

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN SPORT ORGANISATIONS – AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF NON-MONETARY INCENTIVES FOR MOTIVATION IN PROFESSIONAL TEAM SPORTS

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Aim of paper – research question

The field of incentive systems plays a central role in organisational literature. Influencing the motivation of the workforce is one of the main challenges for managers and can be seen as a “hallmark of competitive advantage” (Steer et al. 2004, p. 383). In professional sports, a marginal increase in athletes’ performance can mean the difference between winning and losing and therefore substantially increase revenues. Particularly with regard to salary caps and scarcity of financial resources, the relevance of non-monetary incentives has increased. Since several factors of the organisational environment (e.g. working conditions) to some extent can be controlled by the management, knowledge about the influence of those non-monetary factors could be used to create a performance enhancing environment within sport organisations. While organisational research has widely discussed the effectiveness of monetary and non-monetary incentives on motivation and performance, sports management literature mainly focused on monetary incentives. Therefore the full potential of incentive systems in professional sports has not been explored so far. According to this, we raise the question: What are the main non-monetary organisational incentives for athletes’ motivation and consequently their performance in the context of professional team sports?

Literature review

First, we analysed human motivation literature in order to understand the process and determinants of human motivation as an antecedent of performance (e.g. Herzberg 1974). Although psychological motivation literature is fairly broad and offers various motivation theories, findings show that motivation is somehow determined by individual motives and situational drivers like incentives (e.g. Heckhausen & Heckhausen 2010). Based on those insights, we focused on studies dealing with non-monetary incentive systems in the workplace. While we identified several studies, which show the influence of incentives (e.g. job design, recognition, working conditions, etc.) on motivation (e.g. Applebaum & Kamal 2000), we also found a high dependency of the effectiveness of different incentives on context (e.g. Fisher & Yuan 1998). Therefore it seems likely that results of non-sport related industries cannot be transferred to the team sports context without further qualification or major adjustments. Bearing in mind the relevance of context, we started a further literature review on incentives in professional team sports. As sport management literature has mainly been focusing on financial incentives, there are only few studies dealing with non-monetary incentives. The studies found, mainly concentrated on inter-team incentives and incentives used by coaches. The field of organisational non-monetary incentives which are controllable by the club management has not been investigated so far. These findings support our approach to go one step further and analyse non-monetary organisational incentives in the context of professional team sports.

Methodology, research design and data analysis

We applied a qualitative exploratory approach in order to identify relevant organisational non-monetary incentives for the context of professional team sports. First, we designed an interview guide upon the findings from our literature review and several discussions with professional managers, coaches and players. Then we conducted 12 semi-structured interviews with professional athletes from six different German teams and four different team sports (Football, Basketball, Ice Hockey, Handball). For the data analysis we followed a 7-step approach for exploratory interviews, in order to generalize interview statements for further analysis. The content analysis was conducted by two independent researchers which should assure intercoder reliability.

Results, discussion and implications

According to the content analysis of the 12 interviews we extracted 892 coded paraphrases which could be summarized into 15 categories of incentives. While one category represented monetary parameters and was excluded from further evaluation, we were able to identify 9 categories which were comparable to those we found in organisational literature. Furthermore we identified 5 additional categories:

- Integration of family / partner
- (Players want their family/partners to be better integrated in the club environment)
- Support for career after sports
- (10 out of 12 interviewed players pointed out the relevance of education and development during their sports career)
- Feeling of being backed up by the club
- (As players are scrutinised and face intense media pressure, they want to be supported by their clubs)
- Support for organizing private life
- (In order to be able to focus on the sport, the athletes do not want to bother about some challenges of everyday life (e.g. insurances / accomodation))
- Physical environment (Quality of stadium, locker rooms, lounges or social rooms)

As those organizational factors seem to be important to professional athletes in team sports, the effectiveness of those factors to increase motivation needs to be analysed in more detail in future research.

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