

THE MANAGEMENT OF SPORTS INTERCULTURAL TEAMS

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Abstract

The sport world has been turned into an industry and businessmen are looking to get profit out of this business. Like every single business, sports organizations need to manage their human resources, but is sport human resources different from others fields of activity? In sport organizations the things are really different because a team full of stars cannot create a group and they cannot achieve the expected results. Nowadays, sports team management is more complicated because of the globalization. The mobility of the workforce made that intercultural contacts are more often than before and managers have to adapt to this interculturality in their teams. The concept of intercultural management is a hot issue in many countries all over the world. Many people do not give importance to this aspect, but intercultural education is more and more important. This paper emphasizes a case study aiming to illustrate the cross-cultural issues in the case of Sven-Göran Eriksson who is ranked as the second most successful coach in England but he failed spectacularly in Mexico. It is unlikely he had heard much about the Mexican league or the players before his assignment in Mexico, but Sven's failure could be blamed on a lack of intercultural awareness and a lack of adaptation on his side.

Keywords: sport management; intercultural sports team, managing cultural diversity;

1. INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the sport world become more and more an industry and the businessmen want to get profit out of this business. Like every single business, sports organizations need to manage their human resources, but is sport human resources different from others fields of activity? The problem is that, for example in manufacture, if you have an input, 95% you can expect the output, but in sport organizations the things are really different. Why? Because, for example a team full of stars cannot form a group and they cannot achieve the expected results. So, managers need to develop their skills and to update their knowledge in order to be efficient in their, to have the best results with the minimum consumption of resources. So, they have to study and understand their human resources and to motivate and reward them in order to obtain profit. Many people do not realise, but the sportsmen are employees, too.

I have been involved in sport for more than fourteen years. I'm fascinated about this phenomenon and for me this is a style of living. Because I have been involved in sport for so many years, I see things differently from the people who are not involved in the phenomenon. I have remarked for many years that more and more sport clubs take profit and more and more managers see sport like a business. But what is behind this business? Behind the business are also humans who need to be managed and motivated and it is only those who know to do it well that can take benefit from that.

Even many people do not think about it, the sportsmen are not machines, they are human beings and there are many factors which could influence their activity, their performance. The true sport world cannot be compare with the video games world. The real world is much more than that.

In present-day sport (football, soccer, baseball etc) we talk too much about tactics, strategies and contracts, but we are not talking too much about how the people directly involved in sport are feeling (players and coaches). They are also human beings, they are not robots, they also have feelings, emotions, frustration, anguishes, they have their pride and their prejudices. Sport is a sum of factors which do not reduce just to the wages and good managers have to understand that. In a

professional sport team, a good manager makes every single player to feel important in the team. Probably, this problem is sometimes more important than tactics.

By knowing you employees, cause in professional sports team the athletes are employees, the manager is closer to understand them and help them to give their best and be efficient for the organization, for the team.

2. CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN SPORT MANAGEMENT

Nowadays, sports team management is more complicated because of the globalization. Nowadays, people can travel easily from one corner to another of the world and they can easily find a job in one other corner of the world. This mobility of the workforce has made intercultural contacts to be more often than before, and by way of consequence, managers have to adapt to this interculturality in their teams. Because sport organizations are not immune to the influence of the environmental changes, an increasing diversity can be expected among volunteers and professionals, athletes, coaches, officials, staff and administrators. Probably, this interculturality is the easiest to see in team sports, where players and coaches from all over the world are supposed to work together and have fast positive results [1].

The cultural diversity reflects the unique sets of values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations, as well as the language, symbols, customs and behaviour that individuals possess by virtue of sharing some common characteristics with others [2]. Sport managers should adapt to these opportunities and challenges of managing the diverse workforce, particularly the cultural diversity. Nowadays, no matter the field of activity, the economy and the society put pressure on organizations, demanding them to be more efficient. It means that members are expected to do more with less and effectively managing sport organizations is critical, Sport organizations need new and diverse perspectives, ideas for and approaches to success.

