The use of business tool “project management” in sport coaching

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THE USE OF BUSINESS TOOL “PROJECT MANAGEMENT” IN SPORT COACHING

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Introduction

Sport and coaching has offered valuable experience and procedures to the management field. Over the past years, a number of books have been written about coaching or leadership and other sport related issues, that business people can use in order to improve their work effectiveness. The author of this paper intends to offer something back to sport and coaching, through the presentation of a managerial tool known as “Project management”, which can assist coaches and other sport officials to improve their work effectiveness. A tool that has theoretical base and practical orientation, as well as it is needed but it’s not wide known at the coaching circles of all sports.

Literature review

“A project is a sequence of connected events that are conducted over a defined and limited period of time and are targeted towards generating a unique but well defined outcome.” (Baguley, 2003 p.9). It also have distinct characteristics such as: it has a specific unique goal which can consist of sub goals, it brinks change and some times “knock down the old” (Baguley, 2003 p.8), it has limited time span, it involves individuals from different professional fields, it requires a certain budget for its completion, it can be simple or complex. Therefore, in order to complete a project, a formation of a project team is important. Besides the above, every project has its stakeholders as well, those who have something to loose or gain from the outcome of it and should be taken into account.
As far as the content of a project is concerned, it goes through the stages of planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating. During the planning period it is important to set the Work Breakdown Schedule (WBS) (Gray & Larson 2000, Verzuh 1999), a detailed list of all activities needed in order to end successfully. The important element here is the sequence and time needed to complete each activity known as “critical path”, which determines the total project duration (Gray & Larson 2000, Verzuh 1999). At the organizing period, the project team is staffed, the budget is secured and all its elements are depicted visually in a Gantt-type chart (Figure 1). There, all activities have a sequence, interrelate and lead to the completion of the project according to the goal set. The implementation - evaluation periods consist of the leadership, communication and coordination of the project through the project team according the plan (Gantt-type chart). At the same time, deadlines and the critical path determine the evaluation process.

### Application

The “project management” procedure relates to Track and Field coaching, since athletes set goals that Coaches, acting as project managers, try to help them achieve. The coach is the one who will put together and lead the project team consisting of: a medical doctor, a biomechanist, a biochemist, a nutritionist, a psychologist, a physical fitness specialist, and a physical therapist. These professionals must plan and work together for the completion of the project, that it can be, for example, an Olympic medal or a world record. This project usually has four-to-eight year duration. It consists of smaller sub-projects (i.e., national championships, international meetings). The coach should even take into account during the planning process the stakeholders, which are: team and federation officials, sponsors, fans, athlete relatives, and athlete manager, since they play a significant role to the athletes’ careers (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project elements</th>
<th>Project team member</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athlete’s competition schedule</td>
<td>Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athlete’s sport technique</td>
<td>Coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athlete’s fitness</td>
<td>Fitness specialist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athlete’s medical wellbeing</td>
<td>Medical doctor</td>
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<td>Athlete’s nutrition</td>
<td>Nutritionist</td>
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<td>Athlete’s physical therapy</td>
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<td>Athlete’s psychological support</td>
<td>Psychologist</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athlete’s personal issues, social-professional circle</td>
<td>Stakeholders</td>
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</tbody>
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The heart of coaching project management, is the Work Breakdown Schedule that represents training elements in group form, such as: fitness development (i.e., speed, strength, flexibility endurance and lean-to-fat body ratio), technique improvement (i.e., scheduled biomechanical analysis), nutritional control (i.e., specific meals and dosage of vitamin/mineral supplements), psychological support (i.e., scheduled sessions of: self esteem, mental training, concentration development, personal problem dealing), medical
examinations (i.e., routine check ups), physical therapy (i.e., scheduled massage sessions for the prevention of muscle sores) and personal issues concerning the athlete (i.e., family vacations, days of rest, birth days, menstrual circle, public relations, sponsor activities). Certain of these elements in measured form, outline the “critical path”. It consists of indicators leading-up to a projected goal, such as tests of: performance, technique, as well as medical, fitness and psychological parameters. This entire endeavor can be in visual form, in order its interrelated parts to be in a timely order and its relation to each other clearly understood by all parties involved (Figure 1).

Figure 1. All project elements are depicted visually in a Gantt-type chart
Discussion - conclusion

The project management approach leads up to a very timely and orderly controlled mechanism, that will help the athlete achieve its goal and reach its full potential. It is widespread as a business tool, to the extent that it can be found in ready-made computer programs, that any coach could easily access and learn to use (Microsoft corporation, 1998). Project management is a tool that can help coaches of any caliber to organize their athletes’ training efficiently and effectively. All training parameters up to their details are taken into account, toward the completion of the project that it can range from an athletic meeting, to a season or a four-year pursue of an Olympic medal. Project Management is a practical tool, with a successful presence in the management of modern multi-task endeavors. Sport, nowadays, has become a multi billion business; therefore, its affairs should be approached as such. Business tools like project management can help Track and field coaches to approach their work, in an even more professional manner and, therefore, it is worth adopting.

References