

IKGYM[®]: A FUNCTIONAL QUALITY SYSTEM AS MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR VOLUNTARY BOARD MEMBERS

Jo Van Hoecke and Paul De Knop, Free University of Brussels & **Robbie De Sutter**, University of Ghent, Belgium

Context

As a consequence of some post-materialist developments, many of the traditional mutual support organisations, like most sports clubs, have lost their fit with the (direct) environment, and are coping with substantial challenges such as, among others, financial and infrastructural problems, dropout, shortage of board members and other volunteers. Beside this, there is also an obvious request for a more contemporary management approach coming from supporting and controlling stakeholders like private sponsors and subsidising bodies. To come to terms with this (strategic) problem, traditional sport clubs have to reflect on their future position in the sports market, and how they can close the growing gap between these (changed) internal and external contexts. Since the sector has evolved into a differentiated buyers' market, with service and quality as the most critical success factors, the claim for professionalization has increased considerably. Therefore, the systematic introduction of quality management can be pushed forward as a potential solution for adding value to the competitive strategy of these voluntary sport organisations. Starting with a structured and objective evaluation of the sports context and the management procedures, the volunteers involved in these processes can be well supported with relevant and professional advice.

Project

This project has arisen from a basic idea of the Flemish Gymnastics Federation to produce a catalogue, a *Guide Michelin* of gymnastics clubs, with some general information about them and the activities they organise on the one hand, and a listing of the (service) quality they provide on the other. Recently, the focus of the project has changed a little and has been primarily on supporting the (volunteer) board members with managing their club. Actually, the core of this project is a (multi)functional quality management system with several on-line applications.

The underlying TQM model includes appropriate targets of quality (dimensions) regarding the specific management and sport service systems of a traditionally organised gymnastics club. Targets for assessment were among others: management related factors like strategic planning, organisational structure and culture, internal and external communication, human resources management. On an operational level, four dimensions were used for assessing the different sport service systems: coaching, group composition and training opportunities, the sportscape and some key performance indicators. The software of this quality system was developed as a function of a programmed drive of standards and measures based on some structural variables.

At the macro level, besides the function objective evaluation and certification of well-functioning clubs (licensing and labelling), this quality system can help the (marketing) decision makers of the co-ordinating federations to (re)direct their strategy towards effective and efficient support of their affiliated clubs. For example, based on a global report of IKGym, the Flemish Gymnastics Federation has installed a system of regional training centres to solve the problem of lack of training opportunities in the clubs for talented gymnasts. Recently, it has also developed a functional guide for (voluntary) club leaders to setting up the process of strategic management in their clubs.

At meso level, this management tool can be downloaded by the clubs in order to conduct a self-diagnosis to optimise their management systems (= a function of assessment and benchmarking). The aim is to provide these clubs and their (voluntary) managers with relevant information about their strengths and weaknesses, as well as to suggest some concrete opportunities for improvement. In this context, it can be stated that, in spite of the recent 'management explosion,' in the non-profit sector, little suitable material is currently available to help these particular organisations with their specific management. Board members as well as other co-ordinating persons can use the IKGym model as a frame of reference to optimise their internal systems with regard to well-functioning processes and attractive customer outcomes. To optimize this support function, pop-ups have been included with practical information about the different standards. By increasing the effectiveness and efficiency

of the various (organizational) processes, a higher level of satisfaction is pursued which encourages stronger loyalty and involvement of all members.

Finally, at the micro level, an on-line catalogue (www.ikgym.be) is providing (would-be) members with relevant information (objective cues) to find the most appropriate service (provider) in their region (= the function of a registration and information system). This information is based on data collected by independent auditors during meetings with different stakeholders of the club.

Results

In the last few years (2000-2004), 132 clubs (one-third of the total) have been evaluated by an independent auditor. The overall result of the management audit is presented in Figure 1. With an average of 62,8%, in general, the management system of an average gym club can be considered adequate. On the other hand, strategic decision-making (STRA) and organisational structure (STRU) are the main frequent weaknesses.

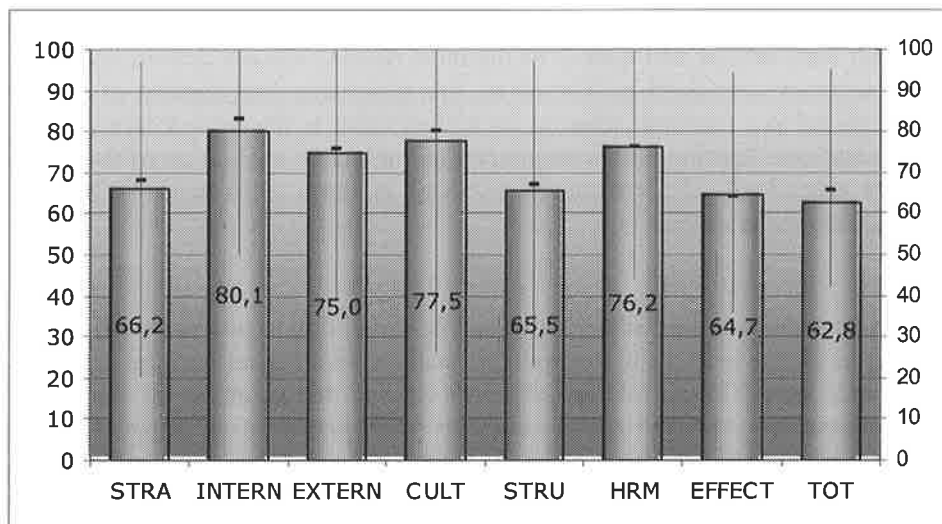


Figure 1: Descriptors for the subscales of the IKGym[®] management audit (N=132)

With a discriminatory norm of 50%, at present 78% of the visited clubs were awarded the IKGym[®] label. This is a satisfactory result, and will probably stimulate the (other) clubs to invest (more) in quality. One-way ANOVA showed significant differences in scores ($p < .05$) between certified and other clubs for all 7 subscales.

Finally, we could detect that at the operational level, 953 of the 1081 (88.2%) sport service systems met the minimal requirements, which can be seen as a hopeful result. At the other hand, most failure points were observed for the critical, success-determining factor 'coaching'. In most cases this was caused by a lack of verifiable expertise, an insufficiency of qualifications in particular. Furthermore, problems with regard to training facilities and training encounters for top-level gymnasts are due to be removed with the organisation of centralised high performance sport centres of the Federation.

Discussion

IKGym can be considered as a consistent multidimensional scale for objective certification of gymnastics clubs. Beside this, this instrument has also an important practical value and the on-going implementation (over 8 years) created some desired effects. Due to this project and the corresponding policy of the federations, the number of candidates on coaching courses has increased significantly. Many clubs have arranged their administration and processes in a more efficient way. Some have joined forces to require (better) facilities from the local authorities. An analogous project recently conducted in the Netherlands confirms the applicability of this frame of reference in other comparable contexts. Both projects are being evaluated by different evaluators (federations, auditors and clubs).

Contact: jvhoecke@vub.ac.be