

# THE MANAGEMENT OF VOLUNTARY SPORTS CLUBS AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON SPORT PARTICIPATION

Claire Bruce, Northumbria University, Newcastle, UK

## Context

Two significant challenges faced by sport providers today centre around how to introduce people to sport and encourage participation whilst simultaneously adding value to the experience in order to retain people's interest and participation (Frederick-Recascino, & Schuster-Smith, 2003; Wilson, & Rodgers, & Carpenter, & Hall, & Hardy, & Fraser, 2004). These questions are pertinent when considering current government sports policy within the United Kingdom, presenting a sound case for further examining the links between sports clubs, national sports priorities and the broader role good quality management can play in relation to increasing participation in sport (Chen, 2004).

Traditional definitions (Chelladurai, 1999; Bratton & Gold, 2003) of recruitment fail in their attempt to explain the clear differences that exist between recruiting prospective employees and recruiting members to a club. Quite possibly, member recruitment leans more towards marketing promotional concepts and theories rather than human resource management. It is these management concepts and functions, their usage within voluntary sports clubs (Nichols, G. & Gratton, C. & Shibli, S. & Taylor, P. 1998) and importantly their relevance to increasing participation within sport that will be explored within this research.

This study will take place during September 2005, with initial research focusing on establishing a detailed profile of current club members, in parallel with analysis of their motivations for participating in the sport of running and the benefits gained from doing so. By compiling this quantitative data a clear picture of who runs for the clubs, why they do and the areas of potential development that exist for the clubs with regards to increasing and sustaining participation can be established.

In addition, the club organisers will also contribute to the research by providing qualitative input on current club recruitment and retention challenges, views on member's motivation to participate, the benefits gained and finally information on the organisational processes utilised in managing the club.

## Results/Discussion Implications

It would be naïve to suggest that this piece of research will provide generic solutions to these challenges that exist within the sports industry as a whole. It is focused on a specific sport within defined clubs, with the ultimate aim of adding another perspective to existing research into current motivational drivers amongst active sports people. With the additional aim of examining the correlations that exist between motivation to participate and specific recruitment and retention challenges voluntary sports clubs face.

From the outset it is hypothesised that club loyalty will be highlighted as a generic reason for long term participation and commitment within these clubs and the sport of running. It is also expected significant differences in motivational reasons for participating and benefits gained will exist between age groups, gender, and levels of running (O'Brien-Cousins, 2003; Hammermeister, & Burton, 2004). Through creating this complex picture of differing consumers and the demands they place on sports clubs, this research should ultimately highlight the significant challenges that exist in relation to increasing participation within the club environment and the broader implications this has on UK sport policy (Garrett, 2004). Through this, recognition of the essential need for a diverse range of good quality management skills within the voluntary sport club environment should be evident.

## References

- Bratton, J. & Gold, J. (2003) *Human Resource Management – Theory and Practice* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- Chelladurai, P. (1999) *Human Resource Management in Sport and Recreation* Champaign, ILL: Human Kinetics
- Chen, L. (2004) Membership Incentives: Factors affecting individuals' decisions about participation in athletics-related professional associations *Journal of Sport Management* 18 111-31
- Frederick-Recascino, CM. & Schuster-Smith, H. (2003) Competition and intrinsic motivation in physical activity: a comparison of two groups *Journal of Sport Behaviour* 26 240-55
- Garrett, R. (2004) The response of voluntary sports clubs to Sport England's lottery funding: cases of compliance, change, and resistance *Managing Leisure* 9, 13-29
- Hammermeister, J. & Burton, D. (2004) Gender differences in coping with endurance sport stress: are men from Mars and women from Venus? *Journal of Sport Behaviour* 27, 148-165
- Nichols, G. & Gratton, C. & Shibli, S. & Taylor, P. (1998) Local Authority support to volunteers in sports clubs *Managing Leisure* 3, 119-27
- O'Brien-Cousins, (2003) Grounding theory in self-referent thinking: conceptualizing motivation for older adult physical activity *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 4, 81-100
- Wilson, PM. et al (2004) *The relationship between commitment and exercise behaviour* *Psychology of Sport and Exercise* 5 405-21