Influential Factors in the Managerial Task of Setting Objectives for Rugby Team:
Important Aspects for the Rugby Manager in the Process of Plannifying the Road to Sporting Access

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Abstract
This paper tries to develop the sport management literature demonstrating why objectives are so important in the management of a rugby team, and by also presenting two of the factors which influence the choice of objectives for the team: the milieu and the available resources. The research insists upon the idea that a rugby team which targets sporting excellence has to follow a supreme objective – which may be seen as the mission of the team: obtaining sporting success. The rest of the objectives must be subordinated to the mission. The key person in setting the objectives is the rugby manager, who has to use the objectives as a managerial tool which to bring sporting success closer to the team. The paper insists upon the idea that, in an ideal case, objectives in a rugby team have to be set through a participative manner, with coach, players and members of the board, all together deciding what is the best for the team.

Keywords: *sport management, rugby management, objectives setting, participative management, sporting success, rugby*

JEL classification: M19, M50

Introduction

Although it has no fixed definition, management is generally presented as the process of fulfilling objectives with the help of the given ressources in the organization, especially the human ones (Burduş, 2005). Because a rugby team and the club it belongs to are also organizations, they need to be managed. As further in the article the both notions of rugby club and rugby team will be used, let us make the difference between the two, by mentioning that a club can have more teams, like for example a professional team, a reserves team, several youth teams and so on. The most important persons in a rugby team are the coach, his staff and the rugby players, while in a club, next to the mentioned persons, we can also find top managers, directors or accountants, whose duty is to assure the existence and the development of the club, among others by obtaining financial, material or human ressources.

Although intense scientific research has been done upon sports management in the last decades (Krüger , 1995; Parkhouse, 2001; Covell, Hess,

Siciliano & Walker, 2007), few books (Woodward, 2005) or research papers have presented the case of rugby management. Many papers analyze sport management in general, without choosing to focus upon one particular type of sport. The reason why authors do so is that the principles of management are appliable to all sorts of sports. This research paper will present how an important managerial task – objectives setting – is accomplished in the game of rugby.

As its manager, the coach is the key person in setting objectives for the rugby team. If a team wants to be successful, to win matches and competitions, then it needs clearly stated objectives which to guide the rugby players to sporting glory. After the objectives have been set, the coach has to clearly communicate them to the players, who he afterwards has to motivate and inspire in order to reach the agreed goals. As it is a part of the rugby club's management, the setting of objectives is influenced by the millieu of the club and by its available ressources. The paper will present which are the factors that influence the setting of objectives for a rugby team and how do they do it.

1. The process of setting the objectives at a rugby team

A rugby coach manages his rugby team in order to achieve some objectives that have been set either by himself or by other persons in the club, with the approval of the managerial board. In an ideal case, the objectives of a team should be set by the coach together with the rugby players and the rest of the persons who have the right to make decisions regarding the activity of the rugby club, considering that the objectives are important landmarks influencing the activity of the players and of the team's staff and club's members.

From the moment he takes charge of the rugby team, the coach begins a way at the end of which he hopes to achieve sporting success. For completing his way, he has to use objectives, which work as milestones or checkpoints that have to be met on the route. Setting the objectives is one of the most important tasks of a rugby coach.

If he wishes his team to achieve sporting excellence (sporting glory), the coach has to place a supreme objective on top of the others. That supreme objective is obtaining sporting success, and it may as well be used as the mission of the team. An exemplification model is presented in Figure 1, where the dashed arrows indicate the subordination of the team's objectives to the mission.
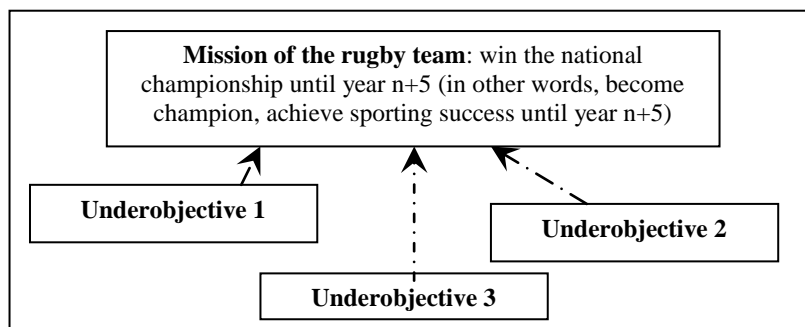

