

THE CONCEPT OF DISABILITY IN ISLAM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO UNDERSTANDING CHANGE IN SPORT ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Organisational change is a process of changing various aspects of an organisation for the purpose of improving its culture, operations, technology, or management. This study examines the interpretation of the concept of disability in Islam and its relevance for understanding organisational change in the Disability Sport Federation in the UAE. The study addresses an orthodoxy in organisational studies: hostile environments usually hamper organisational change. However, in the UAE, religion, which informs people's viewpoints and conduct, has been very supportive of sport provision for people with disability. But concerted organisational efforts in this direction only began in mid 1990s and so far have failed to deliver any significant improvements.

The study employs the contextualist approach to organisational change (Pettigrew, 1987), which considers content, context and process as the three key interrelated dimensions of change. The role of context, and culture and religion in particular, in analysing organisational change, has largely been neglected by sport management scholars. The inner context relates to the internal settings of an organisation undergoing change. The outer context refers to the external settings of an organisation and includes its economic, political, religious and social environments. The study also sheds light on the way in which Islam recommends dealing with people with disability in society. The methods of investigation include literature review and document analysis to unpack the interpretations of disability in Islam and their implications for sport organisations working in this field.

A content analysis of the Quran was undertaken to determine the role of society (i.e., sport providers) and the policies of the UAE Disability Sport Federation in order to

understand how those teachings have informed current policies in terms of priorities and methods of delivery.

Public attitudes and practices related to people with disabilities in the UAE have been mainly informed by the teachings of Islam, which is the main religion followed in the country. Islam recommends that society should look after people with disability and provide them with opportunities for health, education, social care, employment, and sport in order to help them integrate in society. According to Islamic interpretations of disability, the main responsibility lies with society to not only have positive attitudes toward the people with disability, but also to encourage them improve their social conditions (Ahmed, 2007, Al-Qur'an Al-Karim, 2009). Islam recommends that people's physical condition can be made better by sports and recreation. Islam also encourages practicing sports and recreational activities in order to improve and support the condition of the people with disability (Al-ghazali, 1994)

The Islamic view of disability could be seen as a predecessor of the social model of disability, which has been gaining recognition in the West in the past 40 years. The social model of disability does not locate disability in an impaired or malfunctioning body. Instead, it views disability, not as a result of individual impairment, but as a result of social obstacles (Shakespeare, 2006). Religion also shapes the focus of organizational efforts, but despite the social solution to the problem of disability promoted by the teaching of Islam, very little has been done by the DSF. There are only five clubs in the UAE located in three main cities and the rest of the country does not have adequate sport provision and a club network.

From an Islamic point of view the creation, in 1996, by the UAE government of the Disability Sport Federation (DSF), as the only organisation responsible for promoting disability sports in the country, does not represent a radical change in religious and cultural environments. However, it does constitute a major shift in policy and the delivery of sport services to people with disabilities. Moreover, the prevalence of religion over the personal and legal realms creates favourable conditions for a truly strategic organisational behaviour as it eliminates cultural and social uncertainty as determining factors in managing change. Religion also provides the main language of change, which becomes a valuable instrument for managing organisational change.

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