

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN SOUTH AFRICAN SPORT FEDERATIONS

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ABSTRACT

South Africa's political transformation since 1994 compelled sport federations to develop and implement new strategies and structures to actively recognise, appreciate and manage the increasingly multicultural nature of post-apartheid sport. Diversity management consists of three integrated dimensions: affirmative action initiatives, economic empowerment and the existence of a supportive management philosophy to support diversity management. Although South African sport federations are required to meet minimum standards of diversity management, it appears as if they are unaware of the multi-faceted scope of diversity management and concentrate on the single dimension of affirmative action. This study investigates the perceptions of South African sport federations on diversity management by means of a 27 statement questionnaire on the key performance indicators of diversity management evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale. Results are analysed in terms of mean scores (\bar{x}) and frequencies (%) recorded for statements in the questionnaire. Overall results categorise South African sport federations in the neutral diversity management zone on the Diversity Management continuum of Bill (2002). The study concludes by proposing that in order to progress on the diversity management continuum South African sport federations should adopt and implement the strategies of organisational change to reflect the diversity of the South African population, institutionalise clear policy on diversity management, running appropriate, participative and inclusive management training programmes, as well as setting, actively pursuing and continuously monitoring diversity benchmarks.

Key words: Diversity management, South African sport federations.

INTRODUCTION

South Africa's political transformation since 1994 resulted in new political structures as well as changes in social institutions and economic frameworks. Corporate business environment was compelled to develop and implement new strategies and structures to facilitate the management of the South African diverse labour force (Smit & Cronje, 1997). Political transformation per se, does not guarantee social and economic transformation. Cavanaugh (2001) therefore emphasises the necessity of an equal social and economic society as basis for effective diversity management. South African sport, as acclaimed role player in the business environment, is by no means exempted from finding new strategies to actively recognise, appreciate and manage the increasingly multicultural nature of post-apartheid sport. De Beer and Radley (2000) maintain that unless South Africa recognises diverse values and manages the

role of diversity and change accordingly it will miss a major opportunity for the successful integration that is necessary for the country to progress. South African sports leaders should take cognizance of this claim and make conscious strategic adjustments to set free the full potential of its human sports capital. The Minister of Sport and Recreation stated in his inaugural budget speech to Parliament that sport is an important barometer of how a particular society is organised (Stofile, 2004). South African sport must thus be assisted to transform in the direction of an integrated South Africa sensitive to all dimensions of diversity. Sport is a powerful transformative force and has already contributed substantially to nation building and reconciliation (Singh, 2002). Transformation and diversity management will, however, never be fully realised without clear policy guidelines and baseline information on the perceptions of diversity management.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Diversity as concept has been extensively defined by researchers. Smit and Cronje (1997) argue that diversity implies cultural and individual inclusion and recognition to

enhance productivity of the workforce. Melymuka (2001) agrees and define diversity as an awareness and recognition that each individual is unique. Kirton and Greene (2000:4) present a corresponding definition: “..thinking on equality issues and shift toward conceptualizing workforce as composed of diverse special groups which share many employment experiences.” Moving from a mere definition of diversity to managing diversity, however, requires planned action and commitment. According to Prasad, Mills, Elmes and Prasad (1997:4), diversity management “refers to the systematic and planned commitment on the part of organizations to recruit and retain employees from diverse demographic backgrounds and also implies an active recognition and appreciation of the increasingly multicultural nature of contemporary organizations.” The rationale and value of diversity management to corporates (including sport organisations) are well debated in literature (Smit & Cronje, 1997; De Beer & Radley, 2000; Cavanaugh, 2001; Cornelius, 2001; Melymuka, 2001). Despite numerous definitions and approaches to diversity management scholars agree that