Figure 1 The hierarchy of objectives in a rugby team

By corelating his own objectives with the objectives of the team and of each individual player, the coach can implement a Management by Objectives (MBO) at the rugby team. The participative character is one of the premises in implementing a MBO in professional sport, with rugby players encouraged to take part and have their say in the setting of objectives for the team. Other characteristics of the MBO, identified by Burduş (2005, p. 496) and available at a rugby team, are the following:

- People – thus, rugby players – work better when they know what exactly is expected from them, and when they can identify a match between the own expectations and the objectives of the organization – thus, of the rugby team;
- People want to take part at the objectives setting;
- People want and need a feedback so that they know if they work good or bad. In rugby, players want to know if their work (the way they play on the field) is good, so that they can continue their evolution towards completing the long-term mission of obtaining sporting success, or if, contrary, their work is bad. The answer for the players can be given after comparing the objectives with the results. If the results match the objectives, they can carry on with their evolution, if not, a „reengineering" or a change of the mindset is necessary. The comparison between the results and the objectives is sometimes easy to make in rugby, as the results are often the scores of the games. As an example – assuming there aren't any other objectives for the team than the victory in a single match – a won match is a good work, a lost match, a bad one.

Management by Objectives is a managerial tool which a rugby coach/manager in order to lead his team to success. If he wants to use this tool, the manager has to build the MBO system by starting either from an own vision or from the mission of the team, which we have exemplified in Figure 1 and about which we agreed it can also be seen as a supreme objective of the rugby team. Figure 2 is another way of drawing Figure 1.
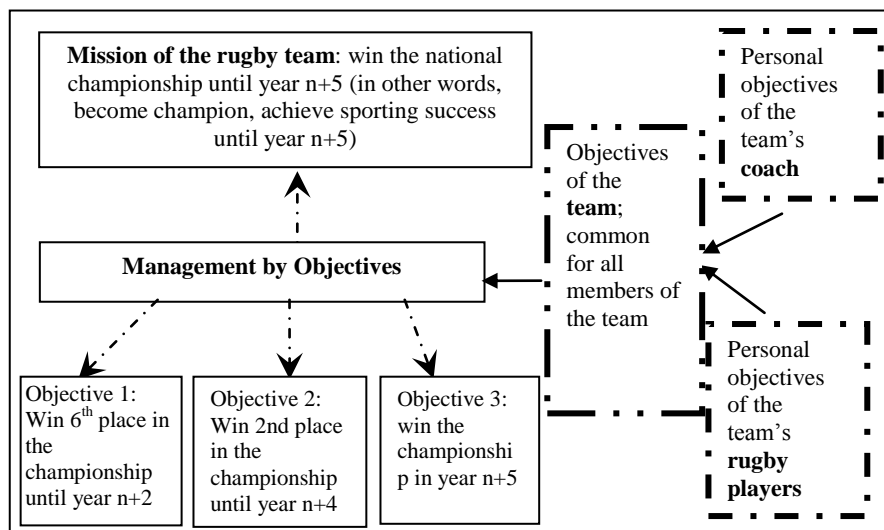

Figure 2: Implementing a Management by Objectives System in a rugby team

The dashed arrows in Figure 2 indicate subordination, so we can see that if he wants to implement a Management by Objectives system, the coach has to subordinate it to the mission of the team. The system must be a support for the coach and the players to fulfill the mission of the team and become national champions, as exemplified in the figure. Because the MBO system is subordinated to the mission of the rugby team, its underobjectives will automatically do the same. This means that, whatever the level of the objectives may be, the coach has to allways keep in mind the mission of the team, when agreeing them with the players and the rest of the staff. Figure 2 presents three objectives which have to be chronologically fulfilled in order to accomplish the mission of the team: first, achieve the 6th place in the championship until year n+2; second, achieve the 2nd place in the championship until year n+4; and, third, win the championship in year n+5. The team has got five years to develop to a winning team, which to achieve sporting success by gaining the national championship. In other words, in five year's time, the rugby team must increase its value from a 6th psoition team to a champion team. The MBO system helps the coach manage, control and assess the development of the team during and after the five years. One more aspect presented in Figure 2 and that needs to be clarified are the dashed boxes and their connection arrows to the „Management by Objectives" box, which indicate that the personal objectives of the coach and of the players must meet eachother and with the objectives of the team, in order to have a performant MBO system.