The cultural diversity within an organization is the sum of every single culture, of every individual member. Cultural diversity means to share some personal characteristics with others. Each cultural group is defined by a unique set of values, beliefs, attitudes, language, symbols and behaviours. Individuals have a unique personal culture and they could identify themselves with many numbers of cultural groups [3]. A person could identify with more that one cultural group, based of different personal characteristics. For example, a person can be at the same time Romanian, male, Catholic and teacher. One other person can describe herself as woman, European, a mother and a volunteer. Even though, individuals can identify themselves with many cultures, they have the tendency to identify more strongly with the culture associated with characteristics that cannot be changed, such as age, gender, race and ethnic heritage [4].

Research has shown that, in comparison with homogenous groups, racially and ethnically diverse groups make more cooperative choices [5], are more creative and produce higher quality ideas when faced with brainstorming task. Moreover, although racially and ethnically diverse groups were less effective than homogeneous groups at the outset of a complex problem-solving task, they eventually interacted as effectively and performed better with regard to the range of generated perspectives and alternatives.

3. MANAGING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Cultural diversity can provide some constructive conflict if *“it improves the quality of decisions, stimulates creativity and innovation and encourages interest and curiosity among members”* [6]. Indeed, as work groups become more tolerant of different points of view, their organizations become more open to new ideas in general and generate more and better ideas”.

Research has also shown that individuals in the racial and ethnic minority experience more stress in the organization [7,8], are less satisfied with their careers than their nonminority counterparts. There is an implication that individuals who differ from the cultural majority are at a disadvantage in an organization that suppresses diversity and encourages similarity. These individuals can feel discriminated against when their unique cultural symbols are not tolerated. Indeed, research has shown

that supervisors tend to less positively perceive and evaluate subordinates who are different from themselves [9].

In intercultural teams the results appear when the group has enough time to surpass the differences and to improve the communication. Nowadays, to manage the cultural diversity is a function of the culture of the organization. In brief, organizational culture can be defined as an underlying system of shared values, beliefs and assumptions about how things are done in the organizations. In organizations where the diversity is effectively managed, cultural diversity tends to be valued and supported in the organization, but in organizations with a culture of similarity, the cultural diversity tends to be suppressed.

A culture of similarity thinks that "our way is the best way" or "our way is the only way". Rigidity, risk avoidance, intolerance of ambiguity, conflict avoidance, task orientation and orientation to the present describe this type of organizational culture, which assumes that "difference is deficit" [10]. An organizational culture of diversity might be born out of a social responsibility to treat all organizational members fairly. This culture is characterized by an underlying respect for differences, as well as flexibility, innovation, risk acceptance, tolerance of ambiguity, conflict acceptance, people orientation, and orientation toward the future. This culture perceives differences to be a source of strength and assumes that there is an arrangement of right or good behaviour. The values and assumptions of an organizational culture of diversity manifest themselves in an open, two-way and inclusive communication; the performance appraisal based on outcomes or substance rather than style and a flexible reward and promotion system providing equitable opportunities and career development. There is a multilevel decision making, with the power distributed throughout the organization, among diverse members and group dynamics are characterized by open membership, mutual respect and shared influence. An organizational culture of diversity capitalizes the values and attitudes that influence individual behaviour. In these organizations the differences are capitalized on the benefit of the individual, the group and the organization [11].

The cultural diversity could have a constructive or destructive effect in the organization. Several authors found that this aspect depends on the organizational task [12]. When culturally diverse individuals perform independent organizational tasks, the positive or negative implications arising from an organizational culture that values diversity or similarity, respectively, will be minimized. The potential for benefits of a culturally diverse workforce is also reduced in this task situation. Simple tasks are more susceptible to standardization or routinization than complex tasks and the discretion allowed in decision making and the need for value of ideas is considerably reduced. When members are required to perform simple or standardized tasks, such as the event registration, the potential positive outcomes of an organizational culture valuing diversity is diminished. On the other hand, the complex organizational tasks could bring benefits like diverse perceptions of ideas [1].