diversity management is a multi-dimensional concept. From a literature study three integrated dimensions of diversity management emerged: (1) affirmative action initiatives, (2) economic empowerment and (3) the creation of a management philosophy to support diversity management. Broodryk (2005) proposes that affirmative action is frequently confused with diversity management and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Affirmative action and diversity management, although related concepts, are separate points on the continuum of interventions available to the sport industry to facilitate transformation. *Affirmative action* is grounded in moral and social responsibility to amend wrongs done in the past and implies the active extension of participation opportunities to groups formerly under-utilised in or under-represented in a particular industry or institution (South African sport). *Diversity management* implies the creation of an intra-national environment within which divergent perspectives, approaches and sensitivities are incorporated and developed to capitalise on diversity in such a way that the full potential of

individuals (sportspersons) and institutions (sport federations) may be optimally realised. Diversity management in sport focuses on the business case for diversity and can be regarded as a strategic approach to sport that contributes to maximising performances, creativity and commitment of participants and management, while meeting the needs of diverse consumer groups. Affirmative action is only one mechanism towards changing the organisational culture of South African sport and provides essential input into a holistic diversity management strategy. The sub-elements of each of the three dimensions of diversity management are clarified in the methodology of this study.

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND AIMS

Although South African sport is required to meet minimum standards of diversity management, it seems that South African sport federations are unaware of the multi-dimensional scope of diversity management and tend to concentrate on isolated elements of affirmative action issues in team selection and governance structures (Welman, 2005).

In this regard Bill (2002) warns against a strategy limited to a single dimension of diversity and emphasised that effective diversity management reflects continuous monitoring of different sub-elements or key performance indicators on a continuum of diversity management before intervention strategies are recommended. The study therefore aimed at determining the perceptions of South African sport federations on the nature and necessity of all dimensions of diversity management.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research approach

As this study investigates the perceptions of diversity management, a qualitative research approach was followed as opinions, perceptions and practices of diversity management in the natural settings of the sport federations are evaluated. A quantitative approach is however also applied as the results recorded on the qualitative statements are presented in terms of mean scores and frequencies

Research instrument

A questionnaire consisting of four sections was used as research instrument. Twenty one (21) statements evaluated sport federations

on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = completely disagree, 5 = fully agree) on the three main dimensions of diversity management: (1) **affirmative action initiatives** (reflecting South African diversity in management structures, formal policy regarding affirmative action, provision of specialised training opportunities to diverse groups, quantifiable affirmative action targets, relation between diversity management and affirmative action); (2) **economic empowerment initiatives** (representation of stakeholders, service providers, and members from designated groups, tempo of economic empowerment of designated groups, implementation of equal opportunities policy), and (3) **supportive management philosophy** (women's position within the sport federation, equal representation of men and women in management of the sport federation, accommodation of ethnic and cultural differences).

Six open ended and closed questions on the (4) **demographic profile** and the overall perception and commitment to diversity management of the sport federations completed the 27 questions of the questionnaire.

The twenty one critical success indicators or sub-elements of the three primary dimensions of diversity management were identified from the literature study and were developed in conjunction with researchers at the Center for Diversity Management at the University of Pretoria. These are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3.

Research sample

Questionnaires were administered electronically to the universum of national sports federations (N=94) affiliated with the Sports Commission in 2004. One electronic follow-up was done and yielded a response rate of 39% (n=37).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Effective diversity management directly influences the success of organisations (Arredondo, 1996). Scholarly researches (Griggs & Louw, 1995; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 1997; De Beer & Radley, 2000; Cornelius, 2001) seem to agree that diversity management initiatives should be incorporated into approaches to management, organisational strategies and depend on employee involvement. These researchers, in addition, agree that diversity management initiatives should not be static but dynamic to progress along a diversity management

continuum. The starting point for facilitating diversity management action plans in any organization, including sport federations is, however, a diagnosis of the federation's current perceptions on all three dimensions of diversity management to establish a baseline for intervention strategies (De Beer & Radley, 2000).

