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Intercultural communication in sport management: The role of sport manager

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Background:

According to Sigband and Bell (1994), there has never been a more acute need for effective intercultural communication on a global level than at present (Samovar, L. et al., 2000). This is due not only to the cultural diversity characterizing the population of the majority of advanced countries but also to the working requirements imposed by globalization on business world (Rumsey, 2007). In the era of internationalization, the need for intercultural knowledge and communication for an effective organizational performance is deemed necessary.

The profession of the sport manager is not excluded from this assumption. For the sport manager to be successful, he/she has to develop intercultural communication skills in order not only to be able to reach different audiences on an international level but also to effectively manage his/her own personnel and complete his/her professional tasks.

The aim of the present paper is to investigate the significance of intercultural communication in contemporary sport management. Based on bibliographical research and practical evidence, the paper aims at contributing to the best possible practice of the profession of the sport manager in an international working environment. To this end, the paper focuses on the importance of intercultural communication to contemporary sport business world and the associated tasks of the sport manager.

Purpose: As a consequence of globalization, today there is a strong need for accurate and effective communication between people. Organizational success depends not only on the communication between employees but also on the way that managerial decisions are applied. Furthermore, cultural differences between people working in the same environment have to be respected and reduced in order to avoid conflicts (Bodea & Mustata, 2007).

Sport communication is a process by which people in sport, in a sport setting, or through a sport endeavor share symbols as they create meaning through interaction (Pedersen et al., 2007). The goal of the present research is to identify the factors that determine effective intercultural communication in a sport environment, and study their importance to the practice of the profession of sport manager. It also intends to demonstrate how sport managers may promote and sustain cultural and communication awareness in case of sport organization.

Methodology: The present study is a qualitative one which requires the use of bibliographical research, internet resources and conduct of interviews. Through this theoretical research and practical evidence, the study aims at contributing to the best possible practice of the profession of sport manager in an international environment, as the issue of the present research has acquired limited academic attention until now.

The main parameters of this research are: a) the importance of intercultural communication to the profession of sport manager b) components of intercultural communication that most affect the profession of sport manager and c) proposals for the sport manager to best achieve his/her task. Conducted personal interviews involved five sport officials who currently work or have worked in a sport multicultural environment. Emphasis was given on the nature of issues that, to their experience, arise as a consequence of intercultural differences, and the management of these issues. Interviews also focused on factors that determine the ability of sport officials (i.e. values, previous experience) to accurately identify and manage cultural differences in a sport working environment.

Findings: Diversity offers solutions but also creates problems. Research has shown that, in a sport working environment, many of these problems are related to difficulties arising from communication and problem resolution between people with different national and cultural background and consequently, different values, beliefs, work styles, work perspectives and communication styles (Rokeach, 1968). The sport manager has to encounter these problems in order to successfully perform his/her role. Interviews have revealed that, a successful completion of the sport manager tasks depends on the manager's ability to understand cultural differences, efficiently communicate despite these differences and resolve conflicts between those who have different cultural perspectives, even with himself/herself. To this end, sport managers need to be educated and trained on intercultural communication topics such as language, religion, habits, nutrition habits, symbols, rules, attitudes, and values. This kind of education and training will help sport managers predict and avoid mistakes related to the lack of intercultural communication, and use cultural diversity in their organization on the behalf of the organization. It will also offer them a significant working tool for the best practice of their profession.

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