The concept of interculturality is a big issue in many countries all over the world. Many people do not give importance to this aspect. Oscar Washington Tabares, the coach of the Uruguay national football team underlined the importance of education in the intercultural field: *"It doesn't help if our national football team wins the World Cup, if our teenagers don't know where France is on the map or they don't understand why France football national team has so many players with African origins."*

4. MULTICULTURALISM IS AN ISSUE: THE SVEN GORAN ERIKSSON EXPERIENCE IN MEXICO

An employee who is assigned to a foreign country without any sort of previous experience of the cultural customs, traditions or language can hardly be expected to thrive, regardless of his subject expertise or football abilities. A good example to illustrate this point is the one around a familiar face to England fans: Sven-Göran Eriksson. He is ranked as the second most successful coach after Alf Ramsey, who led England to their only World Cup trophy in 1966. With such an impressive CV, it was thought that Sven's experience in European football could be a breath of fresh air and would help change the Mexican mentality, leading the team to a higher level. However, Sven's stint as Mexico's manager failed spectacularly.

How is it possible for such an experienced football manager to fail in the seemingly easier level of Central American Football, having previously succeeded in the highly competitive European

leagues? There are surely several answers to that question, but there is one that focuses on the fact that Sven's success in Europe was just not transferrable to a different cultural setting like Central America.

So Sven-Göran Eriksson's failure can be seen as his lack of expertise in Mexican football, the wider culture and the football tradition. It is unlikely that he had heard much about the Mexican league or the players before his assignment in Mexico. So Sven's failure could be blamed on a lack of intercultural awareness and a lack of adaptation on his side. It could also be blamed on the assumption of the Mexican Federation that his expertise could be used in any context, despite the cultural differences.

In short, an organizational culture comprises the shared values, beliefs and assumptions that influence the attitudes, habits, customs and behaviour of an organization's members.

But what does culture mean? Culture operates as the underlying force preserving old ways of doing things. Culture is like the elephant in the room. Everyone knows it is there, everyone knows it is shaping the agenda, but no one wants to talk about it, much less try to change it. Sport organizations with great cultures find ways of winning because success lies at the heart of their identities. Organizational culture provides an understanding of how and why an organization does things, the way the people within the organization behave and the perceptions held sovereign by stakeholders. All sports organizations possess cultures, but some are stronger than others and these cultures can exert a powerful influence on individual behaviour and organizational outcomes [13].

"Culture shapes the cognitive schemas which ascribe meaning and values to motivational variables and guides our choices, commitments and standards of behaviour" [14].

Sports organizations are increasingly compelled to join the commercial world and are under great pressure to adopt the operational and structural characteristics of business enterprises. The commercial and competitive pressure placed upon sport organizations has encouraged sports managers to embrace business tools and concepts like organizational culture.

Sport club cultures possess numerous cultural themes and can be perceived easily at several levels or as several sub-cultures. For example, as an organizational administrative unit comparable to other business organizations, as a supporter organization, whose aims, objectives and traditions may be different (such as winning matches in preference to making financial profit) and as a player unit, where motivation may vary from glory to money. While a player may perform for a club because of loyalty or remuneration, supporters are usually passionately attached to a club's colours and traditions, expecting only on-field success in return. Nowadays, many sports managers are held accountable to business returns by shareholders, owners and [13].

5. CONCLUSIONS

Economic, legislative and social pressures are contributing to increased diversity in the general workforce and, it is clear that changes can be expected in sport organizations, as well. The potential impact of cultural diversity highlights the importance of its effective management, as both social responsibility and a contributing force to organizational performance. Effective managing cultural diversity in sport organizations is critical to success, because they must manage their human resources. The benefits of cultural diversity can be realized when the culture of the organization values diversity, whereas the negative aspects are realized when the culture of the organization values similarity. Moreover, the positive and the negative impacts of cultural diversity are heightened or diminished, depending on the nature of the task. The profile of cultural diversity might vary by sport or type of organization.

Finally, interculturality is a current issue but how far will the intercultural contacts reach? Will managers adjust to these issues?

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