Overall perceptions on and commitment to diversity management and demography of sport organizations

Results revealed a somewhat myopic view of South African sport federations regarding diversity. Diversity was primarily (80%) defined as meeting quotas in sport teams, a view that unequivocally disregards the complexity of the concept and undoubtedly influences resulting management strategies in this regard. Elements such as religious and sexual orientation, family status, gender, cultural diversity, health status, physical ability, age, ethnicity and diverse value systems were not recognised by 60% of the respondents from the analysis of definitions provided on diversity. Carnevale and Stone (1994), Thomas (1995) as well as Cavanaugh (2001) caution against

such a narrow definition of diversity, as it leads to one-dimensional management strategies. Demographic results obtained indicated that women represented only 35% of management in South African sports federations although they comprise 52% of the South African population (Business Women's Association, 2004), people with disabilities only 3% and people of color only 24%, signifying that the demography of the South African population is not adequately reflected in South African sport federations.

Affirmative action initiatives as dimension of diversity management

Table 1 reflects the scores recorded in the ten critical success factors or key performance areas of affirmative action as dimension of diversity management.

Results indicate a collective score of $\bar{x} = 3.22$ (maximum=5) obtained in this dimension suggesting a slightly above average (64%) compliance to the respective sub-elements. The above average score of $\bar{x} = 3.46$ recorded for perceived reflection of the South African diversity clearly contradicts the findings recorded in the overall perceptions of diversity management as discussed above. The existence of

formal policy regarding affirmative action ($\bar{x} = 3.75$) and provision of specialised training or mentoring programmes aimed at previously disadvantaged groups ($\bar{x} = 3.75$) recorded high scores and deserve further clarification. An analysis of the scope of such formal policies and the relevancy of training programmes provided by the sport federations, nevertheless, revealed a one-dimensional perception reiterated by sport federations' perception (80%) that the single dimension of affirmative action is synonymous to the collective concept of diversity management.

Explanatory notes provided by respondents further indicated that sport specific training initiatives for people of colour and open competitions are incorrectly perceived as the total spectrum of affirmative action training initiatives. Equating diversity management to mere affirmative action confirms sport federations' myopic perception of diversity management. In addition, South African sport federations perceive social reasons as the primary motivational factor ($\bar{x} = 3.05$) for implementing affirmative action initiatives in contrast

to research (De Beer & Radley, 2000; Solomon, 2002) postulating that managerial reasons should be the primary driving force. Only 49% of the respondents listed managerial reasons as the primary concern, a finding that questions the diversity managerial efficiency of sport federations as it suggests the lack of management strategy and commitment to diversity management. The eclectic and ignorant approach to diversity management is reiterated in the limited perception (44%) that sport federations have a legal obligation towards affirmative action. The latter finding seems to indicate that sport federations regard the implementation of affirmative action as an option rather than a legal requirement.

Economic empowerment as dimension of diversity management

Table 2 reflects the scores recorded in the six critical success factors in the economic empowerment dimension of diversity management.

An overall collective score (\bar{x} =3.95) recorded for the sub-elements in this dimension, suggests satisfactory levels of equal opportunity to all stakeholders, members and stakeholders in terms of economic

dealings (e.g. purchases, employment). A contributory factor to the relatively high overall score in these dimensions could be the majority of South Africa sport federations' financial dependency on both government subsidies and grants as well as private sector sponsorships and their subsequent compulsory compliance to regulations and requirements regarding Black Economic Empowerment, social responsibility and equal opportunities as a prerequisite for financial support from government. The results recorded on the key indicator of the development of designated groups to achieve top management positions (\bar{x} =3.90; 80%), however, become debatable when compared with results from a study on female (as minorities) accessibility to top management positions in sport federations (Kalaote, 2006).

Supportive management philosophy

Table 3 reflects the scores recorded for the key indicators in the supportive management philosophy dimension of diversity management.

Effective diversity management depends on supportive management philosophy relevant to the business

Table 1: Affirmative action as dimension of diversity management.

