.	
Participant 1: And we also need support. What our company does, they give us a credit card with a limit to places like this that has a bar and say the first 20 supporters that arrive get a free drink. People do arrive – it is a form of a bribery, but when they are there, they are there with us and have a good time. Even though they are not part of the team they are aware of it and they support us.	
Participant 19: The organisation also needs supporters. The company gives the people free drinks to encourage them to support us.	
Participant 54: ... and more involvement in terms of fan base.	
Participant 54: ... The colleagues must show their presence at the games.	
Participant 49: They can incentivise - for instance, they can give every supporter a free beer. There must be some bribery, then the colleagues will come and support us. On a cold day, like night no one will come to watch the game, but if there were incentives paid, there would have been supporters.	Support
Sport coordinator 4: Management must show their support by participation or just plain give their support. This will also encourage everybody to start engaging in the team sport either by participation or just support.	
Sport coordinator 5: The organisation can support the employees by giving rewards to excellent sport achievements.	
Sport coordinator 9: The organisation needs to support sport participation.	
Participant 54: I mean, if Jake White is not at a rugby game, what does it say about the team? So the team will not have a lot of respect for Jake White. It would inspire the team more if they see a physical presence in terms of management.	
Sport coordinator 1: People from the organisation always draw from what the management believes to be the cornerstone of the business and sport is as such to be the concept of team dynamics. It has to start with management who shows their appreciation towards sport as an activity that brings people together and sport is an activity that is important to the business and from there people want to be a part of that.	Top management involvement
Participant 7: They can provide better facilities. If you want to encourage it, you will need to have good facilities. We have a netball field and a volleyball court.	
Participant 23: If we had more facilities here at our company we would have had more support in a sense that if matches were advertised for instance, soccer would be played on that day - you just go to the facilities that are easily accessible for all employees.	
Participant 29: We need better facilities. We would like something at our company where we can play and practise sport. When other companies come to play us, we want to bring them to our domain and we want to be proud of our workplace.	Sport facilities
Participant 33: Facilities are also important because at the moment we need to go to Faerie Glen to play our volleyball games. We have facilities at our company grounds, but they need attention.	

Table 2. Contd.

Participant 42: It is also important for organisations to make the facilities on their grounds. There are some organisations that have a cricket court, netball court, volleyball court on their grounds. It is more convenient to participate in sport. There will also be more supporters.	
Participant 44: If you play during working hours and you have the facilities on your office grounds, it is easier to interact with other companies. The company can host an event with other companies.	
Participant 16: What we experienced last year with the inter-departmental challenge is that we had limited time to play in the sport and some of our departments are in a sense forced to work until 17h00 but we have to start earlier with a game to enable us to finish in time, so the organisation needs to be more lenient over that period to accommodate that, because it is a team built for the company.	
Participant 38: It is important that the head of a department give the employees time off to play their games. Even if top management approved the time off, the head of the department needs to be aware of it and also approve it.	
Participant 45: I think time off during the week. Have a sports day on a Friday or once every quarter on a Friday. Obviously not everyone will be playing sport but they can be supporters. Not everybody can leave the office at once, but the employees can rotate.	Accommodating/ time off
Participant 44: And time, because some people want to spend time over a weekend with their families and that is why they don't join the sports teams. They could maybe dedicate one day a month.	
Sport coordinator 4: Where company events are being held, to be more lenient to enable everybody to be able to participant for instance time off.	
Sport coordinator 5: Give time off for participants to play games.	
Sport coordinator 8: They should allow staff members time off to participate in sport activities.	
Participant 18: No, that is a free choice. If you are going to be forced to do something, the people will not be interested in sport.	Not force sport activities on employees
Participant 39: ... but these sport activities must not be forced on employees because then they will lose interest.	
Participant 30: They must create a sport club.	
Participant 24: To gain an income for the sport club, a clubhouse is a good idea.	Sport club and clubhouse
Participant 40: You can also build a clubhouse at the sport facilities, but the employees need to be responsible.	
Question 2: And if there are colleagues who cannot play sport?	
Verbatim evidence	Code
Participant 6: He can always be a supporter or for instance during a game, he can be the one to bring water or oranges during half time.	
Participant 18: They can come and give their support.	
Participant 23: They can support the teams.	
Participant 34: Yes, other employees who do not play sport can become spectators.	
Participant 36: And they can support the other teams.	
Participant 39: They can be the supporters. The participants play harder when there are supporters shouting for you next to the court.	Supporters/spectators
Participant 47: I think you need to try to give them something that will motivate them to join the sports teams; for instance, they can come and give support. They can also join in the fun.	
Participant 50: It is not that they have to come and play, they only need to come and support.	
Participant 57: They can become spectators.	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Some research has been done on the benefits of organisational team sport interventions for the organisation. Organisational team sport interventions can give an organisation a competitive advantage, but no study has been done on how organisations can encourage organisational team sport interventions. By observing employees participating in team sport, the Human Resource Management Department could get to know their employees better and use this information to improve relations between the various groups within the department, as well as to improve the performance of these employees and help them to plan their professional careers better.

The objective of the study reported on in this article was to explore employees' perceptions of actions that organisations can take to encourage team sport in an organisation. The participants were of the opinion that organisations could encourage organisational team sport interventions by involving all employees, providing funding/subsidies, advertising the sport activities and making employees aware of the sport activities, supporting non-participants, involving top management, providing sport facilities for the participants, accommodating the participants by giving them more time off, not forcing sport activities on employees and supplying a sport club and clubhouse.

An impartial benefit of the data-gathering process was that the sport participants and sport coordinators were interviewed in a boardroom at their workplace, where there were few disturbances. This allowed the participants and sport coordinators to feel in control of the situation and it enabled the researcher to observe them in their work environment. The participants and sport coordinators were extremely cooperative, friendly and willing to share information, and once they realised that the researcher was interested in what they had to say and that she was non-judgemental, they shared their experiences more openly. The researcher also did not allow any preconceived ideas to influence the findings and conclusions.

The limitations of this study are that the sports codes investigated in this study favoured mainly the younger employees and excluded employees older than 35 years of age. Moreover, since this study was conducted only among financial organisations in Gauteng, the findings cannot be generalised to other non-financial organisations. When transferability of the findings is considered, the context in which this study was conducted should be

taken into account. Another limitation is that sport could favour individualism.

The recommendations for possible future research are that this research be repeated to include a larger and more diversified sample of organisations nationally. It is also recommended that a comparative study, including international organisations, be conducted to investigate the influence of different weather conditions and other diversity constraints (e.g. different organisation cultures) in the working environment.

If organisations encourage organisational team sport interventions, they will derive benefits that should also improve the organisation's competitiveness.

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