Although many players and coaches dream to win trophies, an objective targeting such a wish isn't easy to set. To avoid the apparition of frustration among his players, the coach has first of all to make sure that sporting success can in fact be obtained, that it isn't just a distant dream. If the capacity and the know-how of the players are too low in order to permit the team to become champion, then the coach may well have to give up the supreme objective of achieveing success, or at least postpone it. On the other hand side, if the team is made up out of highly performant rugby players, capable of winning important trophies, but the objectives aren't targeting sporting success, then, the coach will hardly be able to motivate his players. Low objectives often make high quality players feel underestimated, and, in such a case, many of the athletes choose to play for another team, where their desire for obtaining performances is respected. This is why it is important to take account of the personal wishes of the rugby players when setting the objectives for the rugby team. In case of incompatibility between the own objectives of the individual players and the objectives of the team, the coach will have to reorganize the team in such a way that he gets to work with players whose personal objectives are the same with the objectives of the team. Otherwise said, players who target to obtain sporting success both as individuals and as a team.

As earlyer seen, the supreme objective of a team may be to win a competition or a championship. In order to complete that objective, the team has to achieve, fisrtly, some underobjectives: those checkpoint objectives that help complete the road to the supreme objective. If, for example, the supreme objective of the team is to win the national rugby championship, then, an underobjective may be to win the matches that the team has to play in the championship.

After setting the objectives, the coach has to communicate and explain them to the players, who have to know for what exactly they are working (or, better

said, playing). From that moment on, the objectives become common for all the members of the team, from the players to the coach and the rest of the staff, and, if they really want to become champions, everyone's noses have to point in the same direction (Woodward, 2005). To make sure that all the players follow one and the same way to success, the coach has to inspire and motivate them to work hard for achieving the objectives. So, the following three steps have to be respected by the coach:

1) Setting the objectives;
2) Communicating and explaining the objectives to the players;
3) Motivating and inspiring the players to achieve the objectives.

If the coach targets to obtain sporting success with his team, a limit of time at which to achieve the objective must be set. This is why the starting date and the completion date of the main objective must not be modified. The modification of the objective may mean quitting the desire to succeed. The underobjectives are more flexible, but must not be changed very often. If, for example, the rugby team has already won the championship with two more matches left to play, then the coach may change the underobjective from winning those matches (the team would still be crowned champion, even if it loses) to protecting the players from the risk of injury. So, the result won't count any more, the players won't target victory, but will play in such a way to protect themselves from injury.

The coaches, especially those with a less developed managerial spirit, have to understand that objectives setting is one of the instruments of a performant sport management and that a rugby team must have objectives, because, together with the vision of the coah and with the mission of the organization, these objectives dictate the way which the players and the other members of the team have to follow in order to reach sporting glory. The coach must not simply recieve the objectives from his top management (the board of the rugby club), but has to be among the persons who set them. Next to the board, the coach is the most appropriate to set the objectives of the team, knowing – maybe better than anyone else – the players and the millieu he is working with and in. When setting objectives for the team, the coach has to make sure they integrate in the objectives-system of the rugby club, which means, for example, that the sporting objectives of the team have to match the social, the economic and the marketing objectives of the club.

2. Influential factors in the process of setting the objectives at a rugby team

Next to his duty to make sure that the objectives of the rugby team are in harmony with the ones of the club, the coach also has to guide his decisions while baring in mind at least two factors which influence the setting of objectives: the millieu of the rugby club/team and the available ressources (Tushman, O'Reilly III, 2002, p. 42).

As each organization, a rugby club is active in a millieu, that is made up by the external factors the club is making contact with. The most important ones are the ones from the world of rugby, from the world of sports, in general, but the state and the society also have their part of influence. Among the factors that build the millieu, the coach has to especially pay attention to the competition, the legislation, the social, the technology and the science. Considering that the millieu and its influences on the rugby club are in a continuous modification, the coach has to be able to adjust the objectives to the changes, but only if the millieu imposes it. Eventhough, the supreme objective, targeting success, must remain unchanged, and only the underobjectives may be modified. Let us have a deeper look upon the influential factors mentioned earlyer:

- The competition - which can be described as a contest in a particular field of activity – for a rugby team is made up by the other rugby teams, more precisely, the ones which it directly meets in a competition. Competitors are all the other teams which a team meets on the way to achieveing its objectives. For example, if a team has the objective to win the national championship, competitiors will be the rest of the teams participating in that championship.