SOUTH AFRICAN SPORT FEDERATIONS.....	\bar{X} (1= low; 5=high)	%
...are reflecting the South African diversity	3.46	69.20
...have formal policies addressing the position of historically disadvantaged groups	2.75	55.00
...provide specialized training opportunities to diverse groups	2.75	55.00
...set quantifiable benchmarks for developing diverse groups	3.50	70.00
...regard implementation of affirmative action as a legal requirement	2.18	44.00
...regard implementation of affirmative action as a moral requirement	2.95	59.00
...regard implementation of affirmative action as a social requirement	3.05	61.00
...regard implementation of affirmative action as a political requirement	3.94	78.80
...regard implementation of affirmative action as a managerial requirement	2.43	48.60
...regard affirmative action as synonymous to diversity management	4.01	80.20
Collective overall \bar{X} for affirmative action as dimension of diversity management	3.22	64.40

Table 2: Economic empowerment as dimension of diversity management.

SOUTH AFRICAN SPORT FEDERATIONS.....	\bar{X} (1= low; 5=high)	%
...represent designated groups in economic dealings.	3.80	76.00
...utilize service providers from diverse groups.	3.60	72.00
...represent all members, clients, consumers and stakeholders	4.35	87.00
...demonstrate an accelerated tempo of empowerment regarding minorities and diverse groups	4.00	80.00
...strive to develop designated groups to achieve top management positions	3.90	78.00
...implement the policy of Equal Opportunity	4.05	81.00
Collective overall \bar{X} for economic empowerment as dimension of diversity management	3.95	79.00

Table 3: Supportive Management Philosophy as Dimension of Diversity Management

SOUTH AFRICAN SPORT FEDERATIONS.....	\bar{X} (1= low; 5=high)	%
...acknowledge and accommodate women as a minority group.	3.25	65.00
...represent women and men on an equal basis in top management positions	2.17	43.40
...represent women on an equal basis in middle management positions	3.32	66.40
...represent women on an equal basis in lower management positions	3.37	67.40
...reflect ethnic and cultural differences (Afro-centric values) in their management policies	2.01	40.20
Collective overall \bar{X} for supportive management philosophy as dimension of diversity management	3.67	73.40

and social context of the organisation (Mbigi & Maree, 1995; Arredondo, 1996; De Beer & Radley, 2000; Cornelius, 2001; Mayikana, 2002; Mello, 2002; Broodryk, 2005). South African sport forms part of the African corporate reality and as such should reflect African values to facilitate transformation. The collective score of $\bar{x}=3.67$ recorded for this dimension proposes the existence of a management philosophy supporting diversity management. Results however imply that although 40% of South African sport federations acknowledge that Afro-centric values (e.g. Ubuntu, group cohesion, consensus, participative decision making and socialising) should be accommodated, in reality South African sport federations (60%) lean towards a Eurocentric management style (e.g. free market system, individualism, capitalistic work ethics). Scores recorded on the key indicators of equitable representation of women and men on lower ($\bar{x}=3.37$; 67%), middle ($\bar{x}=3.31$; 66%) and top management ($\bar{x}=2.17$; 43%) positions, corroborate to some degree the findings of the study of Kalaote (2006) where results concluded that in terms of numbers, women are well

represented at the lower and middle levels of management in South African sport federations but not at top management level.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Measured against the benchmarks of the diversity management continuum of Bill (2002), it appears as if South African sport federations are primarily positioned in the neutral diversity zone. The benchmarks of this neutral position are stated as an awareness of affirmative action programmes, conflicting views on diversity policies, and management philosophies. Economic empowerment strategies exist but often do not receive adequate attention, limited to no support for and implementation of holistic diversity training programmes and supportive diversity management philosophies that are incongruent to the organisation's business environment. An important factor contributing to this neutral position on the diversity management continuum might be sport federations' one-dimensional perspective on and understanding of diversity management equating it to mere affirmative action initiatives.

This undoubtedly prevents sports federations from transferring the full benefits of diversity management to the South African sport management practice.

In order to progress on the diversity management continuum South African sport federations should adopt and implement the strategies of organisational change to reflect the diversity of the South African population, institutionalise clear policy on diversity management, run appropriate, participative and inclusive management training programmes, as well as set, actively pursue and continuously monitor diversity benchmarks. Transformation in South African sport needs to be managed to comply with best practices of diversity management. Focusing on affirmative action as a single dimension of diversity management is a short-term solution to the long-term challenge of diversity management.

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