- For coaches, the legislation is mainly formed by the rules of the game of rugby. How changes of the rules happen often, coaches have to permanently be informed about the latest modifications and to take them into account when setting the objectives. The International Rugby Board (IRB) – the world governing body of rugby – is known for the often changes it makes to the laws of the game. The most changes aim to rise the spectacularity of the game. By modifying existing laws or introducing new other ones, the IRB tries to bring more offensive play in the game, offering the attacking line advantages over the defensive line. Between August 2008 and August 2009, the IRB has experimented 13 new rules, by imposing them in the rugby matches played all over the world. All the rules had an experimental character, which ment that the IRB would decide if to keep them or not after assessing their contribution to improving the spectacularity of rugby. The parts of the game most influenced by the Experimental Law Variations were the lineouts, the scrums and the mauls. The coaches now had to train their teams after the pattern of the new rules, which was not simple, because the players had a mechanism that was used to play after the old laws. When changes occur, the coach must teach the new laws to his rugby players. If the coach is not able to understand the changes and to work corresponding to them, then he won't be able to properly train his team and the objectives will be difficult to achieve.

- The societal factor with the most influence on the rugby team and on the objective setting is formed by the fans of the game, in general, and by the fans of the team, in particular. If the team he manages has a well developed fanbase, the coach may be praised at victory, but also criticized at defeat. The coach must know that, whatever the result, there will exist a feedback from the fans. If he sets too daring objectives, which he afterwards won't be able to achieve, and his team will have poor sporting results, the coach will receive a negative feedback from the fans, he will lose their support, and this may cost him the job. Moreover, even if it

is difficult to please everybody, the objectives of the team shall satisfy the wishes of the fans. For example, London Irish is a rugby club established back in 1898 by the Irish immigrants who lived in London. In its early days, the club had the social aim to gather around it the Irish people and to give the Irish community in London a structure where it could manifest itself (London Irish, 2009). London Irish was ment to be „a Second Ireland", in England. As expected, most of the rugby players were Irish. Nowadays too, even though foreign players are part of the team, Irish people in London still support the club, identifying themselves with it. In this sense, a coach who would manage London Irish should know that he could bring fans closer to the team – and though raising the chances of sporting success – by simply recruiting Irish players. If he wants a good relationship with the fans, the coach shouldn't neglect the transfer of some Irish players, and this may be an objective during his management reign.

- The technology and the science also influence the coach in setting objectives for the team. The performances of the players can imporve from year to year, as a result of the advanced products available on the market, like for example, new, softer balls, which give another dynamic to the game and to the evolution of the sportsmen. Also, science can lead to the developpement of the game, like when new, innovative training methods or game tactics appear. Both technology and science permit achieving higher objectives, thanks to the extra know-how which is accumulated in the team after adopting the innovations. In an interview given to the English newspaper The Independent in September 2009, Graham Henry, the coach of the New Zealand national rugby team, let the readers know that he was unhappy with the technological evolutions in rugby, considering them a factor which led to more ballkcicking during the matches, and thus to the transformation of the rugby game: "The quality of the ball, like everything else such as the quality of the boots, is constantly improving. It means you can now kick the ball a long way out of hand and to goal. Guys are kicking the ball 60 metres these days because the ball has improved so much. Kicking is a skill but it is transforming the game and I don't think that was in the original ideas of rugby", said Henry, who added that "on the same size field as long ago, you can now kick the ball 10-15 metres further. That changes both the nature of the game and the nature of the penalty" (The Independent, 24 September 2009). Because technology transforms the game, coaches must take it into consideration when they set objectives for the team. If the technology has a positive influence on the game, then a coach should use it in order to achieve higher objectives. This means, he can also plan the road to success of the team by setting more daring objectives than in the past. For coaches like Henry it would be better to realize that technology can help them easier win matches, and thus higher objectives could be set. As technology changes the nature of the game, the objectives which coaches choose also change.

The other factor presented by Tushman and O'Reilly III (2002, p. 42) that influences the objectives setting in an organization are the available resources.

The coach has to correctly evaluate the resources available for him in the team and to identify their strengths and weaknesses (Tushman, O'Reilly III, 2002,

p. 42), in order to find out on what he can depend on his way towards achieving sporting success and on what not. The most important resources for a coach are the human ones (rugby players and staff coleagues), because without them, the game can not be played, so the activity of the team would be inexistent. The coach has to manage the human ressources he has at the team. It is his duty to find players and to adequately train them, in order to target the developpement of the team. The ability of the coach to recruit the necessary human capital and to treat the persons he is working with – players, staff and colleagues – as valuable resources is an influential factor of success (Covell, 2007, pp. 316-318).

Among other important ressources are the financial and material ones, which lead to the developpement opportunities of the team. Next, we will see how some of the ressources influence the objectives of a rugby team:

- The most important resources in a team are the rugby players, their value and experience influencing the quality of the team's play. Generally, the higher the quality of the rugby players, the better the rugby they can play, thus the higher the chances for obtaining sporting success and silverware. It must be mentioned that quality doesn't refer just to the sporting knowledge and experience of the players, but also to their human quality, which, among others, is made up by the attitude of the player and his influence on the team. For example, a rugby player may not be the best sporting performer on the pitch, but he may have the best leadership qualities in the team, and because of his ability to motivate his colleagues, he is a key figure in the squad. As a sum-up, the higher the quality of the players in a team, the higher the objectives a coach may set.

- Another important human ressource in a team is the staff the coach is working with. A performant staff, made up by competent people, is a guarantee of success. At the same time, not only the quality, but also the quality of the staff influences the sporting results. A quantitatively reduced staff can't cover the needs of a coach as good as a staff composed by a higher quantity of persons, because the needed physical time is not available. Theoretically, because he can easer delegate tasks, a coach with a larger staff has more chances of success than a coach with a reduced staff. Depending on both the quality and quantity of the members who form his staff, the coach can shape the objectives of the team. Again, the better the tasks in a team are covered by the staff, the higher the performances a coach and his players can aspire to, thus the higher the objectives.

- The available financial ressources play their role in the process of setting the objectives. If he has a high budget available, the coach can dare more and set higher objectives for the team, because he knows the financial ressources needed for investition in developpement are available for him. On the other hand side, if the financial ressources are low, if the coach can't invest in team and he has to work with what he has, the coach may have to quit some of his goals.

- The last decades have seen the transformation from the industrial society to the informational society. As information influences managerial decision, the access to information is one of the keys of success in rugby. The broader his access to information, the higher the goals the coach can set for the

team. For bringing success closer to the team, the coach needs to be informed about the latest game tactics, pedagogical methods, about the evolution of the game and the changes in it, and about the way the opponent thinks and intends to play in the direct match between the teams (in order to build a counter-attacking tactic, for example). Not to forget that the informational systems inside the club are also important, which help have a better communication between the members of the club. As a conclusion to this influential factor, the clearer the communication in the club, the closer is the success and the higher the objectives.

- Last but not least, time must also be regarded when setting objectives. The coach has to evaluate if he has the time to reach the objectives he wants to set. For example, if the coach wants to win the championship, but knows that this is possible just after three years of work and his contract with the club runs just over two years, then he won't be able to fulfill the objective. The coach must take into account the length of his working contract with the rugby club, and choose objectives which can be accomplished during his period of time at the management of the team.

These were some of the influential factors a coach must take into consideration when setting objectives for his team. If he and his players really want sporting success, then the coach has to know the millieu the team is active in and he must realistically assess the available resources he is going to work with.

Conclusions and further research

Next to the couple of influential factors – the milieu and the available resources – the paper has also presented a model of how objectives can be set in a rugby team. A conclusion is that, in order to achieve high performances, a supreme objective (mission) which to target sporting glory has to exist in the team. The rest of the objectives – which, in an ideal case, would be agreed between the coach, the players and the rest of the employees with decisional power in the club – are going to be subordinated to the mission.

The presented model ressembles the principles of the Management by Objectives (MBO) system, characterized by a developed participative character of the objectives setting. In an MBO system, the goals of the individuals – players and coach – have to meet the objectives of the rugby club in order to form a unity which to drive the team to success.

An interesting research idea would be to present in more detail than in this paper how a MBO system can be implemented at a rugby team. In such a case, the mission of the team will continue to be that of obtaining sporting glory. The coach has to adapt his management to the mission. Automatically, the objectives that will be used in the system will be subordinated, at their way, to the mission of achieving sporting success.

In a rugby world strongly influenced by the mass-media and under a continuously growing pressure, the activity of the rugby managers has to lean towards a scientific approach, as simple experience is not enough any more

(Carter, 2006). Thus, scientific research concerning the management of rugby and of other professional sports is welcomed, because it may prove fundamental for making better decisions there where it really counts: on the pitch and in the offices of the rugby clubs.

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